

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Lecture 16

Romans 15:29-16:7

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session 16 on Romans 15:29–16:7.

Paul's mission was to reach the ends of the earth. It was to lay foundations where foundations hadn't been laid before so that others could build on those foundations and spread the gospel even more.

And Paul is going to be able to come to Rome soon, he thinks, he hopes, he prays, because he still has another mission he wants to do. He wants to reach out to Spain, but before that, he's got to go to Jerusalem. But the Spanish mission, he introduced in verse 24, and he's going to talk about it more in verse 28.

Rome was en route and it wouldn't be considered rude to say, you know, hey, I'm going to this place. I just want to stop and visit you en route. Otherwise, I wouldn't visit you.

That wouldn't be considered rude because it was a long distance. It took a long time to travel back then. So, people understood if you're going to go places, you go in sequence.

You don't go here, there, and back and forth. Also, it was a big expense, especially because Paul usually brought his companions with him. So, they have to have a fare for these voyages for all of them.

He was into team ministry. He was into mentoring younger ministers and multiplying it. And sometimes he could leave them in places, they could continue to spread the work there.

But Spain would really be breaking new ground for him because of certain cultural and linguistic barriers. Everywhere he's gone so far, he can speak Greek. Now in Corinth, there was Greek and Latin, and in Philippi.

And just because you're born a Roman citizen doesn't mean you speak Latin automatically. But probably since he had this vision to go to Rome, probably if he didn't have some Latin already, probably he'd probably been learning some Latin while he was in Corinth. But in Spain, they didn't speak Greek and most people didn't speak Latin.

It was in the Western Mediterranean though, so some people spoke Latin. There were some Latin-speaking colonies in Western Spain. He was going to have to be able to use Latin or depend on interpreters, which he could maybe pick up in Rome.

Also, there would be no Jewish connections in Spain. There were synagogues there later, quite a lot later, but we don't have much evidence for Jews in Spain this early in the first century. Paul had usually started in synagogues.

We see that in Acts 13:5 and elsewhere in Acts. It's also, I think, pretty strongly implied in 2 Corinthians 11:24. So, Paul is really going to be breaking new ground. It's going to be stretching him culturally, but he's willing to do whatever he has to do.

It's not like there couldn't have been somebody else who could have done it. But if nobody else is doing it and it needs to be done, this is Paul's heart, his mission to get the word out. And so, he's going to do whatever he has to do to get the word out.

And then he's trusting that it will spread from there. Others will carry it on from there. And others did carry it on.

Notice that the Spanish mission in verses 24 and 28 frames the Jerusalem mission, which is addressed in between. And he says, I'm trusting with this Spanish mission that I'll be helped on my way by you, which is an implicit request for support. They would consider it an honor to do this.

It was considered an honor normally to show hospitality. To show hospitality was considered a great honor. So, they're going to undoubtedly pick up on this implicit request for support.

Now what the support meant was that they would send him and his companions on their way. Maybe they would even supply interpreters if somebody there caught the vision, something like that. But he's been talking about his groundbreaking mission elsewhere.

Now the Roman believers can help with this groundbreaking Spanish mission. Other churches have helped in the sphere of the Eastern Mediterranean. The Western Mediterranean was Rome's cultural sphere.

That's where they had cultural influence. And so, they could really help him with that. The Eastern churches from Achaia, Macedonia, and Galatia, and we have reason to believe from Asia as well, supported the Jerusalem mission, which is where he was going next.

Paul's mention of that is also helpful implicitly by implying that the Eastern churches trust Paul's integrity with finances. So look, they trust me. You can trust me too.

And Paul was very careful with finances. Second Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 make sure that nobody can speak against us. That's why we have representatives from each of the churches of each of these regions coming along so they can also supervise what happens to this money.

The Jerusalem mission. It shouldn't delay him long before coming to Rome unless he faces trouble in Jerusalem. He actually asks prayer for this because he recognizes that trouble is possible.

He doesn't know everything about the future. And it wasn't until he started traveling after this that in the book of Acts, people are prophesying to him in every city that he's going to face trouble in Jerusalem. But in any case, he asks for prayer that he'll be rescued from the disobedient in Judea in the first part of 1531.

Well, his echoing language is used earlier. You do have Gentiles spoken of as disobedient in 1:30 and 2:8. But more recently, he's spoken of his own people as disobedient people in 10:21 and 11:30 to 32, because not all had obeyed the gospel. And they should have because it was the truth.

So, Paul is praying that he'll be rescued from the disobedient there. And we know what happened to Paul there from the book of Acts. And if we didn't have the book of Acts, at least we'd have the letters later on that Paul writes from Roman custody.

Paul did get in trouble and probably was shipped off to Rome. And the book of Acts gives us a good explanation for that. And the most detailed part of Acts altogether, the we narrative, eyewitness material in Acts, I've argued that at length in my Acts commentary, that the we means that Luke was with him.

Luke saw this. Paul appealed to Caesar, and that's why he would be sent to Rome in Roman custody. So, he also prays that his ministry, his diakonia will be pleasing or acceptable, the same word or cognitive, the same words that he's been using so far for that, to the saints.

Or we said it could be translated, the consecrated ones, those set apart to God. What he means is the saints in Jerusalem. And he's spoken earlier to the saints in Rome, but just back in verse 26, he spoke of the saints in Jerusalem.

So that's what he's got in mind here, that they will receive his collection. By the way, earlier when I was talking about the ends of the earth and I talked about Africa, south of Egypt, it was all of Africa, south of Egypt. In the book of Acts, Ethiopia is applied to the kingdom of Neroe, and we know that specifically because he speaks of the queen there as the Kendaka, which regularly was associated with that particular kingdom.

It was a Nubian, black African kingdom that was so strong that the Romans couldn't conquer them, just like they couldn't conquer the Parthians to the east. And they conquered Gaul, but they couldn't conquer the Germans yet. They kept having wars with them.

Eventually, they conquered the Britons. Actually, they did that in Claudius' time, so that had already been done, part of Britain. So, they knew about peoples though beyond their borders.

So, going to the ends of the earth. But here, Paul is going back to where the mission started, back to Jerusalem. The collection and care for the needy.

Paul had been involved in this before. Acts 11:30, after Agabus and some other prophets gave a prophecy to the church in Antioch about coming famine, Acts 11:30, Barnabas and Saul are sent to deliver famine relief from Antioch, even though the prophecy is going to affect the whole world. Antioch is going to face it too.

But they help the church in Jerusalem. 12:25, they're coming back from that. You have something similar then in Paul's ministry, the way Luke narrates it, to what you have in Acts 6, where you have these ministers set aside for some of what the apostles had been doing already, for taking care of the needy, and pretty soon they start preaching too.

So, social ministry, the ministry of the poor, is very important. And it's not incompatible with the ministry of evangelism and preaching the good news and teaching about Jesus. And often it's where you even start.

But Paul had been asked by the pillars in Jerusalem. Pillar was actually often used as a name for prominent or important people back then, just like it's often used that way in English today, the pillars of the community. But Galatians 2:10, they had asked Paul not to forget the needy.

And he said, Oh no, I would never do that. I will never forget. So, Paul is continuing to do this.

This isn't just a one-time thing, but it's something that has happened before. And now, though, there's a very significant collection from a wide range of churches from the diaspora, and not just from Antioch. And in 1526, he specifies the churches of Achaia and Macedonia had been pleased to do this.

Well, we know from 1 and 2 Corinthians, especially 2 Corinthians, that the church in Achaia wasn't necessarily completely pleased to do this. 2 Corinthians 11, it seems that some people were complaining. Some outsiders had come in by the time Paul

wrote 2 Corinthians and had complained, Well, Paul, he doesn't take any money from you because he's not worth any for himself.

But then in 2 Corinthians 12, we find out that some of them had been complaining about him raising funds for the Jerusalem church. Well, he's not trustworthy. So, he won't take money for himself.

He's taking money for this. But they wanted him to take money for himself because then they could be like his patron. They can kind of control what he does.

1 Corinthians 16:1 to 4, he was urging the churches of Achaia to set aside money to get ready. In 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, Paul speaks very gently but says, you know, the churches in Macedonia were really provoked to zeal by the testimony that you churches in Achaia were going to contribute to this collection. And, you know, civic rivalry was a big thing back then and regional rivalry as well.

So, now Paul says, but I'm sending Titus just to make sure you really are getting ready. Because Paul seems to be a little worried. He says, I'm not worried.

I mean, I trust you. But I'm sending Titus just to be sure. It seems like Paul has a bit of concern that the churches of Achaia, who are not on idealist terms with him at the moment because of these rivals who have come in, are not going to have the offering ready.

Well, it looks a bit tenuous in 2 Corinthians, but in Acts chapter 21 to 3, Paul comes in, and he spends the winter with them. Things seem to be fine. Titus went ahead.

Things got cleared up. And so, we see by the time Paul is writing from Corinth in Romans 15, 26, the church of Achaia is really in on this. The churches of Macedonia are definitely in on this.

Some of the representatives have actually come with Paul to Corinth, as we'll see in Romans chapter 16. The church of Macedonia is definitely in on it. He talks about them in 2 Corinthians 8, 1 to 5, chapter 9, verses 2 and 4. And we also see in the book of Acts about these representatives.

Sopater from Berea in Macedonia, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica. He doesn't, Acts doesn't mention who comes from Philippi, but when you get to verse 6 of Acts chapter 20 in Philippi, the we starts. So, it may be Luke himself is a representative of the church from Philippi.

In Acts chapter 20 and verse 4 also, other representatives for the collection, although Acts doesn't speak of it as the collection for reasons we'll mention, but other

representatives, Tychicus, and Trophimus are apparently from Asia. So, from that province in Western Asia Minor and also Galatia. He talked about them being ready.

1 Corinthians 16.1, he's already talked about the churches in Galatia being involved in the collection. He doesn't mention them here but Acts chapter 20 and verse 4 mention Gaius of Derbe and Timothy, whom Acts has already mentioned as being from that region. Now, there has been a debate among scholars as to what is meant by Galatia, but Paul, just like here with Macedonia and Achaia, likes to use provincial terms.

This is the name of a province and the region that's described there in Acts is the southern part of the province of Galatia. The people are Phrygians, even Lycaeans, but scholars who are specialists in the history of this region, classical scholars, Barbara Levick and Stephen Mitchell, all agree that Paul is writing to South Galatia. That's the majority view of scholars as to whom the letter of Galatians addresses, and I think it's the correct view that Paul is addressing South Galatia.

The collection and reconciliation. What does the collection say? That you have representatives from these predominantly Gentile regions bringing an offering to Judea. Well, here's Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, 11:13, 15:18 through 29, this context, serving Jerusalem.

Also, it's predominantly Gentile churches serving Jerusalem. That's going to communicate something. Paul speaks of the obligation of debt, and how the Gentile churches owed it to them.

Paul had earlier spoken of his own debt to the Gentiles because of his mission, Romans 1:14. Now he speaks in 15:27 of the Gentiles' debt to Paul's people. Reciprocity was a major cultural value and benefactors were supposed to be repaid with honor. Like if they gave you money, you didn't give the money back.

That was insulting, but if they donated something for civic works, people were to honor them with honorary inscriptions and so forth. Reciprocity was a major cultural value. And so, people would understand this because he said, if they have ministered to the Gentiles in spiritual matters, then the Gentiles owe them something surely in, he says, fleshly matters or usually translated material matters, the spiritual being more important than the fleshly.

So, he says the Jewish saints, the consecrated ones, the ones who belong to God in Jerusalem, provided for you spiritually, so help them materially. And the word he uses for ministering to them, the way the Gentiles should minister to them is *laiteo*, which can mean a lot of different things. And it's a question of whether it means what I'm about to say here, but it may have something to do, Paul uses it in wider ways, but it may have something to do here with the way *laiteo* was used in

relation to what we find often in honorary inscriptions, where you had public services where people would minister materially to the community with liturgies, it's often translated.

Sometimes these were mandatory donations. They would say, oh, you are a person of wealth, our community needs this, so why don't you give this? And the person sometimes would say, well, I gave last year. Yes, but you're our only rich person, you have to do it again this year.

So sometimes they were mandatory, but often they were for the sake of helping the community and sometimes they expected to get honor in return. But Paul's point is, they served you spiritually, now minister back to them. Don't forget those who evangelized your people.

If someday they are in need, and that's actually happened, you know, some parts of the world that were evangelized, evangelized others, and now they're in need of being re-evangelized and so on. Jesus loves everybody. Jesus died for everybody.

And so, we want to do our best to get the gospel out. Some backgrounds to this, how would people have viewed this? Well, one suggestion is that there were people throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, adult Jewish males would contribute a didrachma, two-drachma tax, half-shekel tax, sorry, half-shekel tax for the upkeep of the temple in Jerusalem. And because of this, actually, the temple became so rich that they were just building this golden vine and making it longer and longer in the temple.

Josephus describes this. But Jewish people from all over the Roman world would contribute to this and from other parts of the world too, in Parthia. Is there a parallel here? In some sense there is.

The motivation is different. The idea is different. This isn't a tax, but it also does help explain how you have respected agents of the diaspora congregations accompanying this money that's being taken there.

There were certain procedures that Paul could have learned and his colleagues could have learned from observing something that had been in use for a long time where churches, well, no, sorry, synagogues, synagogue communities were donating for this temple tax. Something else in terms of the way the church in Jerusalem may have viewed such a contribution. Perhaps they're thinking of the eschatological tribute of the Gentiles like in Isaiah 45.14, Isaiah 60 verses 6 through 10, Isaiah 66.20, and so forth.

Now, as late as Acts chapter 15, you have the Jerusalem apostles still in Jerusalem, or at least many of them still in Jerusalem. And apparently what they're hoping for is

that Jerusalem will be converted. The nations will be bringing their wealth to Jerusalem and coming to learn about God's ways in Jerusalem.

You can read Isaiah that way. The sequence isn't really clear in Isaiah of some of the different kinds of pictures that you have there. And that may not be exactly how Paul envisions it, but this collection from the Gentile believers would reveal the commitment of Gentile believers.

No other Jewish sects in this period or afterward had so many Gentile converts. The Christian movement just kept growing and growing among the Gentiles. So Paul could see this mission in part as part of what it meant, a step towards provoking his people to jealousy, as he talked about in Romans chapter 11, verses 14 and 15.

And in 15:28, Paul himself is going to figuratively fix his seal on the collection. Seals appear in various ways in business documents, but sometimes they appear as a seal to attest to the contents of something. Well, Paul is going to make sure that nothing is tampered with.

Technically, Paul is using it figuratively, but technically what you would do, you'd have a signet ring with your own distinctive seal marking, and you would seal something with hot wax, and then you would put your seal in it while the wax was still hot. And after it dried, it would have that mark on it. And, you know, if somebody broke the seal, well, they couldn't fabricate your seal again.

So once something is sealed shut, when it's opened, you can't pretend that you've got the original seal still on it. You have to reseal it with something. Somebody else's signet ring or your signet ring or something to say, okay, I'm attesting the contents are still there.

So, Paul was going with them, and you had the representatives from these different church communities who would attest that it hadn't been tampered with. And it would send a message to the Jerusalem church and Jerusalem as a whole that here the Gentiles are coming in. God is fulfilling his promises.

Well, is the Jerusalem church going to understand this? And is the rest of Jerusalem going to appreciate these Gentiles coming to Jerusalem? You can read Acts chapters 21 and 22 to get part of the answer. But Paul offers a prayer request. Paul often requests prayer in his letters.

Paul attributes his deliverance from harm partly to their prayers. In 2 Corinthians 1:11, the Corinthians had been praying for him, and he faced a lot of hardship and opposition in Ephesus. Paul elsewhere speaks of his future release as due to their prayers.

In Philippians 1:19 and Philemon 22, he says, I trust that through your prayers, I can be given to you. I can be delivered and see you again. 1 Thessalonians 5:25, in an earlier period, he simply just says to the believers of Thessalonica, pray for us.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2, pray for the word to spread and that we will be rescued from those hostile to the faith. Well, was the prayer answered? Paul did get to Rome, not quite the way he probably expected, but God did answer prayer. But did the Jerusalem church accept the collection? Some scholars doubt this.

Some very good scholars doubt this. Some friends of mine who are scholars doubt this, but I've argued that no, they did accept the collection. In Acts, the collection is mentioned explicitly only in Acts 24:17. Luke obviously doesn't have much focus on that being the purpose of Paul's journey to Jerusalem.

But it was no longer an issue at the time that Luke wrote. It maybe didn't accomplish reconciliation. And if, as Ben Witherington and myself, and F. F. Bruce in his third edition of his Acts commentary and some others have argued, he's writing after Jerusalem is destroyed, the reconciliation between Gentile churches and the non-issue at the time that Luke is writing.

Well, was it a trap? Some people have actually argued that James and the elders set Paul up in a trap. They expected him to face trouble in the temple in Jerusalem. I don't think that's the case.

In fact, in ancient orators, one of the standard arguments was when you're getting blamed for something turning out badly is to say, I could not have foreseen how this would turn out. Well, in Paul's case, he was the one who knew how it would turn out because he'd been getting prophecies all this time before he went. The argument that James and the elders were not supportive of Paul and they didn't show up to help him at his trial or anything like that, that's an argument from silence.

And I think it's not a particularly good argument from silence considering how many other things Luke skips. I mean, he says Paul is trying to get to Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost, Acts 20:16. He gets there, he preaches, and so you're set up to think this is probably to be compared with Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. But the feast isn't mentioned again. I think it's implied a few times in Acts 24.

But there are a lot of things that Luke doesn't specifically mention. Also, they may have attested to some of Paul's claims, some of the claims that he makes at his hearing in Acts 24, like about how many days it was since he had come to Jerusalem and that he came to bring offerings. Those were things that the Jerusalem church would be called upon to attest if anybody was going to attest them.

So, you can't argue with silence just because they're not mentioned. Also, they faced dangers as well. In fact, James was probably executed before Paul was.

Paul got shipped off to Rome and soon after that, James was executed. When Festus, the Roman governor, died in office after maybe a couple of years, then the current high priest took advantage of that to have James and a few other people executed. And then those who were supportive of the law, probably including the Pharisees, spoke out against what the high priest had done.

And as a consequence, the new Roman governor, when he came, deposed that high priest. But this situation could be serious for others as well. So, I don't think it's a trap.

Now, reasons why I think that the Jerusalem church did accept the collection. To refuse a gift in antiquity constituted enmity. So, if they were refusing the gift, they were actually saying, Paul, we're through with you.

We don't want to be in any fellowship with the church of the Gentiles. We want to be enemies of the churches of the Gentiles. I don't think it's very likely, certainly from the way Acts portrays things for the leaders of the church and from the way Paul's letters portray it, if Paul thought it was like that, he wouldn't have even gone.

So, the collection may not accomplish everything Paul hoped for. It may not move the entire church to say, hey, we love our Gentile brothers and sisters. But it doesn't mean that the offering was rejected.

Moreover, I think a very serious reason to say that it wasn't rejected is that it was the Jerusalem church who requested Paul not to forget the poor in Jerusalem, to begin with in Galatians 2:10. They requested it. Why would they possibly turn it down? But Paul is hoping after that to come to Rome and he believes that their hospitality will refresh him. And this language, it could be used for rest or relief from toil, this language in 15:32.

Rome could be a break from his labors, he's thinking. And that language is used elsewhere in Paul's letters. 1 Corinthians 16:18, the Corinthian hosts refreshed Paul and the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians, that's when they came to visit him. 2 Corinthians 7:13, Titus was refreshed among the Corinthians. Philemon 7, Philemon's hospitality has refreshed believers.

And so, Paul concludes this section in 15:33, May the God of peace be with you all. Well, the God of peace is very important when you think about the strife among the

believers in Rome. And later on toward the end of the letter, he's going to say how the God of peace will soon crush Satan beneath your feet.

Philippians 4:9, in a context where Euodia and Syntyche, two women who labored with Paul in the gospel in Philippians 4, are in some conflict. And he's asking another colleague Clement to try to mediate between them and reconcile them. In Philippians 4:9, he says, follow my example and the God of peace will be with you.

1 Thessalonians 5:23, May the God of peace consecrate you fully to himself. Hebrews 13:20-21, May the God of peace thoroughly equip you in his will. Peace was highly valued in many circles.

Certainly, after the destruction of Jerusalem, the peace advocates among the Pharisees were the dominant voice among them. And they cited the tradition, going back to Hillel apparently, many of the rabbis were famous for saying, great is peace. And they would explain why peace was so great.

Of course, the Roman Empire even, spoke about the peace that had been established by Augustus, although that was a fiction, as we mentioned before. Romans chapter 16. Well, with all apologies to Marcion, Marcion seems to have ended Romans chapter 14.

And also, with apologies to those who thought that Romans chapter 16 was addressed originally to Ephesus and somehow accidentally got stuck onto the letter to the Romans that was corrected by Harry Gamble, Yale, and others. So, with apologies to all those, I'm going to go on into Romans 16, which I do think is a very important part of this letter. And it opens as Paul is now, Paul's taking his time to close this letter in various phases.

In Philippians, there are a couple of times when he says, finally, brothers and sisters, you have been some other ancient letters too. Sometimes it's just hard to wind down, I guess, but finally means moving toward the end anyway. Letters of recommendation, chapter 16, verses one and two.

Well, often a letter of recommendation would introduce the bearer of the letter. And that's true in this case, the case of Phoebe. Often, well, normally letters of recommendation were written to peers.

Sometimes they were written to subordinates, but it could be a person of a social class that was higher than the recommended, the person who was being recommended, but carried some weight with their peer, or the subordinate to whom the person was being recommended. And sometimes they would say, here's why this person deserves this, which is what Paul says about Phoebe. Sometimes they would say things like, prove to my recommended, prove to this person that I'm

recommending to you, what a good letter I wrote on their behalf by accepting my entreaty.

Sometimes they'd say, prove your love for me by doing this. Second Corinthians 8:24 has the idea of proving your love as well. I'm in your debt if you do this.

I owe you one. I will repay. Paul says something like that in Philemon 19.

Although in Philemon 19, he also does something else that you sometimes find in letters of recommendation. By the way, you owe me one. And so, take this as fulfilling an obligation to me.

Paul uses a method that we often find in ancient sources. We find Paul using it in Acts 24. We find it in Philemon.

We find it also in Hebrews 11 at one point. Not to mention this, and then you mention it. You don't mention it as much as you could, but you mention it.

Well, letters of recommendation were a big thing back then. Cicero has an entire book of one of his letters that consists of letters of recommendation, plus some others. And actually, he wrote really good ones.

I mean, you read through it and you say, wow, how could he think of a different thing to say to everybody? Not completely everybody, as we mentioned before, but he was very creative with his letters of recommendation. And sometimes you can tell this person had been recommended to him, and he's saying, okay, this person was recommended to me. I'm passing on this recommendation to you.

He didn't really know the person. But other times, he knows what to say. He was very skilled at this.

Who is Phoebe? Well, Phoebe may be a businesswoman traveling. There were a lot of ties between Rome and Corinth, so she may be traveling anyway. People often were traveling back and forth.

She works out of and apparently lives in Cancri. Cancri was one of the port cities of Corinth. Now, you had the Aegean port that was Cancri, which was on the eastern part of the Isthmus of Corinth.

Then you had LeHaim. It was on the western side of the Isthmus, kind of northwestern of Corinth. Corinth had both the blessings and the problems of being a mercantile community with ports, and port towns on either side of it.

They had a lot of wealth. They had a nouveau riche class, a class of people who had just become rich. They weren't hereditary aristocrats.

A lot of them were descended from freed slaves even. But they had a lot of new wealth. They also had a lot of foreign religions there.

Of course, the synagogue, had the churches. They also had, at Cancri, they had a temple for Serapis, an Egyptian deity. They also had a lot of sexually transmitted diseases.

There was a saying with regard to old Corinth, not for everyone is the voyage to Corinth. And the context of that, at least sometimes, had to do with the prostitution industry in Corinth. Strabo talks about a thousand co-prostitutes of Aphrodite in old Corinth.

Now, on the Acro-Corinth, the excavations show that there's no way they could have had a thousand prostitutes up there. Some think, well, maybe they were just dedicated to Aphrodite who was the patron deity of prostitution. But Corinth's reputation for prostitution and sexual immorality was not limited to old Corinth, which was destroyed somewhere around like 146 B.C. And then it was rebuilt.

Lucius Mummius and then Julius Caesar said it could be a colony around 44 B.C. I may not have this exactly right, but something like that. There were still some Greeks who lived there, but it was refounded as a Roman colony in the first century B.C. That was considered the new Corinth. Even new Corinth, had a reputation for prostitution and sexual immorality.

It's not surprising that Paul wrote some of the things to the Corinthians that he wrote. But in any case, it was a port. Well, it had port towns on either side of it.

It was a mercantile city. That's how it achieved its wealth. That's how it was able to support its population.

It was a service center in a sense. And Phoebe, who was probably a businesswoman, was a person of means and that's why she could travel. Most people couldn't afford that.

We read about her work for the Lord in both 16.1 and 16.2. I'm going to start with 16.2 and work my way back. She was a prostatis, which is translated various ways, a helper of many or a patroness. Paul urges the Roman Christians to receive her hospitably and help her on her way because she has been a helper, a prostatis of many, including myself.

Prostatis was a term for a benefactor. It was a patron, but not in the technical Roman sense of a patron with clients, especially during the Republic, who would follow the patron around and make them look good in public so more people would vote for them. But a patron in the sense in which we use the term in English, like a patron of the arts.

A benefactor could sponsor an organization. They could open up their home for meetings. Probably that's what it's referring to here.

She's probably the host of a house church in her home, which is probably fairly sizable. Another reason to think that she may have been a businesswoman. Some relate this to something that derives from the same verb in Romans 12:8 when it lists different gifts.

There's a managerial gift there. Again, if she's a businesswoman, that wouldn't be surprising that she has a managerial gift, although I think the main thing is here she's got a house church, a meeting in her home, and that gives her a position of influence in certain respects. The other one, this slide should say 16.1, is she's a diakonos.

Save that for afterward because the meaning of diakonos is even more debated. Perhaps it's related to the gift in 12.7, the gift of serving or ministering, diakonoos. But how does Paul apply the noun title elsewhere in his writings? Probably it is related to somebody who diakonos, who serves or ministers, but the title applies to Jesus in chapter 15 and verse 8. It applies to Paul very recently in chapter 15 and verse 25 as a minister to the Gentiles.

It also applies to Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6, 6:4, 11:23, and Colossians 1:23 through 25. It applies to Paul's companions in Colossians 1:7, and sometimes it refers to an office distinct from overseers in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13. So, in Pauline literature, it seems to refer sometimes to an office that's distinct from overseers. Most often it applies to somebody who ministers and ministers God's word in the other usages that Paul has.

I'm going to deal with that a little bit more as we read about some more interesting women in this chapter. But whatever else it meant, certainly if Paul had recommended her in this way, she could be called upon to explain the letter. Now normally with letter bearers in antiquity, if somebody didn't understand the point of a letter, they would ask the bearer what it meant.

And we have other examples of that in antiquity. So probably the first person to explain Romans or parts of Romans at least, after Paul, would have been Phoebe. Women patrons.

Women patrons were, they made up about, it's estimated at the moment, it's estimated about 10% of all patrons. They were a minority. Women being educated, that was also a minority.

Even in upper-class homes, women were rarely educated beyond 14 years of age. So, they didn't normally get a tertiary education. Sometimes there were exceptions among some philosophic schools, but among rhetoricians, barely any exceptions.

I think Socipitra, was she a philosopher or an orator? You've got Socipitra, Aspasia. You've just got a few who achieved fame as teachers actually over a wide span of centuries. Women normally didn't get that level of education.

And of course, in a Jewish context, they wouldn't be raised being taught to recite the Torah the way that the boys would be. There were some very educated women, but they were exceptions. And women could attend synagogue, but they weren't really taught to study the Torah in depth.

They could sit in on lectures. We know of a case of that. We also know of a case of a woman in the late second century in Judea by the name of Beruria, the wife of Rabbi Meir, the daughter of a rabbi, who was very informed of domestic halakha.

She knew certain things about the Torah very well. In later sources, she knew other kinds of halakha as well. But she was exceptional.

Most of the other rabbis wouldn't listen to her. Boys were taught to recite the Torah and girls were not. So, we don't have women usually in general having the same kind of education that men had.

In fact, I think I may have mentioned earlier that Philo spoke very negatively of women. As a Jewish philosopher, Josephus, also writing in the first century, a bit later in the first century, says that the testimony of a woman should not be accepted because of the levity and the temerity of their gender. Both Jewish law and Roman law played down the validity of women's testimony or the reliability of women's testimony.

So what Paul is doing here is significant. He's not the only person in antiquity who shows respect towards women. He's not the only man who does that, but he is among those who do that.

He did respect women. And here's a woman who seems to be an exceptional woman. She's a businesswoman.

We don't know how educated she was, but she's a businesswoman and she is apparently a woman of means. Paul entrusts the letter to her to carry it for him. Paul knows many of the leaders here in chapter 16, many of the leaders in Rome.

He doesn't apparently know all of them, but he does know a number of them. And what he says about them shows that he knows a number of them in Rome. Travelers were frequent between Rome and Corinth and between Rome and the rest of the eastern Mediterranean world.

Also, many of those who had been expelled by Claudius' edict, like Aquila and Priscilla, had presumably settled in Corinth, which was the nearest place outside of Italy that they could go. That was a Roman colony and like Rome in many respects, in terms of going to the east where they could also speak Greek. So, after Claudius' edict was automatically repealed by his death in the year 54, many of these people may have returned and many of these people may have been learned in the law.

Some of them had worked with Paul. So, Paul knows a number of leaders in the churches of Rome, even though he doesn't presumably know all of them. I shouldn't say presumably, he doesn't know all of them.

From some things he says, he knows their names, but not too much about them. So, some of these leaders that he mentions were Jewish, but you can't tell by their names how many of them were Jewish and how many of them weren't. Some of them we know from their names, some of them we can't tell because many Jews use Greek names, including names like Hermes, which appears here, named after the god Hermes.

Paul has a colleague, remember, named Apollos, named after the god Apollo. He has other colleagues, these could have been Gentiles, but Tukikus, named after Tukay, fate, or actually chance, and Epaphroditus, kind of the rolling of the dice, named after something related to Aphrodite. So, we do have more Greek than Latin names, and that's not surprising because the gospel spread first among eastern provincials.

So even though in Corinth you have more Roman names, he was reaching some of the Roman citizens there. In Rome, a greater part of the church early on, they had Greek names, and you continue to find that with many of the leaders of the church up until the second century in Rome, in terms of the lists of leaders. Prisca and Aquila, Romans 16, verses 3-5.

Paul had met them in Corinth after the expulsion of Claudius. They were his co-workers, both in Corinth and afterwards in Ephesus. And them being with him in Ephesus is also reported in 1 Corinthians.

Here, Paul calls them his fellow workers, which was a common title for his colleagues. He uses that in verse 9, verse 16, verse 21, 2 Corinthians 8:23, Philippians 2:25, and 4:3, Colossians 4:11, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, Philemon 1, and Philemon 24. So that is a very common label that Paul uses for his colleagues in ministry.

Normally, the husband would be named first, but four of the six times in the New Testament, we have Prisca named before her husband. Why is that? Well, in inscriptions, normally the wife was named before the husband only if she was of higher status. So somehow Prisca is of higher status, whether it's higher social status or higher status in the church.

It might be higher status in the church because Paul usually doesn't respect social status too much as we see in 1 Corinthians. But again, these are things we can speculate on to degrees of probability. In some places she's called Prisca, in some places she's called Priscilla.

Luke prefers the form, Priscilla. Paul prefers the contracted form, Prisca. Both were the same name.

You have the same thing with Silas and Silvanus in terms of the contraction of names. They risk their necks for him, 16:4. He uses the image of a beheading, which in this period the Romans normally did for Roman citizens using a sword. They didn't use an axe anymore as they had sometimes done in the past.

But it had become an idiom and you find this idiom going way, way back many centuries earlier. It had already become an idiom for risking lives. And sometimes the image of laying your head on the chopping block and so on was simply an idiom for risking life, widely used in ancient literature.

I found it many times. Presumably, they did this for Paul when they were with him in Corinth or Ephesus. We know that he faced lots of trouble in Ephesus, 2 Corinthians chapter one.

We also know from Acts that by now what happened in Acts chapter 19 verses 23 through 40, 41 had already happened because Paul had left there. He'd come through Macedonia, he'd come to Corinth. So, this big riot in Ephesus had taken place and maybe that's where they risked their necks for him.

We don't know for sure. But then again, by then maybe they'd already left as well due to pressure in Asia Minor. We don't know.

Thus, he says, all the churches of the Gentiles should thank them because why? They've rescued the apostle of the Gentiles. So, he's the leader of a movement and

by risking their necks for him, they have also served the movement. He speaks of the church in their house, in chapter 16 and verse five.

This can refer to any kind of dwelling. Maybe it does mean a house in Ephesus. It might've meant a house where they lived, although they probably had multi-story buildings in Ephesus too.

But if this is a house here in Rome, they're the only ones who actually had a house in Romans 16. In none of the other local congregations is a house mentioned. Rome, the vast majority of people in Rome lived in tenement apartments, multi-story apartments.

These multi-story apartments were known for collapsing a lot and catching fire a lot. And actually, the fire in the year 64 burned down a lot of these buildings that would have been standing at this point. The ground floor of these buildings, normally the wealthier people lived on the ground floor.

That's where they had running water. Also, the ground floor often had shops. Sometimes with the shops, people would sleep in the shop.

They'd have maybe a curtain in the back of the shop where they'd sleep at night, or they might have a mezzanine where they could be a little bit elevated above the shop and they'd sleep there. But the upper floors, sometimes all the space that you had in the upper floor apartments was just enough room to sleep. And it was the flimsiest near the top.

And it'd also be harder for you to get out in time if the building started to collapse. But with the upper-story apartments, you couldn't meet within the apartment itself like you could on the bottom floor. But you could meet sometimes in the long hallway that connected the apartments.

And that'd be a great way to introduce your neighbors to the gospel too, by having a house congregation in a place like that. So, we don't know exactly all the places that they met. They probably met more often in the wealthier homes insofar as there were enough to go around because you could get a whole lot more people in those places.

Now, we need to keep in mind that the two most common terms that Paul uses for his fellow ministers are diakonos. We already saw that. That's relevant to verse 1. Sometimes it means deacon.

It's in 1 Timothy 3, probably Philippians 1:1. Whatever a deacon was in the first century, we have a lot more detail on what it was in the second century. We know the qualifications in the first century, but different church traditions have taken that

in different ways in terms of what it must have been in the first century. But wherever else we can determine its meaning, Paul uses it for his own ministry or that of his colleagues.

Now, normally his colleagues were men because these were traveling companions. But he does apply it to Phoebe in Romans 16.1 because she bears the letter in Paul commends her. The Roman Christians could ask her to explain it.

But here, with the case of Prisca and Aquila, we have the term *synergos*, fellow worker. Paul applies this to them as a couple. He commends their ministry.

They were house church leaders. Acts 18 says they team taught Apollos, although there was a difference in that culture between teaching somebody privately and teaching in public. We're going to see a lot of women mentioned in this chapter.

And what's surprising is that when he commends them for laboring together with him in the gospel or commends them for laboring, and elsewhere he's using that term, including in this context for laboring in the gospel, he's commending women for their ministry more often than he's commending men. So that's kind of surprising. He lists twice as many men as women.

And if we wanted to make that a rule, like this, is a model for us, you know, you go down the street, you greet twice as many men as women, make sure you do that. No, that's probably not the point that we make a model out of it. But he's probably greeting mainly leaders of house churches.

He doesn't know the name of everybody in Rome, but he knows certain people's names. And the majority of those were male. But he also commends the women more often than he commends men.

So, in terms of per capita, it would be like commending women like four times as often as men, proportionally speaking. Why? Maybe they needed more encouragement in that culture than the men did. But let's look a little bit more at some examples with both men and women.

We'll talk about that more after we get to verse seven. Epaenetus and Mary, 16 verses five and six. Epaenetus is a Greek name, like a lot of the names in the list.

He's said to be the first fruits of Asia. So, he may be a convert from Paul's Ephesian ministry, Acts 18 verses 19 through 19 verse 41. Paul elsewhere speaks of the first fruits of a region.

For example, he speaks of the first fruits of Achaia in 1 Corinthians 16, when he's speaking of one of the believers there. Some people have said, well, that means he

didn't make any converts in Athens, but Athens was not technically part of the province of Achaia in this period. It was a free city.

So technically he wouldn't have to speak of a convert from Athens in that way. But Epänetus, 16:5, and also Maria in 16.6. Romans had a name like this, a Latin name like this, but also the name was very often used, including in every other occasion in the New Testament, as another way to say, Miriam. Miriam was the most widely used name, women's name, by far in Judea and Galilee.

That had been true, especially since Mariamne, who was a Maccabean princess. That's why you run into so many Marys in the gospel, Miriams in the gospels. Maria labored much for you, like he's going to also say about Persis in verse 12.

Paul describes his own spiritual labors in this way, 1 Corinthians 15:10, Galatians 4:11, Philippians 2:16, Colossians 1:29, and also that of others, 1 Corinthians 16:16, and 1 Thessalonians 5:12. Well, Andronicus and Junia are going to be very interesting. They're going to raise some new issues for us. Andronicus and Junia, verse seven, they were in Christ before Paul, he says.

So presumably they were already believers before Paul's conversion in Acts chapter nine, which means given the spreading of the gospel, probably they were part of the Jerusalem church, especially given their names. They don't have Aramaic-sounding names. They're probably not from Galilee.

They're probably not from other regions of Judea. So, Andronicus is a Greek name. Junia is a Roman name.

They may have been part of the synagogue that Paul was a part of most likely in Acts chapter six and verse nine, the synagogue of the Diaspora Libertini, the freed persons who had settled there from other parts of the Roman empire. Paul calls them relatives, which could also make sense if they're part of that synagogue, except that he probably doesn't mean relatives in a narrow sense here. He uses it for kin more generally in Romans chapter nine and verse three for just fellow Jews.

He also uses it here in this chapter in verses 11 and 21. So probably he means their fellow Jews, but he also mentions them as fellow prisoners. He could use that figuratively, but sometimes he employs it literally like in Colossians 4:10 and Philemon verse 23.

Well, where would they have been his fellow prisoners? Take your pick. Paul says he was imprisoned often, so you don't know, but maybe they were his fellow prisoners in Ephesus where he faced a lot of conflicts, 1 Corinthians 15:32. Maybe they were in prison before him. Maybe he was the one who put them in prison back in Jerusalem.

We don't know. Probably this is a husband and wife, possibly could have been an unmarried brother and sister, but most women were married fairly young back then because of the shortage of women. Not as much in Rome as in Corinth and not as much among Jewish people as among Gentiles, but Jewish people very heavily emphasized marriage.

So probably it's a husband and wife. If it's not a husband and wife, it has to be a brother and sister. Otherwise, the man and the woman traveling together would have been scandalous.

But it goes on to speak of Andronicus and Junia as being outstanding among the apostles. And this opens a whole can of worms and therefore I'm going to make you wait until the next session for us to discuss it.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session 16 on Romans 15:29–16:7.