

Romans 15:29–16:7 Paul and the Purpose of Romans: A Cultural Introduction

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Session 16

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Abstract

This lecture covers Romans 15:29–16:7, focusing on Paul's upcoming travel plans, his mission to Spain, and his journey to Jerusalem to deliver the financial collection. Dr. Craig Keener examines the cultural contexts of Paul's financial integrity, the significance of reciprocity, and the debates surrounding the Jerusalem church's acceptance of the gift. The lecture also delves into Romans 16, highlighting Phoebe's crucial roles as a deacon, businesswoman, patroness, and the likely first expositor of the letter. Finally, Keener analyzes other prominent leaders in Rome, including Prisca, Aquila, Andronicus, and Junia, emphasizing the prominent role of women in early Christian leadership.

Outline

I. Introduction to Session 16 (Romans 15:29–16:7)

- **A.** Overview of Paul's mission to reach the ends of the earth and lay new foundations
- **B.** Paul's plan to visit Rome en route to Spain
- **C.** The necessity of his preparatory trip to Jerusalem

II. The Spanish Mission and Financial Considerations

- **A.** Implicit request for support and hospitality from Roman believers
- **B.** Cultural and linguistic barriers in Spain (dependence on Latin or interpreters)
- **C.** Lack of established Jewish connections in Spain (starting without synagogues)

- **D.** Roman believers' involvement in the Western Mediterranean mission

III. The Jerusalem Mission and the Famine Relief Collection

- **A.** Historical context of social ministry and taking care of the needy (Acts 6, 11:30)
- **B.** Participation of diaspora churches (Achaia, Macedonia, Galatia, Asia)
- **C.** Financial integrity and supervision (use of church representatives to oversee funds)
- **D.** Cultural reciprocity: Gentile churches' material debt for spiritual blessings
- **E.** Comparison to the Jewish temple tax and eschatological prophecies of Gentile tribute

IV. The Seal of the Collection and Reconciliation

- **A.** Use of the signet ring and wax seal as a metaphor for integrity and security
- **B.** Paul's prayer requests for deliverance from hostility in Judea
- **C.** Scholarly debate on the Jerusalem church's acceptance of the collection
 - 1. Refusal of a gift in antiquity as a sign of enmity
 - 2. Argument for acceptance: Jerusalem church originally requested poor relief (Gal 2:10)
- **D.** Refreshment and rest expected from hospitality in Rome
- **E.** Theological emphasis on the "God of peace" amidst local congregational strife

V. Letters of Recommendation and Phoebe's Role (Romans 16:1–2)

- **A.** Cultural conventions of letters of recommendation among social peers
- **B.** Phoebe's status as a businesswoman from Cenchreae
- **C.** Phoebe as "prostatis" (patroness, benefactor, host of a house church)
- **D.** Phoebe as "diakonos" (deacon, minister of the word)
- **E.** Phoebe's role as the letter-bearer and likely first expositor of Romans
- **F.** Cultural significance of Paul's respect for women in contrast to broader Roman and Jewish legal views on female testimony

VI. Prominent Roman Leaders and the House Church Networks (Romans 16:3–7)

- **A.** Greek and Latin names indicating diverse backgrounds and social classes
- **B.** Prisca and Aquila (synergos/fellow workers)
 - 1. Met in Corinth after Claudius's expulsion of Jews
 - 2. Prisca's higher social or ecclesiastical status (named first)
 - 3. Risked their lives for Paul (idiom of "laying down their necks")
 - 4. Leaders of a house church, likely meeting on the ground floor of a tenement building
- **C.** Epaphroditus: "first fruits of Asia" and convert from Ephesus
- **D.** Mary (Maria/Miriam): commended for laboring much
- **E.** Andronicus and Junia
 - 1. Believers before Paul (likely part of the early Jerusalem or Diaspora synagogue)
 - 2. Relatives (fellow Jews) and fellow prisoners
 - 3. Outstanding among the apostles