

Romans

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Romans 16:5b-11



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Introduction

- There are a number of things truly remarkable about this lengthy list of greetings, but it must be said that there is a lot of conjecture and "connecting the dots" that makes the list even more fascinating! Of all the names listed in Paul's greetings, William Barclay states that at least 13 are mentioned in inscriptions or documents related to the emperor's palace and household. In Philippians 4:22, Paul mentions the believers who are in Ceasar's household. Perhaps many of these were servants or slaves, but these were often very influential in any given household, so it is amazing that the faith had penetrated the highest halls of power so quickly!

Vs. 5b

- Epaenetus is described by Paul as "my beloved" and we are told that he was Paul's first convert in Asia. This may have been as recent as year or two before on Paul's Third Missionary Journey. So here is a man who is dear to Paul, someone Paul has known and loved as a brother. And again, like Prisca and Aquila, a traveler. Asia here is not the continent we know, but a Roman province covering the Mediterranean coast of what is now Turkey and extending east into the north central part of the country. And yes, Ephesus was a part of Asia, so it may have been that Epaenetus came to Rome from there with Prisca and Aquila, especially given how his name is in such close proximity to theirs.

Vs. 6

- Mary of course was a very common name for Jewish women in the first century. Of the women who found the tomb of Jesus empty at least three were named Mary! But what is interesting is that this Roman Mary needs no designation other than her first name. At Sweetwater there was a time when if someone asked, "Have you had a visit from Sarah?" everyone knew exactly who Sarah was! It must have been the same with this Mary. She worked harder than anyone in the church and everyone knew her for they had all been blessed by her labors.

Vs. 7

- Andronicus and Junias are interesting, for here we have another couple. Moreover Paul calls them his kinsmen, his cousins. These are two names that are thoroughly Greco-Roman, but remember that Paul certainly had a father who was Roman citizen. Twice in Acts Paul claims to have been a citizen from birth, which could only come from his father, his Jewish heritage coming from his mother. It may be that both were his cousins or that it was Andronicus only and thus Junias by marriage.
- Paul says that they were his fellow prisoners. Where the three of them may have been imprisoned we do not know. We only know of his imprisonment in Philippi before he wrote this letter to Rome. But in 2 Corinthians 11:23 Paul speaks of multiple imprisonments. At the end of John's gospel, the apostle tells us that what he has written is just a small part of all that Jesus said and did. It seems despite Dr. Luke's best efforts we have only a small part of Paul's adventures with Jesus!
- Paul says the couple "were outstanding among the apostles" and "were in Christ before me". His cousins, his fellow prisoners, now Paul is counting them among the Apostles in Jerusalem! And they were outstanding! Could they have

been part of the 150 in the Upper Room at Pentecost? Or part of the thousands who were saved after hearing Peter's sermon? And as they fled the persecution, were they part of the founding of the church in Rome?

Vs. 8

- Ampliatus was a common name for male slaves. So it is interesting that in the Roman catacombs there is the Cemetery of Domatilla and in this cemetery is a very elaborate tomb with only one name inscribed: Ampliatus. The name is carved in very big, bold and descriptive script. Normally such an elaborate tomb would be for a wealthy citizen, not a slave. But a citizen would typically have a first, middle, and last name inscribed. But here at this elaborate tomb is just one name, indicating the tomb of a slave. But given that this is a Christian cemetery, what it suggests is that even a slave could be highly valued and elevated in the church, a place where the world's distinction of rank and power were meaningless. It may well be that there in the catacombs lies the remains of Paul's good friend.

Vs. 9

- Urbanus was Paul's co-laborer in Christ and Stachys is his good friend. But who were they? They were in the church in Rome, a city that Paul had never been to. How did he know them? Where did he work with Urbanus? How did he and Stachys become friends? All this points to how little of Paul's life we really know!

Vs. 10-11a

- Apelles was "approved in Christ" – a man of the highest character, one who you could trust, one who would never abandon you. But again, where on the journey did he prove himself so to Paul?
- The household of Aristobulus: in Rome lived the grandson of Herod the Great and his name was Aristobulus. This man was a close friend of Emperor Claudius. When Aristobulus died, the emperor inherited his household and not just the family but all the slaves and servants as well...the whole household. Paul does not say "Greet Aristobulus and those who are in his household" only "greet the household...". Thus this may be a greeting only to the Christian slaves and servants who were living in the palace, but are also part of the church.
- Connecting the dots...Apelles was sometimes the Greek version of the Jewish name Abel and Herodion, who also seems to be a cousin of Paul's, is clearly connected somehow to Herod's family. Perhaps they both were part of the household of Aristobulus!

Vs. 11b

- The household of Narcissus...but only those who are "in the Lord". Despite the negative connotations given to the name by Freud, Narcissus was actually a fairly common name in the first century. However, it may be that the Narcissus Paul is speaking of here is the notorious one who was the private secretary to Emperor Claudius. This man was the ultimate gatekeeper. No one saw the emperor, no piece of mail made to the emperor without going through Narcissus, so he became very rich by accepting bribes from people who wanted or needed to get an audience with Claudius. Well, Claudius died and soon Narcissus died and all of the wealth, possessions and households of both men became the property of the new emperor...Nero. If we have the stories of Aristobulus and Narcissus right, then Nero would have inherited all their households, so that by the time Paul wrote to the Roman church from Corinth, already Christians were walking the halls of power and moving in the highest circles in the Empire.