

## Going to Church in Ancient Rome

Dr. John Niemelä

Message of Life: John 3:16 ([www.MoL316.com](http://www.MoL316.com))

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### Introduction

### Geography

#### Residents of First Century Rome

Those with Latin names: typically non-slaves

Those with non-Latin names: often slaves or freedmen

### Housing in Ancient Rome

### First Century Events in Rome concerning Christians

Winter AD 56-57: Paul wrote Romans

July 19ff., AD 64 (7½ years after Paul wrote Romans): Rome burns

In response being blamed for the fire, Nero blamed Christians

Nero Arrested and Killed Multitudes of Christians

*Many Christians were in Rome in AD 64, were they numerous when Paul wrote?*

We contend that the people greeted in Romans 16:3-15 were leaders and/or sponsors of congregations. Paul greets fifteen separate groups of leaders/sponsors. Thus, we suggest that there were at least fifteen separate congregations (probably many more than fifteen). These congregations were spread over many parts of Rome, with heavier concentrations in poorer neighborhoods. The following excerpts from Romans 16 will serve as the basis for several points:

- A. Paul uses the word greet fifteen times here (fifteen separate groups,
- B. Even though Paul had not yet visited Rome, he knew many of these people personally.
- C. Many of these people seem to have met Paul during his travels. For example, Priscilla and Aquila met Paul in Corinth, because they had been evicted from Rome when the Emperor Claudius persecuted Jewish Christians (Acts 18:1ff). Also, Epaenetus was called the firstfruits of Achaia (southern Greece). THEREFORE, THE PEOPLE PAUL GREET SEEM TO BE MINISTRY LEADERS AND/OR SPONSORS.
- D. If these are ministry leaders and/or sponsors, there are at least fifteen Christian congregations at Rome when Paul wrote.

Romans 16:3-15 extends greetings to twenty eight leaders and/or sponsors:

1. Greet Prisc[ill]a<sup>J</sup> and Aquila<sub>L</sub><sup>J</sup> . . . and the church that is in their house. (vv 3–5a)
2. Greet my beloved Epaenetus<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, the firstfruits of Achaia (southern Greece) . . . (v 5b)
3. Greet Mary<sup>J</sup><sub>H</sub>, who labored much for us . . . (v 6)
4. Greet Andronicus<sub>G</sub><sup>J</sup> and Junia<sup>J</sup><sub>L</sub>, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners . . . (v 7)
5. Greet Amplias<sub>L</sub><sup>G</sup>, my beloved . . . (v 8)
6. Greet Urbanus<sub>L</sub><sup>G</sup>, our fellow worker, and Stachys<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, my beloved. (v 9)
7. Greet Apelles<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, approved in Christ (v 10a)
8. Greet those who are of the *household* of (or *slaves of*) Aristobulus<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>. (v 10b)
9. Greet Herodion<sub>G</sub><sup>J</sup>, my countrymen (v 11a)
10. Greet those being in the Lord of the *household* of (or *slaves of*) Narcissus<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>. (v 11b)
11. Greet Tryphena<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup> and Tryphosa<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, who have labored much in the Lord. (v 12a)
12. Greet the beloved Persis<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup> . . . (v 12b)
13. Greet Rufus<sub>L</sub><sup>J</sup>, chosen in the Lord, and his mother<sub>L</sub><sup>J</sup> and mine. (v 13)
14. Greet Asyncritus<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, Phlegon<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, Hermas<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, Patrobas<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, Hermes<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, and the brethren with them. (v 14)
15. Greet Philologus<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup> and Julia<sub>L</sub><sup>G</sup>, Nereus<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup> and his sister<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, and Olympas<sub>G</sub><sup>G</sup>, and all the saints who are with them. (v 15).

Underlining = male. Subscript L, G, or H = Latin, Greek, or Hebrew surname (respectively).

Superscript J or G = Jewish or Gentile (respectively).

Few Latin-named people and non-Latin-named mixed. No mixture of Jews and Gentiles. This concerned Paul in Romans 14:1–15:13.

### How many believers might have met in Rome when Paul wrote Romans?

The numbers could have been sizeable, despite most congregations meeting in tiny apartments (Priscilla and Aquila might have had a larger apartment than most).

Let us make a guess:

1. Fifteen congregational locations:	15
2. Twelve (total) adults at each meeting (including leader):	<u>× 12</u>
	180
3. Each leader met with three groups each week:	<u>× 3</u>
	540
4. An equal number of unnamed groups existed:	<u>× 2</u>
	1,080

This assumes ninety groups being led by thirty groups of leaders.

### What does this tell us about churches in the first century?