

Recycling Romans?

Scholars have long noted two peculiarities regarding early copies of Romans: (1) the words “in Rome” are missing from 1:7 and 1:15 in some manuscripts; (2) the entire last chapter (and sometimes the last two chapters) are missing from some manuscripts. Why? Our best guess is that the letter was recycled: copies were made and sent around to other churches with the more specific references to Rome and the Roman Christians omitted.

Indeed, a few scholars have wondered whether our copy of the letter perhaps is not the one sent to Rome. Paul greets an unusually large number of people in chapter 16. Could he have known that many people in a church that he had never visited? Or, instead, is it more likely that this section of the epistle is an addendum attached to a copy of the letter sent to some other church (some of the people mentioned appear to have been associated with Ephesus)? That is possible, but most scholars think that Paul knew people who had moved to Rome, and he may have made a special point to mention them all in order to establish connections with the church there.

More serious discussion attends the last three verses of the letter as it appears in English Bibles (16:25–27). Due to a host of manuscript problems, many scholars believe these verses were composed by someone other than Paul and added to one of the truncated versions of the letter to provide a suitable closing.