

# Talking Back to the Empire: An Imperialistic Background for *Romans*

(Or: What does the mission to Spain have to do with Roman imperialism? – Asking new interpretive questions of old data)

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## **I. Introduction: Intention with Background**

The audience of *Romans* is simply “all in Rome who are loved by God” (1:7). The greeting at the end of the epistle indicates that the members of the Roman churches were quite wide-ranging. By his extensive greetings to a church he had never visited before, Paul proved that he was a widely traveled person whose network spread throughout the Empire.

The more complicated issue is the author’s intention. Paul had most certainly made clear that he wanted to travel to Rome many times. His wish to see the audience is clear (1:11). From the prologue in 1:1–15 and the extensive epilogue in 15:14–16:27, Paul made quite clear his missionary purpose. At the very least, the structure of Paul’s letter informs the interpreter that the letter focuses on mission.<sup>1</sup> He wished to build that relationship presently

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1 Douglas Moo considers mission as merely a partial purpose rather than the umbrella purpose. He sees Jewish-gentile relations and apologetics against Judaizers as the two other purposes of Paul. See Moo, *Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 20–