

The Book of Romans

The Title, Author, and Date of Romans

1. Title: “To the Romans” => “The Gospel of God”
2. Author: Paul
 - a. Internal and external evidence is clear. It is uncontested. Denied by no one. *1.1*
 - b. Tertius was Paul’s amanuensis. *16.22*.
3. The Recipients
 - a. The church at Rome. *1.7, 15*.
 - b. Note, Paul did not address it to “the church at Rome.” The likely reason for this is that there were probably a multiple number of local church bodies at Rome, due to the size of the city. Rome was a large city, with Christians scattered all across it. Therefore, there could be multiple local flocks. Compare *Ro 1.7* and *Ga 1.2* with *1 Co 1.2*; *2 Co 1.1*; *1 Th 1.1*; *2 Th 1.1*. Note *Ph 1.1*; *Co 1.2*
 - c. The letter was delivered by Phoebe. *16.1-2*
2. The Date and Location of Writing
 - a. The letter was written from Corinth, probably in early spring, A.D. 57-58.
 - b. Corinth was Paul’s last visit of the third journey (*Ac 20.1-3*), one year after Ephesus.

The Background and Setting of Romans.

1. The city of Rome was an important and strategic city.
 - a. Rome was the chief city of the world at this time; a wealthy cosmopolitan capital of the empire, stretching from Britain to Arabia. It was the political, economic, and communications center of the world. Rome impacted all men in the civilized world!
 - b. Geography and Demographics
 - 1) Rome sat on the Tiber River, 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea, with a population of 1.2 to 2 million people of a racial, religious and cultural mixture, having all the good and bad of each.
 - 2) Social extremes: Luxury for the few, poverty for the rest (no middle-class).
 - 3) “Pauper citizens” – They were proud of their Roman citizenship, disdained manual labor, and had an entitlement mentality. They cared only about bread to eat, entertainment, and excess. Physical work (including trades and manufacturing) was deemed fitting only for slaves. About half the population were slaves.
 - 4) Emperors tried to evict “undesirable immigrants” from time to time. This included Jews and Christians.
 - c. This was during the “better days” of Nero’s reign. One of the best periods since Augustus!
 - 1) This was a time of political stability, during Nero’s early years (he reigned from A.D. 54-68). The central government was administered by wise senators at that time.
 - 2) It was a time of peace, law, and order in the provinces. There was freedom of movement throughout the Empire, due to an excellent road system.
2. Religious atmosphere
 - a. The dominant approach was religious syncretism. A heathen polytheism. This eventually proved inadequate, and many were drawn to monotheism.
 - b. Rome had a Jewish colony, with over 13 synagogues. A poor, yet influential group.
3. The establishing of the Church at Rome
 - a. There is no record of who established it. *Romans 15.20* indicates there was no apostolic presence in Rome when this letter was written.
 - b. The church in Rome was likely established as Christians moved to Rome.
 - 1) Rome, as a large city, was a magnet for displaced people. (Like NYC, or LA).
 - 2) Christians came to Rome, some after Pentecost in Jerusalem (*Ac 2.10*), and others later from churches in the eastern part of the empire. Many were converted through Paul or Peter.

- 3) The church was probably established in the 40s. It was a mature church by A.D. 57, but had never had any follow-up theological teaching, when Paul wrote to them. n.b. *1.15; 15.23, 24*
- 4) By A.D. 64, Christians in Rome were described by Tacitus as “an immense multitude.”
- c. The Church in Rome was likely mostly Gentiles.

The Purpose and Message of Romans

1. The **purpose** of the book
 - a. The occasion is clear: Paul is done in the East, and intends to go to Spain, visiting Rome on the way. First he will take a collection to poor Christians in Jerusalem. He writes this letter as an introduction of himself and his intent to come see them. *1.8-15; 15.14-33*
 - b. The **purpose** of the letter is not as clear. But, seems to be threefold.
 - 1) Support – to enlist their interest, prayer, and assistance in going to Spain. I.e. a “base of operations.” He shares his plans, to gain their participation. *15.23-24, 28-32+Ac 19.21*
 - 2) Gospel/Theology – Paul explains his theology/gospel. His intent is to reach the West with the Gospel (*1.15 + Jude 3*) as well as protect the Roman Church from false gospels and teaching, by establishing sound doctrine, as a safeguard.
 - 3) Encouragement – Paul is not writing to correct them, but to “fill them up.” *1.11-13*
2. The **message** of the book: ***“The Good News of the Righteousness of God” 1.16-17***

Key Themes in Romans

1. *God* – God’s: Gospel, Son, wrath, righteousness, truth, judgment, faithfulness, grace, sovereignty, etc.
2. The *Righteousness* of God in His comprehensive plan of salvation *1.16-17*
3. God’s *saving grace* – About all sinners, not a special group.
4. Sin, death, and law – Explanation of their nature and relationship to each other and to us.
5. Justification and Sanctification
6. God’s sovereignty in Salvation
7. Israel’s place in God’s plan
8. Spiritual gifts and Liberties

Interpretive Issues in Romans

1. Perpetuation of Adam’s sin - *5.12-21* -> How did we become sinners?
2. Battle within - *7.7-25* -> Who is Paul describing? An unbeliever? A Christian?
3. Election and the Sovereignty of God - *8.28-30; 9.6-29* -> Is election fair?
4. The status and nature of Israel - *9-11* -> Has God rejected the nation of Israel? Replaced with the Church?

Structure of Romans

1. The normal epistolary structure is followed: Writer, readers, greeting, followed by the content.
2. Outline
 - a. *1.1-17* Introduction and Purpose
 - b. *1.18-3.20* - God’s Wrath Revealed - Need for God’s Righteousness
 - c. *3.21-4.25* - God’s Righteousness Revealed - Provision of God’s Righteousness
 - d. *5.1-8.39* - God’s Righteousness Applied - Transformation by God’s Righteousness
 - e. *9.1-11.36* - God’s Righteousness and Israel - Restoration by God’s Righteousness
 - f. *12.1-15.13* - God’s Righteousness Lived out - Lifestyle of God’s Righteousness
 - g. *15.14-16.27* - Conclusion, Greetings, and Benediction

The Pauline Epistles - Overview by Tom Vacek

The next 13 books in the New Testament are written by the same man. He is known to us as the Apostle Paul. He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, although Jewish by birth. His Jewish given name was Saul, and he had become a fervent and active Pharisee, having sat under the teaching of one of the leading teachers of the day, Gamaliel. Many think that Paul was born at about the same time as Christ. We don't know this for sure; all we do know is that he was a "young man" at the stoning of Stephen.

Note: The stoning of Stephen is often dated in the early 30's (ca. 32). We do know that Caiaphas held the office of high priest until AD 36. If the high Priest who questioned Stephen in Acts 7.1 was Caiaphas, that would easily place the stoning of Stephen within a couple years after Christ's death and resurrection. Again, all we know for certain is that Paul was a "young man" at this time.

Paul was dramatically converted by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself on the road to Damascus, as Paul (who was still Saul at that time) was enroute to kill or imprison the Christians there. Immediately upon his conversion, Paul began to proclaim Christ.

Although he was apparently an unimpressive man physically, through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, he became a spiritual powerhouse. He became personally responsible for much of the spread of Christianity throughout the entire Roman Empire. His ministry was marked by persecution, physical beatings, and imprisonment. But his ministry was also marked by widespread conversions among the Gentiles. He founded several churches throughout the Empire and made return visits to many of them as an encouragement to the local disciples.

Paul established the template for New Testament church planting. He would go to an area, preach the Gospel, and build into the lives of those converts until they were able to function on their own as a local church.

The 13 books that he wrote are known collectively as the Pauline Epistles.

1 Co 1.2

to the church of God which is at Corinth

2 Co 1.1

to the church of God which is at Corinth

1 Th 1.1

to the church of the Thessalonians

2 Th 1.1

to the church of the Thessalonians

Ph 1.1

to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

Co 1.2

to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae

Ac 20.1–3

1 And after the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he departed to go to Macedonia.² And when he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.³ And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia.

Ro 15.20

And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation;

Ro 1.15

Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Ac 2.10

Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

Ro 15.23–24

²³ but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you²⁴ whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—

Ro 15.28–32

²⁸ Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.²⁹ And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.³⁰ Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,³¹ that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;³² so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

Ac 19.21

Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

Jude 3

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Ro 1.11–13

¹¹ For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.¹³ And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.