

A Survey of the Book of Romans

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Author:

The apostle Paul is the undisputed author of the letter. Many critics of the Bible can even agree to this fact. Paul did use Tertius as a secretary to pen the letter (**Romans 16:22**) and probably used Phoebe to take the letter to the Romans (**Romans 16:1**).

This book appears first in a long succession of letters in the New Testament. There are 13 epistles (letters) ascribed to the apostle Paul. There are only six of those letters where his authorship is questioned, but only by the most liberal scholars.

Date:

This book was probably written from Corinth in the mid to late 50's AD when Paul was on his third missionary journey (**Acts 20:2-3**). He spent only three months there toward the end of his journey on the way to Jerusalem. Some have assigned the year 55 AD to the book, but that is by speculation. Others suggest 56 or 57 AD.

We can confirm he was in Achaia/Corinth region when it was written because of four things: (1) Phoebe was from Cenchrea, Corinth's eastern seaport (**Romans 16:1**), (2) Timothy and Sosipator/Sopater, companions of the third missionary journey, were with him (**Romans 16:21, Acts 16:1-5, Acts 20:4**), (3) Gaius was a member of the Corinthian church, and he was baptized by the apostle Paul (**Romans 16:23, I Corinthians 1:14, Acts 18:7**), and (4) Erastus, the treasurer of Corinth, is mentioned (**Romans 16:23, II Timothy 4:20**).

What we do know is that it would have been written when Paul was collecting money for the needy saints in Jerusalem (**Romans 15:18-22**). It is clear that he had already collected money from the churches in Macedonia and Corinth (**Romans 15:26-27**). He was on his way to Spain before coming to collect their offering (**Romans 15:28-29**). It is safe to assume that Romans was written after I & II Corinthians because their money had already been collected (**I Corinthians 16, II Corinthians 8-9**).

Theme:

The theme of the letter is that we are justified by faith (**Romans 3:21-8:39**). In the Greek, the word justification means "to set right." Paul declares that the sinner can be saved. The sinner has to obey the Lord (**Romans 1:5, 16:26**), but cannot be justified by their works alone to save. The foundation of justification is built on Christ's merit and not man's merit.

The Roman letter is more formal and less personal than any other letter of Paul. It is possible that this was done because of his intent for it to be universal. It is not a thesis or a treatise (**Romans 16:22**). Paul wrote the letter because he was "*the apostle of the Gentiles*" (**Romans 11:13, 15:16**). Rome was the capital of the Gentile world. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was free to travel throughout the Empire. He used his Jewish heritage and Roman citizenship to reach the masses. He established Gentile churches in strategic centers around the world. He worked in major cities. These events helped to spread the gospel to every creature on the earth.

Audience:

The letter is written to Roman Christians who Paul intended to visit. We do not know who established the church in Rome but we do know that there were around 50,000 Jews in Rome during Paul's day. Total population was around 4 million. Archeological evidence suggests that there were at least 13 synagogues (based on ruins that have been discovered).

We are not sure who took the gospel to Rome first. Paul gives a hint in **Romans 15:20**, when he says it was built on the foundation of others. Many scholars believe that the Jews heard of the Christian movement. They may have studied the prophecies and discovered the truth for themselves. Another theory is that **Acts 2:10** says there were "visitors from Rome" at Pentecost. These visitors may have become followers and went back to establish the church.

The Christians suffered persecution in Rome soon after the church was established. In fact, Claudius had all Jews, and Christians (including Pricilla, Aquila) forced out of the city in 49 AD because they enraged him (**Acts 18-19**). One writer in that day (Suetonius) said, "He expelled the Jews from Rome because on the instigation of Chrestus they were continually causing disturbances." Further research shows that Chrestus also meant Christus or Christians. This means the gospel was preached among the Jews as early as 49 AD or before. **Acts 18** seems to imply that the work was already established when Paul arrived there himself, as we assume Pricilla and Aquila were already in the church. These two are mentioned in **Romans 16** along with several others. After Claudius' death the Jews returned to Rome, along with some Christians. Paul probably wrote Romans at that time as he saw the door beginning to open again and he hoped to take advantage of the opportunity.

Romans 1:8 shows us that the community of believers were well-known among the brotherhood. Some of the Christians in Rome knew Paul before he arrived there (maybe from other missions). Some of Paul's own relatives were a part of the church family at Rome (**Romans 16:7, 11**). The church in Rome met in various locations. One congregation met in the home of Aquila and Pricilla (**Romans 16:5**). According to **I Corinthians 16:19**, **Colossians 4:15**, **Philemon 2**, and **Acts 18:7** there were others. They may have met collectively, but they specifically met in house churches.

Key Verses:

Romans 1:7, 1:16, 3:9-11, 3:21-24, 4:3, 5:1, 5:8, 6:23, 8:1, 8:9, 8:28, 8:31, 8:37-39, 10:9-10, 10:14, 12:1-2, 12:19, 13:1, 16:16-17

Outline:

- I. Introduction (1:1-17)
- II. Condemnation (1:18-3:20)
- III. Reconciliation (3:21-5:11)
- IV. Sanctification (5:12-8:39)
- V. Vindication (9:1-11:36)
- VI. Application (12:1-15:13)
- VII. Conclusion (15:14-16:27)