

## INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

### ***The church at Rome***

As the capital of the empire, Rome was the great city around which Paul's missionary strategy was planned. The book of Acts concludes with Paul's arrival in Rome and his preaching the gospel there. The city already contained a flourishing church, apparently founded very early after Christ's resurrection (cf. Acts 2:10). By Paul's time the church was large and well known (Rom 1:8; 15:23; names in ch. 16); there were several congregations there, probably meeting in homes (Rom 16:5). A majority of the church were Gentiles (Rom 1:5-6; 11:13, 28-31), but apparently a substantial minority were Jewish (Rom 2:17; 3:1; 4:1; ch. 9-11; Aquila and Priscilla in 16:3; cf. Acts 18:2).

The church there undoubtedly suffered serious disruption when Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49. This decree affected both Christian and non-Christian Jews (Acts 18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius states: "Since the Jews were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome" (*Life of Claudius* 25:4). Probably Suetonius confused the rather common name of "Chrestus" with the title for Jesus, "Christus." It seems that the non-Christian Jews in Rome were leading in riots against the believing Jews, a practice quite frequent in Paul's experience. Claudius, not knowing the details, simply expelled all the Jews, assuming that some fellow named "Chrestus" was at the bottom of the trouble. By the time Paul wrote Romans, the Jews were permitted back in Rome, and Aquila and Priscilla had already moved back there.

### ***Peter in Rome***

There is some discussion as to the time that Peter was in Rome. Although frequently found in Jerusalem and once in Antioch, Peter is not mentioned in Acts or in the Pauline epistles as being in Rome. But 1 Pet 5:13, "She [the church?] who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings," generally is understood to indicate Rome, "Babylon" being a metonymy indicating the wickedness of Rome and its oppressing of the Jews. It appears that 1 Peter was written ca. A.D. 65, sometime near the deaths of Peter and Paul.

The church fathers wrote that Peter was martyred in Rome, and there is little reason to doubt their testimony.

Clement of Rome (ca. A.D. 97) wrote to the Corinthians, mentioning the ministries and deaths of Peter and Paul, in such a way as might suggest that they were martyred there in Rome (*1 Clement* 5, *ANF* 1:6). Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3:1:1) said that "Matthew among the Hebrews published a gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel at Rome and founding the church there." Peter and Paul's labors

and martyrdoms under Nero are explicitly connected to Rome by Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200; *Scorpiace* 15, *ANF* 3:648; *On Prescription Against Heretics* 36, *ANF* 3:260). Following the tradition, Eusebius, the early fourth century church historian, places their deaths in Rome at the hands of Nero (*Ecclesiastical History* 2:25).

However, since there is no convincing evidence that Peter was in Rome prior to Paul's third missionary journey, we can assume that he did not come to Rome until after Paul wrote Romans.

### ***Occasion of writing***

Romans is one of Paul's four great Soteriological Epistles, written during his third missionary journey (Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans; Galatians may have been written earlier).

Near the end of his third missionary journey, Paul remained in Corinth during the winter/spring of A.D. 54 (Acts 20:3-4). Paul was staying with his host Gaius, whom he had baptized when he started the church on his second missionary journey (1 Cor 1:14; Rom 16:23). Paul sent the letter to the Roman church by Phoebe, who is called a "deaconess." She probably was traveling from Cenchrea to Rome on business (Rom 16:1-2). Assuming that Phoebe and Paul both left Corinth about the same time, the letter probably arrived in Rome when Paul was en route to Jerusalem.

There were two main purposes in writing:

#### 1) Practical purpose

Paul was planning to first travel to Jerusalem with the offering (Rom 15:25-26), and then travel to Rome and on to Spain (Rom 1:9-15; 15:23-29). This letter was to prepare for his visit, so that the church in Rome would receive him and aid him on his continuing journey to the west.

#### 2) Doctrinal purpose

In this epistle Paul laid out the doctrinal groundwork for his visit. This included encouraging the church, clearing up difficulties, and solving some of the practical problems they faced. If he had written Galatians during this missionary journey, the doctrines of salvation would have been on his mind, and he would have desired to inoculate the Roman church against the heresies attacking his churches. The best defense is a good offense, and in Romans Paul set out clearly and magnificently the whole scope of God's salvation.

A secondary doctrinal purpose was to obtain and ensure harmony between the believing Jews and Gentiles in the church.

## ***Points of interest in Romans***

- Lengthy introduction
- Many names in conclusion (26 names in Rome)
- Most treatise-like epistle
- Luther's conversion verse, Rom 1:17
- Classic natural theology passage, 1:18-32
- Abraham and David justified by faith alone, ch. 4
- Federal headships of Adam and Christ, 5:12-21
- Baptism, symbol of death, 6:1-10
- Anti-perfectionism passage, 7:14-25
- Assurance by the Holy Spirit, ch. 8
- Missionary passage, 10:13-17
- All Israel to be saved, 11:26-32
- Classic government passage, 13:1-7
- True Christian liberty, ch. 14
- Paul's missionary strategy, 15:14-22
- Separation from heretics, 16:17
- Excellent salvation verses (the "Romans Road"), 1:16; 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 8:1; 10:9-10

## ***Outline of Romans***

I. Introduction, 1:1-17

II. Mankind guilty before God, 1:18 - 3:20

1. The Gentiles guilty, 1:18-32
2. The Jews guilty, ch. 2 - 3:8

3. All the world guilty, 3:9-20

III. Justification by faith alone, 3:21 - ch. 4

1. God's righteousness by faith, 3:21-31
2. Abraham and David justified by faith, ch. 4

IV. The fruits of justification, ch. 5-8

1. Justification and peace with God, 5:1-11
2. Jesus, our federal head, 5:12-21
3. Justification and holiness of life, ch. 6 – 7:6
4. The struggle with sin, 7:7-25
  - a. Paul before his conversion, 7:7-13
  - b. Paul after his conversion, 7:14-25
5. From justification to glory, ch. 8

V. Israel's relation to the church, ch. 9-11

1. God's sovereignty in election, 9:1-21
2. Israel's fall, and the remnant, 9:22 - 11:10
3. God's plan for salvation for Jew and Gentile, 11:11-36

VI. Practical Christian living, ch. 12 - 15:13

1. Personal associations, ch. 12
2. The Christian and the state, 13:1-7
3. Love and God's commandments, 13:8-14
4. Weak and strong brothers, ch. 14 - 15:13

VII. Paul's missionary plans, 15:14-33

VIII. Greetings and conclusion, ch. 16