

# Introduction to Romans

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## *I. The Church of Rome*

### **A. The Church**

1. Planted before 50 A.D. probably without an apostle [Peter was still in Jerusalem in 50A.D.]
2. May have been planted by pilgrims of Acts 2, or as result of dispersion of Acts 8, or by a team from Antioch.
3. Significantly Gentile in composition (Rom.1:13/11:13-14; 15:15-16)
4. Also had a significant number of Jewish members (2:17-29/4:1/7:1)
5. Probably had at least five "home churches": Pricilla and Aquila's house (16:3-5); Aristobulus' household (16:10); Household of Narcissus (16:11); Asyncritus, et al (16:14); Philologus, et al (16:15)

### **C. Relations between the Church and the Roman State**

1. Jesus had been condemned in a Roman court; Peter and Paul would eventually be martyred there
2. Jews tried to get Christianity outlawed by Rome, but the Romans could not distinguish between Christianity and Judaism, a legal religion in the empire (Gallio in Corinth—Acts 18:12-16).
3. Claudius' decree (Acts 18:2) expelled all Jews (including Christian Jews) from Rome (49-50 AD)
4. Romans 13:1-7

### **D. Relations between the Jewish and the Gentile elements in the Church**

1. The Jews (including Jewish Christians) had been banished from Rome, in AD 49-50, by order of Emperor Claudius. Thus, for some years, the church was left with entirely non-Jewish culture and style.
2. No doubt, many Jews had returned after Claudius' death, in AD 54. When the Jewish Christians returned to Rome, they would have found the church dominated by Gentile customs and convictions.
3. When the Jewish believers sought to practice their Jewish convictions, it probably was frowned upon by the Gentile Christians, who would find them legalistic. In turn, the Jewish believers would have found the Gentiles too libertine in their practices. This would cause a wedge in the fellowship, and it is a matter that seems to concern Paul (e.g., 1:16; 2:9-10, ch.9-11; 14:1-6; 15:26-27).

## *II. The letter*

### **A. Time and occasion of writing**

1. Winter of 56-57 A.D. (some say 55); 7 years after Jerusalem Council (Acts 15); 3 years before Paul's arrival in Rome; End of Paul's third missionary journey;
2. Having spent 3 months in Greece [Corinth] (Acts 20:3/Rom.16:1), Paul was now leaving for Jerusalem to deliver gift (15:25-26)
3. As the "apostle to the Gentiles", Paul had long wished to visit Rome (1:13-15)
  - a. He had been "hindered" from visiting Rome by his priority to reach the unreached (1:13/15:20ff)

- b. At the time of writing, Paul was in Corinth (Acts 20:2-3) and had evangelized all parts east of Italy (15:19-23)
- c. His present intention was to press westward to Spain, to drop in on the church in Rome *en route* to preach, receive support, and to establish a beachhead for westward outreach (15:24, 28).

## B. An expansion on Galatians

- 1. Deals in more detail with the same themes
- 2. Different attitude in the two Epistles
  - a. Galatians written in heated spirit in time of crisis, Romans more coolly
  - b. Galatians were Paul's "children" in the faith; he had not been to Rome yet
  - c. Romans is Paul's most impersonal letter, except for greetings in chapter 16

## C. Purpose of writing

- 1. Most common view: Paul was coming to Rome to minister en route to Spain. Since he had never been to Rome, and was unknown to many, he sent the epistle ahead of him to acquaint them in advance with the Gospel as he preached it. It is seen as a logical and well-organized Gospel tract, proving that all need salvation, provided through grace, not through the Law.
- 2. Alternative view: Like all of his other epistles, this was an “occasional” letter, occasioned by a problem in the church that Paul wished to address and remedy—namely, rough relations between Jewish and Gentile believers (See: 1:16; 2:9, 10; 3:9; 11:17-26; 14:1-6; 15:7-9).

## D. Structure of the argument (as typically taught)

- 1. Seen as a theological treatise: A commonly-proposed (but not entirely satisfactory) outline:

### ***Prologue — 1:1-17***

#### ***a. Justification (1:18—5:21)***

—Gentile guilt (ch.1:18ff); Jewish guilt (ch.2); All have sinned (3:1-20); Justification by faith (3:21-5:11); Christ's grace defeats Adam's guilt (5:12-21)

#### ***b. Sanctification (6:1—8:39)***

—Dying to sin is deliverance from sin's power (6:1-14); We now are slaves of righteousness (6:15-23); We have a new husband/head (7:1-6); The law could not conquer sin in our members (7:7-25); The Holy Spirit changes everything (ch.8)

#### ***c. Parenthesis: Israel's status and future (chs.9-11)***

—Paul is grieved about Israel's failure to get saved (chapters 9-10); God has saved a remnant of Israel as an proof that all Israel will later be saved (ch.11)

#### ***d. Christian living (12:1—15:13)***

—Consecration of our bodies & minds is the proper response to the mercies of God (ch.12); Christians should submit to government officials (13:1-7); Love is the fulfillment of the Law (13:8-10); Put on Christ (13:11-14); Defer to the weaker conscience of others (14:1-15:7); Christ for the Jew and the Gentile (15:8-13)

### ***Epilogue: Personal travel plans and greetings to friends***

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- 2. Seen as an “occasional” letter: An outline, recognizing the theme of unity in the Church:

### ***Prologue — 1:1-17***

**a. *Antidote to Jewish ethnic snobbery (chapters 1-4)***

- Being Jewish is not the ticket that admits a man into favor with God (1:16-17)
- The sins of the Gentiles are all found in the Jewish community as well (1:18-2:24)
- Being Abraham's descendent means more than ethnic identity (2:25-29)
- Though Jews had greater privileges, this has not resulted in greater virtue (3:1-20)
- All, therefore, stand in equal need of grace, which is provided in Christ (3:21-30)
- The Law, in which Jews boast, teaches that legal observance is not what saves (ch.4)

**b. *Clarification of concepts affirmed in the first section (chapters 5-11)***

- Celebration of justification by faith (5:1-11)
- Adam and Christ—the global view—the reign of sin, death, the law and grace (5:12-21)
- Parenthesis: Dealing with anticipated misunderstandings (chapters 6 and 7)
  - Should we sin because that causes grace to “abound”? (6:1-14)
  - Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? (6:15-7:6)
  - Is the law bad, then? (7:7-25)
- The reign of the Spirit (chapter 8)
- So what ever became of the promise to save “Israel”? (chapters 9-11)

***c. Practical ramifications: Right living and peaceful relationships (chapters 12:1-15:7)***

***d. Summary, travel plans and greetings (15:8-chapter 16)***