

## A Study in the Book of Romans

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## Introduction

Out of the whole of Scripture, Paul's letter to the Romans is the most important for the believer to understand, for the truths it reveals put in focus all the other revelations of God's Word. In **Module 109**, we will place this extraordinary letter under the microscope. In fact, we will study this letter in more depth than any other book of the Bible in the course of our studies at the Online Bible College.

This letter to the church in Rome is different to most of the other letters in the New Testament. Most of Paul's other writings were personal correspondence to a church that was in need of adjustment, either correcting the lives of believers whose lifestyle did not match the Gospel pattern or correcting some wrong teaching they had received. Take a look at these examples:

- **Corinthians** – Paul wrote his first and second letters to the Corinthians primarily to address the immorality and worldly behavior that had infiltrated that church.
- **Galatians** – Paul wrote his letter to the Galatian Christians because they had fallen into the trap of the Judaizers who taught that Christians must adhere fully to the Law of Moses after believing in Jesus.
- **Thessalonians** – Paul wrote his two letters to the Thessalonian Christians (considered the earliest of Paul's letters) to address some wrong concepts that arisen in the church, particularly concerning the return of Christ.

Paul's letter to the Romans, however, is written as a deliberate teaching statement. It is a declaration of what the Gospel of the Lord Jesus is all about.

### **Getting to Know the Author**

Before we examine Paul's letter itself, it is important for us to get to know the author. Without question, Paul has uniquely shaped our understanding of the Gospel. But who is exactly is he?

The man we now know as Paul was a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin. His original name was Saul, named after the famous first king of Israel, who was also from the same tribe. The name "Saul" was his Jewish name, and the name "Paul" was his

Roman *cognomen*, the name by which he was known as a Roman citizen. Prior to his ministry to the Gentile world, Paul is referred to solely as Saul, his Hebrew name. But after his first missionary journey to the Gentiles commences, he is from then on referred to as Paul. **Acts 13:9** therefore marks the turning point in Paul's ministry focus.

Paul was born into a wealthy family in the Roman colony of Tarsus, a seaport city on the shores of Cilicia in the province of Syria. In **Acts 21:39**, Paul announces:

“...I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city...”

Tarsus was one of three university cities in the first century, the other two being Alexandria and Athens. It is of interesting note that Caius Octavius Caepias (who would later be known as Caesar Augustus) had been a student at the university of Tarsus.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Strabo, writing in about AD 19, claimed that “Tarsus surpassed all other universities, such as Alexandria and Athens, in the study of philosophy and educational literature in general.”<sup>2</sup>

This in itself provides a window on the stature of Paul's educational background, for Paul was well versed in both Greek thinking and Jewish law. At the age of five, Paul would have attended the local synagogue school, but his religious training was later extended when he became a disciple under Gamaliel, a Pharisee of high standing and a member of the Sanhedrin.

**Read Acts 22:3**

**Read Acts 5:33-40**

Paul was probably unimpressive in his appearance. An early tradition describes him as “[b]aldheaded, bowlegged, strongly built, a man small in size, with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, full of grace, for at times he looked like a man and at times he had the face of an angel.”<sup>4</sup>

Paul's lack of physical stature is probably confirmed in **Acts 14:11-12**, when the Lystrians mistook Barnabas for the god Jupiter and Paul for the god Hermes “because he was the chief speaker” (**Acts 14:12**). Barnabas obviously had the more impressive appearance, while they construed Paul as merely his spokesman.

In keeping the custom of Jews in the first century, Paul was taught a trade early in his life, a trade that Luke later identified as tent-making (**Acts 18:3**). He apparently often used this trade to support himself financially during his missionary journeys (**Acts 20:34; 1 Thessalonians 2:5-9**).

It is likely that even at a relatively young age, Paul became a member of the Sanhedrin, and was probably Gamaliel's prize pupil and a rising star in first century Judaism. As the chief instigator of Stephen's death (note **Acts 7:58; 8:1**), Paul would have been one of the ones who were “furious and gnashed their teeth at him” (**Acts 7:54**). Such was his zeal for the Law of God, Paul hounded and imprisoned the early believers until he himself had an encounter with the Lord

Jesus on the road to Damascus.

**Read Acts 26:4-23**

**Read Philippians 3:4-6**

Everything in Paul's background appears to have been finely tuned by God to prepare him to be the "apostle to the Gentiles" (**Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8**). For God had prepared Paul as the bridge between the Jewish and Gentile peoples. As this bridge, he had both a Jewish heritage and Gentile heritage:

- **Jewish heritage** – Paul was raised as a strict Pharisee and would have known the Old Testament in both Hebrew and Greek. He moved in the leading Jewish circles and had viewed Christianity at first from a violently antagonistic perspective.
- **Gentile heritage** – Paul was born in a Roman-governed, Greek-speaking city. He spoke Greek fluently and was versed in Gentile poetry and philosophy. He was even born a Roman citizen, which gave him a unique status in the Roman world (see **Acts 16:37-39; 22:25-29**).

As Gordon Moyes explains:

"As a Roman citizen from a Greek city with a Jewish education, Paul had unique credentials that fitted him for leadership within the Christian church."<sup>3</sup>

Roman citizenship gave Paul free and unfettered travel within the Roman Empire and also qualified him with a special authority to write to Roman Christians.

## **Paul's Reason for Writing**

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There was a special reason why Paul wrote to the Roman Christians. In Paul's day, Rome was the greatest city in the world, the capital of the greatest empire the world had ever seen. Paul himself had never been there (see **Romans 1:10-15**) and so, unlike his other letters, he was now writing to a church he had not founded himself, and with which he had had no personal contact.

Rome, however, was vitally important because it was the hub of world government and its influence touched every area of the Roman Empire. Because of this, the church in Rome also had a vital influence on the rest of the world. It was important that this church be pure in its understanding of the truth of the Gospel. And so Paul wrote to them the very heart and core of his faith. For this reason, the letter to the Romans has become the foundation document of the Christian faith.

## **The Need for Clarity**

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The need for this foundation document is very clear. Paul wrote it while he was in Corinth (in around AD 57-58). The Gospel had already been preached throughout the world for 25 years. Many Christian communities had come into being, and as it is with any new Christian, there were questions that needed to be addressed.

The church in Rome was made up of both Jews and Gentiles; therefore, the Law of God and the Grace of God were subjects that needed to be understood very clearly. It is quite evident that the believers in Rome were well-grounded in the faith, for Paul commends them for the soundness of their teaching and for the practical outliving of the message. The purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans was to re-establish clear guidelines of truth so as to protect the believers from any false teachings that might later arise.

## **Paul's Love for the Church**

At the time of writing, Paul was just about to set out for Jerusalem (**Romans 15:25**). Because the church at Jerusalem was in need, he had organized a collection of finance throughout the young churches of the Gentile world (**1 Corinthians 16:1-3**; **2 Corinthians 9:1-5,12-13**) and was about to begin his journey to take the gift to Jerusalem. This not only met the need of the Christians in Jerusalem, but also fulfilled three purposes for the young churches:

- It was an opportunity for them to put Christian love into action.
- It was a way of teaching them that they were not isolated and independent congregations but members of one great Church, with every Christian having a responsibility toward all the others.
- It was a reminder to the Gentile Christians that they were not cut off from their Jewish roots, but were members together with the Jews of the New Covenant promises of God.

Paul had always had a great longing to visit the church in Rome (see **Romans 1:10-11**). His desire was finally answered. For just after writing to the Romans, on his visit to Jerusalem, he was arrested (**Acts 21:27-36**; **28:16-20**). Two years later, he was taken to Rome as a "prisoner of Christ" (**Ephesians 3:1**; **4:1**). From there he wrote many of his other letters, and it was there that he was eventually martyred for the Lord he loved and served.

**Read Ephesians 6:19**

**Read Philippians 1:12-14**

**Read Colossians 4:7-18**

**Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8**

**Read Philemon 1**

## **An Outline of the Letter**

The book of Romans has a very clear structure, made up of four major sections. Together with the letter's introduction and conclusion, these sections are:

### **Introduction**

- The Writer – the Messenger (**1:1**)
- The Gospel – the Message (**1:2**)

- The Savior – the Mediator (**1:3-4**)
- The Saints – the Receivers (**1:5-15**)
- The Core of the Letter – the Heart of the Gospel (**1:16-17**)

From **1:18** onwards, the letter to the Romans easily divides into the following four major sections:

- **The Gospel's Three Revelations – chapters 1-4**
- **The Gospel's Three Answers – chapters 5-8**
- **The Gospel's Answer to Israel – chapters 9-11**
- **The Gospel in Action – chapters 12-15**

Let's look at a breakdown of these four major sections:

### ***The Gospel's Three Revelations***

The first major section of **Romans** provides light on the three principal revelations that come through the Gospel:

- The Revelation of God (**1:18-2:16**)
- The Revelation of Man (**1:18-3:19**)
- The Revelation of Righteousness (**3:20-4:25**)

### ***The Gospel's Three Answers***

The second major section of **Romans** details the Gospel's answer to three critical problems:

- The Answer to Sins (**5:1-11**)
- The Answer to Sin (**5:12-6:23**)
- The Answer to the Law (**7:1-8:39**)

### ***The Gospel's Answer to Israel***

The third major section of **Romans** provides Paul's insight into a particular problem – the question of how Israel now fits into the purposes of God. In this section, Paul addresses:

- The Faithfulness of God (**9:1-13**)
- The Sovereignty of God (**9:14-33**)
- The Jews' Mistake (**10:1-21**)
- The Future of Israel (**11:1-36**)

### ***The Gospel in Action***

The fourth section of **Romans** teaches on the Christian's six responsibilities:

- To God (**12:1**)
- To Himself (**12:2-3**)
- To the Body of Christ (**12:4-16**)
- To the World (**12:17-13:14**)
- To weaker brothers (**14:1-15:7**)
- To the Gospel (**15:8-33**)

## Conclusion

In the last chapter of Romans, Paul concludes his message. The conclusion is broken down into four subsections:

- Personal greetings (**16:1-16**)
- Final instructions (**16:17-20**)
- Final greetings (**16:21-24**)
- Closing doxology (**16:25-27**)

As we study Paul's letter to the Roman Christians, we will present, in each lesson, a Section View like that at the right. This will provide you with a continual reminder of where we are in Paul's letter and the nature of the subject material on which Paul is writing.

### Introduction

### **The Gospel's Three Revelations**

### The Gospel's Three Answers

### The Gospel's Answer to Israel

### The Gospel in Action

### Conclusion

## How to Study the Book of Romans

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was “the Word [become] flesh” (**John 1:14**, KJV), so God desires his Word to become “flesh” in you – a living revelation and experience in your heart and life. As you begin these studies in **Romans**, here are a few suggestions to help this be a reality for you:

### Before you begin each lesson

- Pray that the Lord will enlighten the “eyes of your heart” (**Ephesians 1:18**)
- Open your heart to the Holy Spirit and allow him to convict you and challenge you to respond to the message of **Romans**

### As you study

- Receive for yourself the truth revealed
- Talk to the Lord about how you can put the truth of **Romans** into action in your own life

We are now ready to embark on what we at OBC believe to be the most significant message in the Bible - Paul's extraordinary letter to the Romans!

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Moyes, *Discovering Paul* (Sydney, Australia: Albatross Books, 1986), p.17.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo (xiv. 6, 73), quoted by the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Moyes, *Discovering Paul* (Sydney, Australia: Albatross Books, 1986), p.17.

<sup>4</sup> *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0.

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