

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

LESSON I : INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR / AUTHENTICITY OF THE EPISTLE

No one has ever seriously questioned the authenticity of this epistle as coming from the Apostle Paul. Hodge, after giving several paragraphs of proofs for the epistle's authenticity, says this: "***There is, therefore, no book in the Bible, and there is no ancient book in the world, of which the authenticity is more certain than this epistle.***" [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 9]

"In keeping with regular ancient custom, Paul used an amanuensis, or scribe, to write the letter, identified in 16:22 as Tertius. Ancient authors gave to their amanuenses varying degrees of responsibility in the composition of their works — from word-for-word recording of what they dictated to quite sweeping responsibility for putting ideas into words. Paul's method in Romans is certainly far toward the 'dictation' end of this spectrum. For the style of Romans is very close to that of Galatians and 1 Corinthians — and we have no evidence that Tertius was involved in the composition of either of these letters (indeed, see Gal 6:11)." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 1f]

This reflects upon our understanding of the doctrine of inspiration and illustrates the fact that the important thing is the end-product (the scriptures), not the human instruments God used as Bible authors. Is it important whether or not Moses wrote the last few verses of Deuteronomy? — or if Joshua wrote the last few verses of the book of Joshua? Is it heretical to accept Proverbs was not entirely written by Solomon? What about our present situation ... is it still inspiration if Paul did not actually write his letters but rather dictated them to a scribe? Would it effect the doctrine of inspiration if the scribe actually would change a word or two during Paul's dictation?

a-man-u-en-sis (ə-măn-yōō-ĕn-sīs) — noun: one who is employed to take dictation or to copy manuscript. From the Latin *āmanuēnsis*; from the phrase (servus) *āmanū*, "(slave) at handwriting"

It would be erroneous to think of inspiration as if some invisible force was moving the hand of Paul or John or whoever when they were writing the scriptures, as if they were being moved outside of their will. It would be equally erroneous to think of inspiration as God "dictating" to Paul (or John, etc.) the actual words to say and all the Bible writers did was to write down what that inner voice told them to write (called the "Dictation Theory" of inspiration for obvious reasons). Rather the correct view of inspiration is that God the Holy Spirit so providentially guided the human author and / or scribe that the end result was the written word of God, perfect and without error as the Holy Spirit intended it to be produced. It was **verbal** (meaning every word was the word intended by God to be written) and **plenary** (meaning the entire product was the word of God, not bits and pieces).

TIME / PLACE OF COMPOSITION

Whenever we attempt to determine exact dates and placements of the New Testament documents, we must do so with the understanding we are looking back almost two thousand years and therefore cannot be dogmatic about every detail. But while we acknowledge that fact, we are also pleased with the information we have regarding this particular epistle from Paul. Considering first where Paul was when he wrote his letter, I have read none who disagree with the place of origin as being Corinth. Evidence of that is as follows:

- Paul's recommendation of Phebe, a member of the church at Cenchrea and generally accepted to have been the bearer of this letter to Rome (16:1). Cenchrea was the eastern port of Corinth.
- Paul refers to Gaius as 'his host' and Gaius himself sends greetings to the church at Rome (Rom 16:23). This person may have been the man mentioned in 1 Cor 1:14 as having been one of the few Paul himself baptized in Corinth.
- From the salutation of Erastus to those at Rome. Erastus was probably also a resident of Corinth according to 2 Tim 4:20. An inscription found on a paving-block at Corinth reads: 'Erastus laid this pavement at his own expense.'
- From the account given of Paul's journey through Macedonia into Greece, prior to his departure for Jerusalem to carry the contributions of the churches. According to Acts 20:2,3, Paul spent three months in Corinth.

Acknowledging Paul wrote from Corinth, the question then arises: When was Paul at Corinth under circumstances which harmonize with the situation as pictured in his letter to the Romans?

It is unlikely that Paul wrote Romans during his first visit to Corinth which would have occurred during his second missionary journey. This second journey began after the conference in Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 15 which is generally accepted to have occurred about 50 AD; therefore an acceptable date for his second missionary journey could be 50/51 to 53/54 AD (note: Paul appeared before Gallio in Acts 18:12-17 and Gallio's consulship fell within the period of 51-53 AD). But Paul's letter to the Romans indicates a time period later, when Paul's missionary journey in the eastern part of the empire was completed. Note: "...*from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.*" (Rom 15:19b,c KJV) "*But now having no more place in these parts...*" (Rom 15:23a KJV)

Paul's second visit to Corinth is just as unlikely. This visit, implied in 2 Cor 12:14; 13:1 was a painful visit for Paul and in all likelihood a very short visit. While not impossible, the circumstances would make it unfavorable for the composition of this great letter.

The great probability therefore is Paul wrote this during his third missionary journey and his last visit to Corinth (Acts 18:23-21:16). The date for the entire third missionary journey is probably 53/54 to 57/58 AD. We see within the epistle to the Romans as well evidence of this being the date. Paul mentions the saints of Macedonia and Achaia had gathered a collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem (Acts 20:3-21:17; Rom 15:25,26). There is a full account of this collection for the saints in Second Corinthians. Since Paul left Philippi around the Passover (Acts 20:6) but wanted to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16; 21:17) we might even be more specific to say it was probably early spring when the letter was written of the year 57/58 AD. For most of the commentators, this best suits his long imprisonment of four years, first at Cesarea and then at Rome, from which he was probably set free in 62/63 AD. After his imprisonment, Paul had further labors and a second imprisonment which resulted in his martyrdom under Nero.

di-as-po-ra (dī-ās'-pər-ə) — noun: the dispersion of Jews outside of Israel from the sixth century B.C., when they were exiled to Babylonia, until the present time

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: PAUL

<i>Four Groups of Pauline Epistles</i>		
<i>Dates</i>	<i>Epistles</i>	<i>Chief Topic</i>
50 – 51 AD	1 & 2 Thessalonians	<i>Eschatology</i> — to correct misconceptions in Thessalonica
54 – 57 AD	1 & 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Romans	<i>Justification by faith</i> — defense against Judaizers
61 – 63 AD	Philippians; Philemon; Colossians; Ephesians	<i>Christology</i> — defense against the Gnostic perversions of the Person of Christ
65 – 68 AD	1 Timothy; Titus; 2 Timothy	<i>Ecclesiastical</i> — church matters

Paul was called to “preach the gospel in virgin territory” (Rom 15:20). “This task of initial church-planting is one that Paul has completed in the eastern Mediterranean: ‘from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum [modern day Albania and the former Yugoslavia] I have “fulfilled” the gospel of Christ’ (15:19). As a result of the first three missionary journeys, churches have been planted in major metropolitan centers throughout southern and western Asia Minor (Tarsus, Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, Derbe, and Ephesus), Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica), and Greece (Corinth). These churches can now take responsibility for evangelism in their own areas, while Paul sets his sights on virgin gospel territory in the far western end of the Mediterranean.... Paul has completed his collection of money from his largely Gentile churches and is now on his way to Jerusalem to deliver the money to the Jewish saints there. ***This collection was an important project for Paul, as may be gauged from the fact that he talks about it in every letter written on the third missionary journey (cf. also 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9). Its importance goes beyond meeting the material needs of the poor Christians in Judea; Paul views it as a practical way to cement the fractured relationship between the Gentile churches of the mission field and the Jewish churches in the ‘home’ country. In chap. 15 Paul demonstrates his concern about how this collection will be received by the ‘saints’ in Jerusalem. Will they accept the gift and so acknowledge the links that bind Jewish and Gentile believers together in one people of God? Or will they reject it, out of suspicion of Paul and the ‘law-free’ churches he has planted?***” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 2]

This touches upon one of the most controversial issues of Paul’s day: how much of the Jewish rituals were required for worship within the new “Christianity” which involved both Jews and Gentiles. This is a mute point in our day but one which produced divided relationships in the first century. Note the emphasis put upon this question in Acts 15, Romans, Galatians and Ephesians chapters two and three. For those of us who are saved, ***it is important to learn from this early controversy that the early churches had their problems too!*** From time to time there will be those who comment that we only need to return to the early churches, as if they had miracle cures for all the problems in today’s churches. The problems through the centuries may be different but we should not deceive ourselves into thinking the early churches were without difficulties and controversies. From all outward appearances, it seems the emphasis of preaching to the Gentiles as presented by Paul was much different than the emphasis preached to the Jews as represented by Peter, and they were content to accept the differences between the two of them while standing for what they believed to be true in their own ministry. They “agreed to disagree.”

There is a lesson here for those who are not saved as well. What the controversy centered around was the differences of those saved from a ritualistic religious background and those saved from a pagan background, free from ritualism. Soon churches sprang up, some of which we might consider “Jewish Congregations” while others did not emphasize the ritualism and were “Gentile Congregations.” We may learn from this that Christianity is not a “cookie-cutter” religion. There is great freedom in Christ which allows all who trust the Lord to become the person they were truly meant to be. That does not mean they must be exactly like the pastor or other church leader. Once saved, there is a sense in which the new Christian is still the same person, only now he is released from the shackles of sin and guilt and free to live as unto Christ.

ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH AT ROME

STRONG JEWISH PRESENCE IN ROME BEFORE GOSPEL — One of the items which providentially helped the spread of the early churches was the *diaspora* of the Jews. They were widely scattered throughout the East, Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, especially Rome. As they scattered they worshiped the Lord according to their teachings, so that even in the midst of very

pagan lands there was the worship of Jehovah according to the Old Testament teachings. Since the apostles were Jews, they had ready access to these people and their synagogues afforded a place of meeting without arousing the civil authorities. In the synagogues they would meet not only Jews but heathen who often already had their hearts tendered by the hearing of the Word of God. Some of these heathen had already converted to Judaism and were either proselytes or “devout”, i.e., worshipers of the true God. ***Since these heathen were monotheistic but not typically encumbered with the national and religious prejudices of the Jews, they were typically the ones most receptive to the gospel. It is typically these people that would constitute a new church in these heathen cities.***

There is abundant evidence that enough Jews had immigrated to Rome by the end of the first century BC to make up a significant portion of the population. Philo says Augustus had assigned the Jews a large district beyond the Tiber for their residence. There they had many synagogues which were independent of each other. Dion Cassius states the Jews were so numerous at Rome that Claudius was at first afraid to banish them but forbade them to assemble together when there was trouble. He later did banish them after a tumult they had fomented about 49 AD which corresponds with Acts 18:2 where Luke says Aquila and Priscilla had recently come from Italy “because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.” This is also recorded by the Roman historian Suetonius in his ‘Life of Claudius.’ Suetonius states that Claudius “expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus.” This is generally looked upon as a dispute among the Jews as to the claims of Jesus to be the “Chrestus” or Christ, the Messiah. This without doubt did not stay enforced for long and by the time of Claudius’ death in 54 AD the Jews were probably allowed to return to the city. That the Jews returned to Rome in great numbers is evidenced in ancient writings as well as the numerous mention of Jewish Christians by Paul in the last chapter (Romans 16).

Since the Roman authorities would not have distinguished between an orthodox Jew and a Jewish-Christian, this would have had a tremendous effect on the development of the church at Rome. Without Jewish influence for a period of time, the church at Rome would have leaned towards a “law-less” church theologically.

HOW DID THE GOSPEL FIRST REACH ROME? — It is unknown who first took the gospel to Rome. That the gospel should reach Rome is no surprise considering the constant travels between Judea, Asia Minor and Greece with that of Rome; indeed, the surprise would be if the gospel failed to reach Rome by normal transactions. In support of this is the fact there were “*strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes*” (Acts 2:10) present on ***the day of Pentecost***, any of which could have returned to Rome and began a house-church. It is also important to remember the city of Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians, had ***a strong missionary-minded church***. Since travel between Antioch and Rome was heavy, it would be difficult to imagine the church not sending missionaries to Rome to establish and / or strengthen the church in Rome.

EARLY WRITINGS INDICATE THE CHURCH BEGAN WITH “LAY PERSONS” — In addition to those general facts, there is also one historical witness that the church was began by “lay persons” rather than an official apostle. In the introduction to the epistle of Romans in a commentary Ambrosiaster, a fourth-century Latin father, writes that the Romans “had embraced the faith of Christ, albeit according to the Jewish rite, without seeing any sign of mighty works [miracles] or any of the apostles.” [q.v. Bruce, *Romans*, pg 16] This finds further support with the issues discussed in Acts 15:1; 21:17-24 as well as some comments made by Paul within the letter itself.

EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THE CHURCH WAS AT ROME FOR A LONG TIME — When Paul wrote this epistle, the faith of the Romans were spoken of everywhere (Rom 1:8) which implies the church had been long established. Aquila and Priscilla who left Rome was undoubtedly Christians prior to being banished since nothing is said of their conversion under Paul’s ministry when Paul found them at Corinth (Acts 18).

PETER AND ROME

What of Peter and Rome? Attention must be given to this since the Catholic Church teaches Peter was the central figure in Rome for twenty-five years (42–67 AD) and is therefore designated the “first pope.” But even Paul, the great pioneer of the gospel in the west, had not set foot in Europe nor even preached in Greece in 42 AD. Therefore, while it would probably be saying too much to deny Peter was ever in Rome, there is great evidence Peter was not in Rome in any position of authority during the period Catholicism states:

- 37 AD — Paul was converted approximately 34 AD, then three years later he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, staying with him fifteen days (Gal 1:18)
- Peter was preaching the gospel to the Jews in Caesaria and Joppa in Palestine, unto Cornelius, some 1800 miles from Rome (Acts 10:23,24)
- 44 AD — Peter was cast into prison by Herod while in Jerusalem (Acts 12:9) but was released by an angel
- 46 – 52 AD — Peter was in Jerusalem during the “Jerusalem Council” (Acts 15; exact date unknown)
- 51 AD — fourteen years after Paul’s previous visit of 37 AD, Paul visited Jerusalem and mentioned Peter (Gal 2:1-13)
- 57/58 AD — Paul writes the book of Romans. If Peter were indeed at Rome during 42-67 AD, he would have occupied a position of authority over the church at exactly the time when Paul was writing his epistle. Yet in Paul’s greetings (Rom 16:3-15), Peter is not mentioned. Would Paul have neglected Peter in his greetings?
- 62/63 AD — Paul writes from Rome to the Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and to Philemon without mentioning Peter

with him

- 66 AD — Paul writes 2 Timothy from a Roman prison just prior to his martyrdom, stating “only Luke is with me.” (2 Tim 4:6-11). Paul would not have said this if Peter was the head pastor at the church of Rome. Note this also contradicts Catholicism’s teaching that Paul and Peter were cell-mates for several years in Rome.

WAS PETER EVER IN ROME? — Some commentators (e.g. Hodge) dogmatically states Peter was never in Rome. One proof of this is Paul’s statement, “*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.*” (Rom 15:20 NIV) Paul makes a similar comment in his letter to the Corinthians: “*Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory.*” (2 Cor 10:15b,16 NIV) By these statements as well as the historical evidence throughout the New Testament and especially the book of Acts, we can see Paul was engaged in pioneering work and church planting. His calling was not to begin a church and stay for decades as their pastor; rather Paul would begin a church, place those capable of leading in positions of authority, and move along to another area to begin anew. ***This argues against Peter being at Rome in a position of authority as Catholicism teaches because Paul would not have interfered with another’s work.***

But does this prove Peter was never in Rome? To take these statements of Paul to mean Peter was never in Rome may be saying too much. There is a possibility Peter was in Rome at the time period which coincides with Paul’s first release from prison. It is during that time Peter wrote what we know as his first epistle, in which he makes this statement: “*The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you*” (1 Pet 5:13 KJV) Some (e.g. Hendriksen) interpret Peter’s reference to Babylon as Rome, adding it is this argument by which we typically interpret Revelations 17:5 to refer to Rome. ***If this is true and Peter was in Rome during that time, it still must be noted these events occurred after Paul had written Romans.*** B. H. Carroll says this concerning Peter’s use and identity of “Babylon”: “The contention is that by ‘She that is in Babylon’ Peter means heathen Rome, mystical Babylon, a style followed by John in Revelation. But John writes a confessedly mystical book; not of this kind is Peter’s first letter. Moreover, John’s mystical Babylon is not heathen Rome, but the apostate Christian church — the woman in purple and scarlet.... Another argument against Peter’s using Babylon in the sense of Rome, is that in his second letter, presumably from the same place, he quotes Paul’s letter to the Romans using the phrase, ‘hath written unto you.’ If living at Rome he could not have been writing to Rome and quoting what Paul had written to them. The author [B. H. Carroll] does believe that the traditional evidence is sufficient to prove Peter’s martyrdom at Rome, but it is mixed with so much incredible and evidently manufactured matter — manufactured for a later purpose — that the real evidence is discounted by its bad company.” [Carroll, *Interpretation*, vol 5 pg 76f]

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION FOR CATHOLICISM’S TEACHING OF PETER AND ROME? — Several of the commentators evaluate how this teaching of Peter and Rome began. Hendriksen makes the comment that Clement of Alexandria wrote Peter “had publicly preached the word in Rome” (Hypotuposeis, as quoted by Eusebius VI.xiv.6). Earlier Irenaeus made the statement “Peter and Paul went westward and founded the church in Rome.” (Against Heresies III.i.1; cp. Eusebius V.viii.3). In addition to these statements, traditionally it is said Mark wrote his gospel to satisfy the urgent request of the people of Rome for a written summary of Peter’s preaching in that city. But per Hendriksen, there are various interpretations and evaluations of these statements.

Godet places the origin of the Catholic error concerning Peter because of a mistake which began with Justin Martyr (Apol. i. c. 26.). Justin Martyr understood a statue raised to a Sabine god on an island of the Tiber for a statue erected to the magician Simon the Sorcerer in the book of Acts. This Simon was confronted by Peter in Acts 8:20-23. But this statue was later re-discovered in 1574 and understood correctly to not refer to Simon the Sorcerer.

Per Hodge, Irenaeus states that Matthew wrote his gospel while Peter and Paul were in Rome, preaching and starting the church there. Eusebius states Peter founded the church in Antioch, then departed from there to Rome. “Both these statements are incorrect. Peter did not found the church at Antioch, nor did he and Paul preach together at Rome. That Peter was not at Rome prior to Paul’s visit, appears from the entire silence of this epistle on the subject; and from no mention being made of the fact in any of the letters written from Rome by Paul during his imprisonment. The tradition that Peter ever was at Rome rests on very uncertain authority. It is first mentioned by Dionysius of Corinth, in the latter half of the second century, and from that time it seems to have been generally received. This account is in itself improbable, as Peter’s field of labour was in the East, about Babylon; and as the statement of Dionysius is full of inaccuracies. He makes Peter and Paul the founders of the church at Corinth, and makes the same assertion regarding the church at Rome, neither of which is true. He also says that Paul and Peter suffered martyrdom at the same time in Rome, which, from the silence of Paul respecting Peter, during his last imprisonment, is in the highest degree improbable. History, therefore, has left us ignorant of the time when this church was founded, and the persons by whom the work was effected.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 6f]

CONDITION OF THE CHURCH AT ROME

The condition of the church at Rome may be seen from circumstances already mentioned and from comments made by the apostle in his writing. While there were numerous Jews and heathen proselytes present in Rome, the latter seemed to predominate the Roman congregation since we see no evidence of leaning towards Judaism as may be seen in the epistle to the Galatians. Paul does not seem to fear the Roman believers will apostatize towards Judaism, and his exhortations in chapters 14,15 imply the Gentiles were more likely to oppress the Jews than the reversal being true. Paul therefore writes to them as Gentiles (1:13) and claims the right to address them with authority since he was the apostle to the Gentiles (15:16).

That there were Jewish believers in the church however is evidenced by Paul's comments concerning Jewish beliefs inconsistent with the gospel. **Particularly addressed in this epistle are these:**

- **The Jewish belief that the natural connection of Abraham and circumcision, together with the law, is sufficient to merit favor with God.** Cp John the Baptist's exhortation, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Matt 3:7b-9 KJV) The Jews often said, "Great is the virtue of circumcision; no circumcised person enters hell." Paul addresses this in chapters 1-3.
- **The Jewish belief that the blessing of the Messiah's reign would be confined to the Jews and proselytes.** Nothing was more obvious in the writings of the Jews that they were superior to the Gentiles. Paul addresses this in chapters 9-11.
- **The Jewish belief that subjection to heathen authorities was inconsistent with God's people and their duty to the Messiah as King.** This undoubtedly arose partly out of their contempt for the heathen and their concept of the Messianic kingdom, and partly because of their oppressions and hardships to which they were exposed because of their beliefs. Paul addresses this in chapter 13.

PURPOSE FOR WRITING

● **TO INFORM THEM OF HIS LOVE FOR THEM** — "The initial answer must be that Paul, being an intensely warm and loving person, desires to go to Rome in order to be a blessing to his friends (Rom 1:10,11) and to be refreshed by them (15:32). Moreover, it is for this same reason that he, now that it is impossible for him to go to Rome immediately, communicates with the Roman church by means of this letter. He writes to the Romans because he loves them. They are his friends 'in Christ,' and by means of this letter he imparts his love to them, praises them (1:8), informs them about his constant prayers for them (1:9), asks them to pray for him (15:30), and informs them about his traveling plans (1:10-12; 15:24f). It is strange that this deeply personal reason (desire for fellowship, etc.), a reason clearly brought out by the apostle himself, is often overlooked. At times the emphasis is placed entirely on theological motivations or on mission incentive: Paul wants to correct the errors of the antinomians and / or wants to make Rome the headquarters for the evangelization of Spain. To be sure, these matters are important, but we should begin with the reason first stated by Paul himself in this very epistle." [Hendriksen, *Romans*, pg 23ff]

● **TO ESTABLISH THE ROMANS IN THE FAITH** — "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." (Rom 1:11,12 KJV) The NIV states it in this manner: "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong — that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." (Rom 1:11,12 NIV) "That is the reason — they needed to be established. Conversion is not the end; it is the beginning. Though a man be soundly converted and born again, he may be in a dangerous state. Why? The Apostle tells us in the last chapter — chapter sixteen, in verses 17 and 18: 'Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine, which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.'" [Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, pg 20]

● **TO PUT IN WRITING PAUL'S ESTABLISHED VIEWS ON DOCTRINAL ISSUES** — At this time period of Paul's life, Paul was having to deal with theological issues brought forth by the Judaizers. "Paul's three-month stay in Greece came after the resolution of intense battles for the gospel in these churches; before he enters a new stage of missionary work, with fresh challenges and problems, Paul may well have decided to put in writing his settled views on these issues." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 17] Coming out of his theological battles is a defined doctrine of the gospel. Note the first eleven chapters of Romans develops internally and naturally until any mention of a specific issue in Rome in chapter 11:13.

● **TO POSSIBLY ESTABLISH A MISSIONARY BASE** — Many commentators believe one of the main reasons for Paul's writing is to prepare for his mission to Spain. Logistically, having one's base in Antioch while traveling to the far reaches of the Roman empire would be a nightmare. If Paul could establish a base or enlist help in a centrally located place like Rome, his travels would be greatly aided. Paul indicates this when he wrote "Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company." (Rom 15:24 KJV) The word Paul uses here connotes "help on the way with material support." Wuest translates it as follows: "Whenever I journey into Spain I am hoping to see you as I journey through, and by you to be furnished with the necessities of travel to that place." (Rom 15:24, Wuest Expanded Translation) Others: "I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there." (Rom 15:24, NIV) We would be justified therefore to view Romans as a "letter of introduction" to a church Paul wanted to add to his list of "sponsors."

● **TO REQUEST PRAYER FOR THE JERUSALEM OFFERING** — Paul's primary focus at this time in his life was taking the collection to those in need in Jerusalem. Paul expressly requests prayer for the success of his mission (Rom 15:30-33). "All the more does Paul feel the necessity of writing this letter and by means of it asking the Roman church to remember him in prayer, because he is not at all sure that he will ever reach Rome. Rom 1:10 introduces this fear, and 15:31 clarifies what the apostle has in mind. There are two things he fears: (a) that the Jews may kill him; (b) that the Jerusalem saints may not even be willing to accept the bounteous gift coming to them from the Gentiles. As to the first misgiving, that it was not groundless is clear from such a passage as Acts 20:3 (because of a plot by the Jews Paul had to change his traveling plan), and from Acts 14:19; 17:5,13; 18:6,12f; 23:12-21; 2 Cor

11:24,32,33. Moreover, Paul's misgiving was not entirely subjective. He was constantly receiving intimations from the Holy Spirit, hints of impending hardships (Acts 20:22,23). See also 21:10,11,27f. As to the second fear, ***though the brothers welcomed Paul and his companions warmly (Acts 21:17), to what extent this warm welcome also included appreciation for the 'collection' on which Paul had spent so much time and effort is not made clear.*** [Hendriksen, *Romans*, pg 23ff]

● **GENTILE / JEWISH RELATIONS** — Being a church of both Jews and Gentiles, there was a danger of one of the groups looking down in disdain on the other. The Jews could look down upon the Gentiles: *"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."* (Rom 2:1) The Gentiles could look down upon the Jews: *"Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee."* (Rom 11:18) Paul's response to this was *"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."* (Rom 10:12) Likewise in today's churches we must be careful not to form artificial lines of demarcation, with one group "superior" over another.

Undoubtedly there were differences between the Jewish and Gentile believers; the question becomes to what degree are these differences a problem? Some scholars / commentators focus on Paul's comments in chapters 14:1–15:13 as evidence there was a "split" between the Gentile / Jewish relations. They reason therefore that chapters 1–11 forms a theological basis for unity within the church between the two factions, while chapters 12,13 forms an encouraging or persuasive basis for Paul's argument. Along the same lines are those who consider Paul to be writing to correct the Gentile indifference (arrogance?) towards the Jewish minority while at the same time trying to show the Jews they cannot insist on the law as a normative factor in the church. Support of this is Paul's specific points in chapters 14,15 and his comments of *"the Gentiles should not boast against the Jews"* in Rom 11:13-24. Moo comments however it is more popular to view Romans as an address to both groups with an emphasis upon the Gentiles, rather than writing a polemic treatise.

● **TO CORRECT POTENTIAL RUMORS OF PAUL'S PREACHING** — Another reason for Paul's writing may have been the rumors and reputation concerning Paul, fair or unfair. Some misinterpreted his teachings to state Paul was "anti-law" while others may have concluded he was even "anti-Jewish." That rumors may have reached Rome is without question; note Paul's comments: *"And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just."* (Rom 3:8 KJV) If Paul were to establish a base in Rome, he had to defuse the rumors and perhaps even win over some who were hostile to his teaching.

Another potential heresy to which the Romans were being exposed was the conclusion that since salvation was by grace through faith without the merit of works, the performance of good works were unnecessary. If more sin produces more grace, why not continue in sin to produce grace (Rom 6:1)? Such a teaching is called antinomianism (anti = against, nomos = law; or 'living without law'). Paul refutes this teaching, arguing that for those *"united with Christ"* (Rom 6:15), such a life of sin is impossible. Those living in such conditions are living a lie, *"How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ... For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Rom 6:2,23) Paul supports this elsewhere that to be out from under the law in totality is an error: Romans 13:8,9; cp 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 5:14.

● **TO INSTILL HOPE IN THE HEARTS OF BELIEVERS** — The Greek and Roman world was one of hopelessness, filled with despair. The Greek concept of death taught there was no hope for neither the body nor the soul after death. A person's soul departs at death either through wounds or in the last breath, either to enter "the very dismal realm of the shades" or simply to cease to exist. To my surprise prior to this being pointed out, hope was central to Paul's writing of his epistle. "This book offers hope. In fact, the subject of hope — for which see also the books of Psalms, Acts, Hebrews, and especially 1 Peter — is mentioned more often in Romans than in any other New Testament book. The apostle even tells us 'It was in hope that we were saved' (8:24), a hope well-founded (8:26-39). He calls the Divine Being 'the God of hope' (15:13). From start to finish this book proclaims good tidings (3:24; 4:16-25; 7:24,25; chapter 8 in its entirety; 11:33-36; 13:8-14; 16:25-27). And it encourages Christian action (12:9-21; 13:7; 14:19; 15:30; 16:1,2). ***At the root of every question is the question of man's guilt. 'How can a man be righteous before God' (Job 9:2; 25:4). Paul, too, asked this question. So did Luther, and so does everybody, consciously or unconsciously. Romans answers it.***" [Hendriksen, *Romans*, pg 4]

PLACEMENT IN NEW TESTAMENT

Why is this epistle first? In our present layout of the New Testament we have the historical books first: the four gospels giving the life of Christ followed with the historical beginnings of the early churches, covering the major events from the ascension of Christ unto Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

Then we come to Romans. Why Romans? The answer to that question is not that it is the first epistle Paul wrote; that honor belongs to first Thessalonians. Nor is it the longest of Paul's epistles. ***"I would suggest to you that it is here in the first position because the church was given the wisdom by the Holy Spirit to realize that it is first in importance.... There is a sense in which we can say quite truthfully that the Epistle to the Romans has, possibly, played a more important and a more crucial part in the history of the church than any other single book in the whole of the Bible."*** [Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, vol 1, pg 3]

"Romans is the first epistle in the reading of the Word of God. I believe it was placed there by the Holy Spirit, because the canon of the New Testament would not be in proper order otherwise. It stands there much as the brazen altar stood in the tabernacle: when the worshiper started to approach the holy place, the first thing he came to was the brazen altar on which the sacrifice was placed. He could

not pass; he could not enter the tabernacle until he came to that. *The book of Romans in the New Testament corresponds to the brazen altar. It is the place where we find Christ set forth as the propitiation which justifies us and enables us, through faith in his blood, to go on in Christian truth.*" [McClain, *Romans*, pg 15f]

INFLUENCE OF BOOK OF ROMANS

Why spend time reviewing how the Lord used the book of Romans in history? Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a scholar of the great ancient works of literature, equally at home in either the English or German classical works, and author of the book *Biographia Literaria*, had this to say about the book of Romans: *"It is the profoundest piece of writing in existence."* In the word of Lloyd-Jones, *"I am not only saying these things to justify our teaching of this great Epistle, but trusting that as I am doing so we shall all be examining ourselves and asking this question: 'Have I realized all this about the Epistle to the Romans? As I have gone through my Bible have I stopped at this book? Have I paused at it and given my time to it? Have I realized its profundity?'"* [Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, pg 7]

As we begin our study in Romans, we should take this "warning" into consideration as well as our prayer: *"There is no saying what may happen when people begin to study the letter to the Romans. What happened to Augustine, Luther, Wesley and Barth launched great spiritual movements which have left their mark in world history. But similar things have happened, much more frequently, to very ordinary men and women as the words of this letter came home to them with power. So, let those who have read thus far be prepared for the consequences of reading further: you have been warned!"* [Bruce, *Romans*, pg 58]

- **John Chrysostom** of Constantinople, known as one of the most eloquent preachers of the early church, had the book of Romans read to him twice every week.

- **Aurelius Augustinus (Augustine)** credits his conversion to the book of Romans. Considered by many to be the most important man to have lived between the apostolic age and the Reformation, Augustine was a brilliant man, a professor, a philosopher. Being unconverted, his life was filled with immorality and decadence. In the summer of 386 AD he sat in his garden considering the trouble and agony of his soul when he heard the words of a child, "Take up and read, take up and read." So he went to his lodging and opened the scriptures to Romans 13. There he read, *"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."* (Rom 13:13b,14) Augustine writes, "No further would I read, nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of this sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away."

Living at the same time as Augustine was a man named Pelagius. Pelagius espoused a doctrine today known by his name, Pelagianism which teaches man is not depraved and therefore can be saved by his own merits of righteousness. Along with that skewed doctrine of sin, Pelagius taught Christ's death was valuable as an example only, thereby rejecting the substitutionary atonement of Christ. God used Augustine to counter this teaching, winning the day simply by the exposition of the book of Romans.

- Most are aware **Martin Luther** credits both Romans and Galatians for his salvation. Luther was under deep conviction of sin as a Catholic monk in 1515. He was a priest and a teacher of theology at the time, and decided to give lectures to his students on the book of Romans. While pursuing these lectures and studies, Luther came to the realization that salvation was by grace through faith based on the merits of Christ's death alone. This led to the change in Luther's life and which ultimately was used by God to bring about the Reformation. In Luther's own words: "I had greatly longed to understand Paul's letter to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'the righteousness of God', because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous.... Night and day I pondered until ... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven." [Luther; q.v. Bruce, *Romans*, pg 57] Luther said this concerning the book of Romans: "This Epistle is the chief part of the New Testament [i.e., the greatest book of the New Testament] and the very purest gospel, which indeed deserves that a Christian should not only know it word for word by heart, but deal with it daily as with the daily bread of the soul, for it can never be read or considered too much or too well, and the more it is handled the more delightful it becomes and the better it tastes." [Martin Luther, q.v. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, pg 6]

- **John Calvin** wrote of Romans, "When any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture."

- **Melanchthon**, in order to make it perfectly his own, copied it twice with his own hand. It is the book he expounded most frequently in his lectures.

- **John Bunyan** too credits Romans, Galatians and Luther's commentary on Romans with his salvation.

- **John Wesley**, upon whose foundation rests the Methodist Church, was converted through the hearing of the book of Romans. Wesley understood mentally the facts of salvation but by his own account, he had to say, "I have not felt it." "On May 24, 1738, a discouraged missionary went 'very unwillingly' to a religious meeting in London. There a miracle took place. 'About a quarter before nine,' he wrote in his journal, 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.' That missionary was John

Wesley. The message he heard that evening was the preface to Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. Just a few months before, John Wesley had written in his journal: 'I went to America to convert the Indians; but Oh! who shall convert me?' That evening in Aldersgate Street, his question was answered. And the result was the great Wesleyan Revival that swept England and transformed the nation." [Wiersbe, *Be Commentaries*, pg 514]

- There was a great revival in Switzerland, France and Holland at the beginning of the 18th century which began by God using two Scotsmen, Robert and James Alexander Haldane. **Robert Haldane** went to Geneva, Switzerland, to stay in 1816. One afternoon as he sat listening to a conversation between some theological students, Haldane became aware that they were ignorant of the great truths of the Bible. After several such conversations, Haldane became burdened for their lack of knowledge and invited them to his room. Twice a week he took the students through the book of Romans verse by verse. One by one these men were converted through these studies. They included such men as: **Merle d'Aubigné**, famous for writing what has become the standard history of the Reformation; **Frédéric Monod** who became the chief founder of the Free Churches in France; **Bonifas** who became a great theologian; **Louis Gaussen**, author of 'Theopneustia,' an excellent book on the inspiration of the Scriptures; and others which include **César Malan** and **Vinet** — once familiar names in France according to Lloyd-Jones. "What a distinguished French minister Dr. Reuben Saillens says of what became known as 'Haldane's Revival' can be applied with equal truth to [Haldane's] commentary: 'The three main characteristics of Haldane's Revival, as it has sometimes been called, were these: (1) it gave a prominent emphasis to the necessity of a personal knowledge and experience of grace; (2) it maintained the absolute authority and Divine inspiration of the Bible; (3) it was a return to Calvinistic doctrine against Pelagianism and Arminianism.'" [Lloyd-Jones, in the foreword to Haldane's *Romans*]

- **Dr. B. H. Carroll** summarizes the beauty of Romans as follows: "It is the most fundamental, vital, logical, profound, and systematic discussion of the whole plan of salvation in all the literature of the world. It touches all men; it is universal in its application; its roots, not only in man's creation and fall, but also in the timeless purposes and decrees of God before the world was, and fruits in the eternity after this world's purgation. It considers man as man and not as Jew or Greek. It considers law, not as expressed in statute on Mount Sinai, but as antedating it and inherent in the divine purpose when man was created in the image of God. It considers sin, not in ceremonial defilement nor as an overt act, but as lawlessness of spirit and nature. It considers condemnation, not as personal to an individual offender because of many overt acts, but as a race result from one offense of the one head of the race. Consequently, it considers justification, the opposite of condemnation, not as an impossible acquittal of a fallen sinner on account of his many acts of righteousness but as resting on one act of righteousness through the Second Head of the race. It considers, not an impossible morality coming from a corrupt and depraved nature, but a morality arising from regeneration, sanctification, resurrection, and glorification. It considers, not the divine government and providence as here and there looking in on particular men, in special times and given localities, but as an all-comprehensive sweep from eternity to eternity reaching with microscopical minuteness every detail of the nature of man, and universal in its control of all forces, and all subsidiary to the original divine purpose. The God of this letter is God indeed — not a partial, local deity, not blind chance, not cold, inexorable fate, but a purposeful, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, infinitely holy, and infinitely loving God." [Carroll, *Interpretation*, vol 5 pg 79f]

ANALYSIS AND OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE

There is a general agreement among all commentators as to how to outline the book of Romans. Generally it may be divided as follows:

- chap 1-8 the doctrine of justification and its consequences
- chap 9-11 the calling of the Gentiles and future restoration of the Jews
- chap 12-16 practical exhortations and salutations

W. H. Griffith Thomas created his outline centered on the theme of righteousness: "*We must never forget that the term 'righteousness' is much wider than justification, though this is of course, included. Righteousness really covers all that is necessary to reinstate a sinner as right with God, and therefore includes his position, his character, his privileges, and his prospects. It embraces the past, present, and future, and means 'the state of being right.'*" [Thomas, *Romans*, pg 37]

- Righteousness needed by sinful men (1:17 – 3:20)
- Righteousness provided by God (3:21-26)
- Righteousness received through faith (3:27 – 4:25)
- Righteousness experienced in the soul (5:1 – 8:17)
- Righteousness guaranteed as a permanent blessing (8:18-39)
- Righteousness rejected by the Jewish nations (9 – 11)
- Righteousness manifested in practical life (12 – 16)

A basic overview of the book may be described as follows:

- 1:1-17 — Paul begins by saluting the Roman Christians, commending them for their faith and expressing the desire to come to them. This readiness is based on the conviction that the gospel revealed the only way by which men could be saved (by faith in Jesus Christ), which is equally applicable to all mankind, Jews and Gentiles alike. Thus the two central topics of this epistle is introduced.

- 1:18-39 — To establish the doctrine of justification, Paul begins by proving the Gentiles cannot be saved by their own merits.
- 2:1-3:20 — Paul states the same thing regarding the Jews.
- 3:21-31 — Having established no one may be saved by their own merits, Paul then gives God’s method of saving sinners: the gospel of Christ dying for sinners to provide justification.
- 4:1-5:21 — Paul supports and established the teaching of justification from the Hebrew scriptures, proving this is the only and eternal plan of God for the salvation of mankind.
- 6:1-7:25 — The immediate reaction to salvation entirely based on grace without works is to object upon the grounds that sinners would indulge in sin. Paul responds to that objection by looking at the work of the Holy Spirit and the law.
- 8:1-39 — Paul then addresses the complete security of the believers in Christ.
- 9:1-24 — After declaring his affection for his own kindred, Paul points out that God never bound Himself (or limited Himself) solely to the natural descendants of Abraham to be heirs of His kingdom. The Lord has a right to be merciful upon whomever He wills which Paul proves both from scripture and providentially-guided history.
- 9:25-10:5 — God predicted in the Hebrew scriptures that He would turn away from the nation of Israel and turn to the Gentiles, due to the unbelief of the Jews.
- 10:6-21 — Paul contrasts the two methods of justification, showing the impossibility of salvation by works versus the simple message of the gospel. Since the gospel is adapted to all men, it should be preached to all men.
- 11:1-10 — This rejection of the Jews is not total; many who belong to the nation of Israel do submit to the authority of the gospel and become true children of God, not by national heritage but by spiritual birth.
- 11:11-36 — Neither is this rejection of the Jews final. There is a future and general conversion of the Jews to Christ, and thus all Israel shall be saved.
- 12:1-21 — The third and last section of the book of Romans consists of practical admonitions. This chapter centers upon the spiritual duties of Christians in their various relations to God.
- 13:1-14 — Paul then prescribes principles for how the Christian is to relate to political or civil authorities.
- 14:1-15:13 — Paul finishes his exhortations with principles on how the Christians are to relate to each other.
- 15:14-16:27 — Paul concludes his epistle with some account of his labors and purposes, and his usual salutations.

OUTLINE OF ROMANS (from Moo, *Romans*, pg 33ff)

- I. The Letter Opening (1:1-17)
 - A. Prescript (1:1-7)
 - B. Thanksgiving and Occasion: Paul and the Romans (1:8-15)
 - C. The Theme of the Letter (1:16,17)
- II. The Heart of the Gospel: Justification by Faith (1:18 – 4:25)
 - A. The Universal Reign of Sin (1:18 – 3:20)
 1. All Persons are Accountable to God for Sin (1:18-32)
 2. Jews are Accountable to God for Sin (2:1 – 3:8)
 3. The Guilt of All Humanity (3:9-20)
 - B. Justification by Faith (3:21 – 4:25)
 1. Justification and the Righteousness of God (3:21-26)
 2. Justification by Faith Alone (3:27 – 4:25)
- III. The Assurance Provided by the Gospel: The Hope of Salvation (5:1 – 8:39)
 - A. The Hope of Glory (5:1-21)
 1. From Justification to Salvation (5:1-11)
 2. The Reign of Grace and Life (5:12-21)
 - B. Freedom from Bondage to Sin (6:1-23)
 1. “Dead to Sin” through Union with Christ (6:1-14)
 2. Freed from Sin’s Power to Serve Righteousness (6:15-23)
 - C. Freedom From Bondage to the Law (7:1-25)
 1. Released from the Law, Joined to Christ (7:1-6)
 2. The History and Experience of Jews under the Law (7:7-25)
 - D. Assurance of Eternal Life in the Spirit (8:1-30)
 1. The Spirit of Life (8:1-13)
 2. The Spirit of Adoption (8:14-17)
 3. The Spirit of Glory (8:18-30)

- E. The Believer's Security Celebrated (8:31-39)
- IV. The Defense of the Gospel: The Problem of Israel (9:1 – 11:36)
 - A. Introduction: The Tension Between God's Promises and Israel's Plight (9:1-5)
 - B. Defining the Promise: God's Sovereign Election (9:6-29)
 - 1. The Israel Within Israel (9:6-13)
 - 2. Objections Answered: The Freedom and Purpose of God (9:14-23)
 - 3. God's Calling a New People: Israel and the Gentiles (9:24-29)
 - C. Understanding Israel's Plight: Christ as the Climax of Salvation History (9:30 – 10:21)
 - 1. Israel, the Gentiles, and the Righteousness of God (9:30 – 10:13)
 - 2. Israel's Accountability (10:14-21)
 - D. Summary: Israel, the "Elect" and the "Hardened" (11:1-10)
 - E. Defining the Promise: The Future of Israel (11:11-32)
 - 1. God's Purpose in Israel's Rejection (11:11-15)
 - 2. The Interrelationship of Jews and Gentiles (11:16-24)
 - 3. The Salvation of "All Israel" (11:25-32)
 - F. Conclusion: Praise to God in Light of His Awesome Plan (11:33-36)
- V. The Transforming Power of the Gospel: Christian Conduct (12:1 – 15:13)
 - A. The Heart of the Matter: Total Transformation (12:1,2)
 - B. Humility and Mutual Service (12:3-8)
 - C. Love and its Manifestations (12:9-21)
 - D. The Christian and Secular Rulers (13:1-7)
 - E. Love and the Law (13:8-10)
 - F. Living in Light of the Day (13:11-14)
 - G. A Plea for Unity (14:1 – 15:13)
 - 1. Do Not Condemn One Another (14:1-12)
 - 2. Do Not Cause Your Brother to Stumble (14:13-23)
 - 3. Put Others First (15:1-6)
 - 4. Receive One Another (15:7-13)
- VI. The Letter Closing (15:14 – 16:27)
 - A. Paul's Ministry and Travel Plans (15:14-33)
 - 1. Looking Back: Paul's Ministry in the East (15:14-21)
 - 2. Looking Ahead: Jerusalem, Rome and Spain (15:22-29)
 - 3. A Request for Prayer (15:30-33)
 - B. Greetings (16:1-23)
 - 1. Commendation of Phoebe (16:1,2)
 - 2. Greetings to Roman Christians (16:3-16)
 - 3. A Warning, a Promise, and a Prayer for Grace (16:17-20)
 - 4. Greetings from Paul's Companions (16:21-23)
 - C. Concluding Doxology (16:25-27)

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