

The Book of Romans

"A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD!"

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Norman, OK.*

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Text: 1:1-7

Lesson: 1



TEXT:

1:1 Paul, a servant of **Christ Jesus**, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of **God**, **2** which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, **3** concerning **his Son**, who was **descended from David** according to the flesh **4** and was declared to be **the Son of God** in power according to **the Spirit of holiness** by his resurrection from the dead, **Jesus Christ our Lord**, **5** through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, **6** including you who are called to belong to **Jesus Christ**,

7 To all those in Rome who are loved **by God** and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. How do these verses speak about both the humanity and deity of Christ?
2. What are the terms Paul uses to refer to himself?
3. Note all the Gospel words: (tell what each of these say about your Christian life)

- gospel promised
- grace
- faith
- called to belong
- loved by God
- called to be saints
- peace

God's Grace in Romans†

Paul explains God's grace more fully in Romans than in his other letters, since he had not yet visited these Christians and was hoping that they would provide some support for his intended missionary journey to Spain. The theme of the letter (1:16-17) concludes with a quotation from Hab 2:4, "The righteous will live by faith."

To comprehend better the grace of God (God's righteousness) necessitates an understanding of God's wrath towards both the Gentiles and the Jews. Both are "under sin" (3:9) and "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law" (3:20). Thus God's grace means that "righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (3:22), "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (3:23-24).

So far Paul has elaborated on "The righteous . . . by faith." Then the apostle explains in detail the last words, "will live," delineating the truth that God's grace (justification) results in a life free from God's wrath (ch. 5), from the slavery of sin (ch. 6), from the punishment of the law (ch. 7) and from eternal death (ch. 8).

Since there were a large number of Jews among the Christians at Rome, Paul reminds them that Israel's general unbelief does not imply that the promises of God's grace are unreliable; all believers, Jews and Gentiles, are a new Israel (chs. 9-11), "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). God's grace also means that the members of this new Israel of God respond to their justification from God by living a sanctified life (chs. 12-14).

Luther on Romans†

"This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes" (LW35:365).

"In this epistle we thus find most abundantly the things that a Christian ought to know, namely, what is law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross; and also how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, be he righteous or sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe—and even toward our own selves" (LW 35:380).

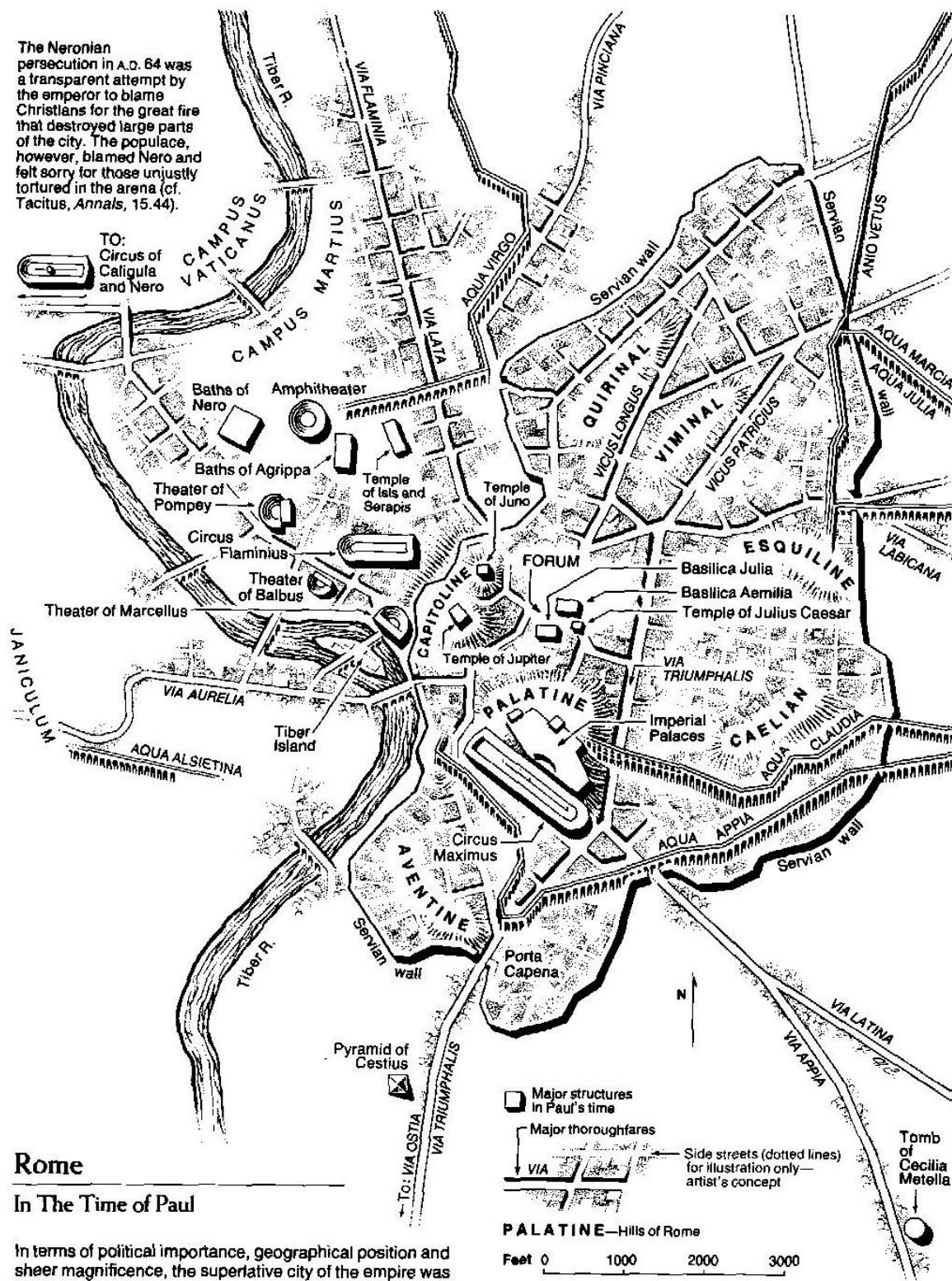
Author

The writer of this letter was the apostle Paul (see 1:1). No voice from the early church was ever raised against his authorship. The letter contains a number of historical references that agree with known facts of Paul's life. The doctrinal content of the book is typical of Paul, which is evident from a comparison with other letters he wrote.

Date and Place of Writing†

The book was probably written in the early spring of A.D. 57. Very likely Paul was on his third missionary journey, ready to return to Jerusalem with the offering from the mission churches for poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem (see 15:25-27). In 15:26 it is suggested that Paul had already received contributions from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, so he either was at Corinth or had already been there. Since he had not yet been at Corinth (on his third missionary journey) when he wrote to that church (cf. 1Co 16:1-4), and since the collection issue had still not been resolved when he wrote 2 Corinthians (2Co 8-9), the writing of Romans must follow that of 1,2 Corinthians (dated c. 55).

The Neronian persecution in A.D. 64 was a transparent attempt by the emperor to blame Christians for the great fire that destroyed large parts of the city. The populace, however, blamed Nero and felt sorry for those unjustly tortured in the arena (cf. Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44).



Rome

In The Time of Paul

In terms of political importance, geographical position and sheer magnificence, the superlative city of the empire was Rome, the capital.

Located on a series of jutting foothills and low-lying eminences (the "seven hills") east of a bend in the Tiber River some 18 miles from the Mediterranean, Rome was celebrated for its impressive public buildings, aqueducts, baths, theaters and thoroughfares, many of which led from distant provinces. The city of the first Christian century had spread far beyond its fourth-century B.C. "Servian" walls and lay unwall'd, secure in its greatness.

The most prominent features were the Capitoline hill, with temples to Jupiter and Juno, and the nearby Palatine, adorned with imperial palaces, including Nero's "Golden House." Both hills overlooked the Roman Forum, the hub of the entire empire.

PALATINE—Hills of Rome

Feet 0 1000 2000 3000

Alternatively described as the glorious crowning achievement of mankind and as the sewer of the universe where all the scum from every corner of the empire gathered, Rome had reasons for both civic pride in its architecture and shame for staggering urban social problems not unlike those of cities today.

The apostle Paul entered the city from the south on the Via Appia. He first lived under house arrest and then, after a period of freedom, as a condemned prisoner in the Mamertime dungeon near the Forum. Remarkably, Paul was able to proclaim the gospel among all classes of people, from the palace to the prison. According to tradition, he was executed at a spot on the Ostian Way outside Rome in A.D. 68.

The most likely place of writing is either Corinth or Cenchrea (about six miles away) because of references to Phoebe of Cenchrea (16:1) and to Gaius, Paul's host (16:23), who was probably a Corinthian (see 1Co 1:14). Erastus (16:23) may also have been a Corinthian (see 2Ti 4:20).

Recipients

The original recipients of the letter were the people of the church at Rome (1:7), who were predominantly Gentile. Jews, however, must have constituted a substantial minority of the congregation (see 4:1; chs. 9-11; see also note on 1:13). Perhaps Paul originally sent the entire letter to the Roman church, after which he or someone else used a shorter form (chs. 1-14 or 1-15) for more general distribution. See note on 2Pe 3:15.

Major Theme

Paul's primary theme in Romans is the basic gospel, God's plan of salvation and righteousness for all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike (1:16-17). Although justification by faith has been suggested by some as the theme, it would seem that a broader theme states the message of the book more adequately. "Righteousness from God" (1:17) includes justification by faith, but it also embraces such related ideas as guilt, sanctification and security.

Purpose†

Paul's purposes for writing this letter were varied:

1. He wrote to prepare the way for his coming visit to Rome and his proposed mission to Spain (1:10-15; 15:22-29).
2. He wrote to present the basic system of salvation to a church that had not received the teaching of the apostle before.
3. He sought to explain the relationship between Jew and Gentile in God's overall plan of redemption. The Jewish Christians were being rejected by the larger Gentile group in the church (14:1) because the Jewish believers still felt constrained to observe dietary laws and sacred days (14:2-6).

Occasion

When Paul wrote this letter, he was probably at Corinth (Ac 20:2-3) on his third missionary journey. His work in the eastern Mediterranean was almost finished (see 15:18-23), and he greatly desired to visit the Roman church (see 1:11-12; 15:23-24). At this time, however, he could not go to Rome because he felt he must personally deliver the collection taken among the Gentile churches for the poverty-stricken Christians of Jerusalem (see 15:25-28). So instead of going to Rome, he sent a letter to prepare the Christians there for his intended visit in connection with a mission to Spain (see 15:23-24). For many years Paul had wanted to visit Rome to minister there (see 1:13-15), and this letter served as a careful and systematic theological introduction to that hoped-for personal ministry. Since he was not acquainted directly with the Roman church, he says little about its problems (but see 14:1-15:13; cf. also 13:1-7; 16:17-18).

Content†

Paul begins by surveying the spiritual condition of all mankind. He finds Jews and Gentiles alike to be sinners and in need of salvation. The needed justification has been accomplished by God through Jesus Christ and his redemptive work on the cross, and it is appropriated through faith. Paul moves on to show how the believer is freed from sin, law and death—made possible by his union with Christ in both death and resurrection and by the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Paul then shows that Israel has not been treated unjustly (chs. 9-11). The letter concludes with an appeal to the readers to respond to their Christian faith. None of Paul's other letters states so profoundly the content of the gospel and its implications.

Special Characteristics†

1. *The most systematic of Paul's letters.* It reads more like an elaborate theological essay than a letter.
2. *Emphasis on Christian doctrine.* The number and importance of the theological themes touched upon are impressive: sin, salvation, grace, faith, righteousness, justification, sanctification, redemption, death and resurrection.
3. *Widespread use of OT quotations.* Although Paul regularly quotes from the OT in his letters, in Romans the argument is sometimes carried along by such quotations (see especially chs. 9-11).

Epistola S. PAULI ad Romanos.



Die Epistel St. Pauli
an die Römer.



*Après que le Seigneur fut venu, nous étions sous la garde de la Loi, transformés en pécheurs à la Loi, qui
nous a été rendue. La Loi a été notre conducteur jusqu'à Jésus-Christ. (Gal. III. 24-25)*



