

Romans: *Salvation for Sinners*

"The Just Shall Live By Faith"

Romans is the "most profound work in existence," said Coleridge. John Murray writes: "No one can read the epistle with any degree of attention without noting the emphasis which falls upon the grace of God and, more particularly, upon justification by grace through faith. In this Gospel Paul gloried . . ."

AUTHOR: The author gives his name as Paul the Apostle (Rom. 1:1; cf Acts 26:4-11). Paul s'amanuensis for this letter was Tertius (16:22).

TIME AND PLACE: Paul wrote the letter from Corinth towards the end of his three months stay in Greece, and near the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2ff; Rom. 16:1-2; 15:23, 25). The time of the year is in the spring if we combine statements in the Acts and the Epistle. Paul says, "I am now going to Jerusalem ministering to the saints" (Rom. 15:25). In Acts 20:3 we read that Paul spent three months in Corinth. In II Corinthians we have a full account of the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The account of the journey from Corinth to Jerusalem is given in Acts 20:3-21:17. Therefore, the epistle was written in the spring between Passover at Philippi (Acts 20:6) and Pentecost in Jerusalem (20:16; 21:17). This would mean he left Corinth not later than March of that year. Paul refers to this journey in his speech before Felix (Acts 24:17; cf. Rom. 15:26). The precise year is not as easy to arrive at, but most scholars agree on A.D. 58 or 57. Paul sent the letter to Rome by Phoebe, one of the great Christian women of Cencrea near Corinth (Rom. 16:1-2).

RECIPIENTS: The city of Rome was the most important city in the world during the first century, and the church at Rome is the recipient of the most important letter of its day (1:7). The population of the city was around a million, and "all roads lead to Rome." Along those same roads the Gospel would quickly spread throughout the Roman world. It is almost certain that no apostle founded the church in Rome. The church may have been organized by Jews who were present in Jerusalem and who were converted on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). These converts would have been well grounded in the Old Testament Scriptures, and the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit would guide them. It is composed of Jews and Gentiles, although it is considered a Gentile church (Rom. 1:13; 11:13; 15:15-16). Because Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote the letter, we know he did not start the church. We know that Peter was still in Jerusalem at the time of the Council (c. A. D. 49) whereas it is almost certain that a church existed in Rome prior to this. Suetonius records that Claudius banished Jews from Rome in A.D. 49. There is a strong possibility that Christians were somehow mixed up in this matter because Priscilla and Aquila were banished under this edict of Claudius. Moreover, the date is before Peter moved from Jerusalem. It is very unlikely that either Paul or Peter founded this church, although both were probably martyred in the city of Rome according to Clement of Rome and Tertullian. However, it tells us nothing about the origin of the church at Rome. "The church in Rome is plainly composed of both Jews and Greeks, though who started the work there we have no way of knowing. Paul s'ambition was to preach where no one else had been (Rom. 15:20), but he has no hesitation in going on to Rome," observes A. T. Robertson. The list of twenty-six members of the church in Rome in chapter 26 would indicate that Paul had friends there. "It is quite possible for Paul to have many friends in Rome whom he had met elsewhere. People naturally drifted to Rome from all over the empire."

PURPOSE: This is Paul s'own personal letter of introduction to the church. Paul has not yet been to Rome when he writes this letter, and he wants to introduce himself to the believers there before he arrived so they

when he writes this letter, and he wants to introduce himself to the believers there before he arrived so they would know what he believed and preached (Acts 19:21; Rom. 1:14-15; 15:15-17). Paul planned to go to Rome and then on to Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28) after delivering the offering for the poor in Jerusalem. His plans were altered when he was arrested in Jerusalem and then finally arrived in Rome as a prisoner (Acts 28).

THEME: The theme is justification by faith in Jesus Christ (1:17). "It is not a book of formal theology though Paul is the greatest of theologians," writes A. T. Robertson. "Here Paul is seen in the plenitude of his powers with all the wealth of his knowledge of Christ and his rich experience in mission work."

KEY VERSES: 1:16-17

KEY WORD: justify (14 times)

ANCIENT LETTER WRITING AND THE LETTERS OF PAUL

Paul s' writing material was composed of strips of the pith of a certain bulrush that grew on the banks of the Nile. These strips were laid one on top of the other to form a substance very much like brown paper. This material was called *papyrus*.

It is important to keep in mind when we read Paul s' letters that we do not possess the letter which he was answering, nor do we know fully the circumstances with which he was dealing. It is only from the letter that we can deduce the situation that prompted the letter. Moreover, Paul s' letters follow exactly the same pattern as ancient letters.

The Greeting. Rom. 1:1; I Cor. 1:1; II Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1, 2; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1

The Prayer. In every case Paul prays for the grace of God on the people to whom he writes: Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:3; II Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:2; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:2

The Thanksgiving. Rom. 1:8; I Cor. 1:4; II Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; Phil. 1:3; I Thess. 1:3; II Thess. 1:3

The Special Contents. This is the main body of the letters.

Special Salutations and Personal Greetings. Rom. 16; I Cor. 16:19; II Cor. 13:13; Phil. 4:21, 22; Col. 4:12-15; I Thess. 5:26

With very few exceptions, all Paul s' letters were written to meet an immediate situation and not treatises which he sat down to write in the peace and silence of his study. In most of his letters there was some threatening situation in Corinth, or Galatia, or Philippi, or Thessalonica, or Colosse. Paul wrote to meet the need of the immediate situation.

Paul s' letters were spoken. Like most people in his day, Paul did not normally pen his own letters but dictated them to a secretary called an *amanuensis*. At the end of his letter he added his signature and personal notes in his own hand writing. From Rom. 16:22 we know the amanuensis was Tertius.

Series: A Look at the Book

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