

1. ROMANS SERIES: An Introduction

'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

Please read Romans 1:1-15; 15:14-16:27

AUTHOR

Most commentators have generally agreed that the apostle Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans, based on what is seen as overwhelming evidence. The book itself claims Pauline authorship in Romans 1:1.

However, there have been several appeals against Pauline authorship, including one that says, 'because Luke fails to mention a church in Rome, Paul could never have wrote such a letter.'

TIME/PLACE OF WRITING

It is generally agreed among commentators that the place of writing for the epistle of Romans was Corinth. The following Biblical evidence is put forward to prove this:

Romans 16:1,2: The person who probably carried this letter was Phoebe, who is commended to the Roman church in the letter. Phoebe comes from Cenchrea, an eastern port of Corinth.

Romans 16:23; cf 1 Cor 1:14: At the time of writing Gaius is playing host to Paul. This Gaius is probably the Gaius baptised by Paul in Corinth.

Romans 16:23; cf 2 Tim 4:20: Erastus is mentioned as

remaining in Corinth in 2 Timothy, and is also mentioned in greeting the church at Rome in this epistle.

If, therefore, Paul wrote this epistle while in Corinth, when was the situation in Corinth that which is described in Romans? Consider the following points:

Romans 15:19-24; 1:10: This indicates the situation as being later in Paul's missionary activities in the east of the Roman Empire, his work there coming to completion.

Acts 20:1-3; Romans 15:25: Paul probably wrote Romans towards the end of his 3 months in Greece, before returning with gifts from the Greek church to the Jerusalem church. This would be around 57AD.

THE SCENE AT ROME

Having seen what Paul's situation was like at the time of writing, we now turn to the scene at Rome itself, from the establishment of the church there. Let us consider for a short time the early history of the church in Rome. This may very well help us to understand more clearly the text of Romans itself, and as to why Paul wrote what he did to them. In so doing, consider the following points:

Acts 2:10,41: The establishment of the church in Rome is not clearly described in Scripture. However early in Acts, Roman tourists in Jerusalem are confronted with the Gospel, and probably brought it back with them to Rome. This is probably how the church began.

Acts 11:26; 13:1: As the Gospel spread and itinerant preachers travelled the Roman highways, it is probable that they reached Rome, furthering the work there. This would be increasingly the case as churches were established closer to Rome.

Acts 18:2: History records the banishment of Jewish people from Rome under Claudius (41-54AD). This was because of Chrestus (Christus - a not unusual rendering), and probable disturbances associated with unbelieving Jews.

Romans 11:13-32; 15:15,16: At the time of Paul's letter,

the church appears to be predominantly Gentile. This is probably due to the Jewish banishments under Claudius, and growing converts from pagan Rome.

Romans 16:3-15: Roman Catholicism claims Peter as the first and founding bishop of Rome, from 42-67AD. Paul in his epistle to the Romans fails to mention such an important figure.

Romans 16:3-5; cf Acts 12:12; 16:15,40; 1 Cor 16:19: The believers in Rome met in 'house churches'. Romans 16:14,15 may suggest the presence of other such churches in this large city.

QUESTION: Consider how the church in Rome began. What does the Biblical evidence suggest as being the likely scenario? How would this have happened in practical terms?

THE PURPOSE OF ROMANS

It needs to be remembered that this book is in fact a letter to the believers in Rome, with several parts typical of letters written in that period (1:1-7; cf Acts 15:23-29; 23:26-30; Gal 1:1-5).

As we have reasons for or purposes in writing letters to family and friends, so Paul has a reason for writing to the Christians in Rome. Paul had completed his missionary work in the eastern Roman Empire (15:19-24), and now planned to visit Rome (15:23; cf 1:10,11; Acts 19:21). Therefore he writes to inform the church of his plans (1:10-12; 15:24ff), requesting that they pray for him in order that he may be able to do so (1:10; 15:31; Acts 20:3; 14:19; 17:5,13; 18:6,12ff; 23:12-21; 2 Cor 11:24,32,33; 20:22,23; 21:10,11,27ff; 21:17).

Because there was a real possibility he may not get to Rome, he was keen to provide the Roman church with instruction they needed in order to grow, and to answer error, for this was to be the purpose of his visit (1:15,16).

Paul also sought the co-operation of the Church of Rome for missionary operations in Spain.

THE STRUCTURE OF ROMANS

A. PROLOGUE: PAUL'S DESIRE TO VISIT ROME	1:1-15
B. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL	1:16-8:39
1. Theme of the Gospel	1:16,17
2. Need for the Gospel	1:18-3:20
3. God meets the need	3:21-5:21
4. The way of holiness	6:1-8:39
C. GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION	9:1-11:36
D. RESPONDING TO THE MERCIES OF GOD	12:1-15:13
1. Common life of Christians	12:1-13
2. Christians and those outside the church	12:14-13:14
3. Christian liberty and Christian love	14:1-15:13
E. EPILOGUE: PAUL'S PERSONAL NOTES	15:14-16:27

WHY STUDY ROMANS?

This is a question that you may be asking as we begin these studies. Well there are many reasons why we should study the Epistle to the Romans, including the authorship of the Holy Spirit. This is obviously the basic reason why we study any book of the Bible. Sure it was written by the apostle Paul, '*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost(2 Peter 1:21; cf 2 Tim 3:16).*' God the Holy Spirit so moved upon Paul so that what he wrote was just as much the words of God as they were his. Because of this, the words of the Epistle to the Romans are a message from God to men, and by implication a message from God to us.

Another reason is that Romans provides a helpful introduction to the message of the Bible as a whole. It really is the epitome of Biblical doctrine, containing a helpful overview of the Bible's chief doctrines, including sin and God's plan to remedy that condition, thus saving a people for Himself. These doctrines also include judgment, salvation, faith, sanctification, election and Christian practice. Romans is the closest thing to a systematic theology that the Bible itself provides.

Because of the above reasons, Romans seems to be a most useful place to start in seeking to understand the scheme of the Scriptures, '*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Tim 3:15b).*'

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

In Romans 1:7, Paul calls the Christians there '*saints*'. What does the use of that term mean, both in theory and practice?

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