

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Romans

- A simple guide to the main themes in the letter
 - The power of the gospel in our lives today
 - The place of Israel in God's plans

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PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

Many years ago, a very successful young man sat on a bench. He was disgusted with his life. His success could not hide his terrible failings. Lust and greed ruled his life. In despair, he picked up a book and read:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (Rom. 13:13–14).

He awoke from his “slumber” (Rom. 13:11): “No further would I read, nor had I any need,” he said. “Instantly, at the end of this sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.”

The young man was Augustine. In the fourth century AD he became bishop of Hippo and one of the most influential Christian thinkers in the history of the church. Through the message of Romans, God transformed the life of that anguished young man and then used him in powerful ways. It is the same message we read today, and it has the same power to transform us.

Studying the letter to the Romans will help us understand what God has done in and through Christ, and letting the Word of God and the Holy Spirit shape our minds and hearts will transform our lives. Open your mind, your heart, and your will to the powerful words of this letter.

Paul's Journey to Rome, AD 57–62 (Acts 21:17–28:31)



WHO WROTE THE LETTER?

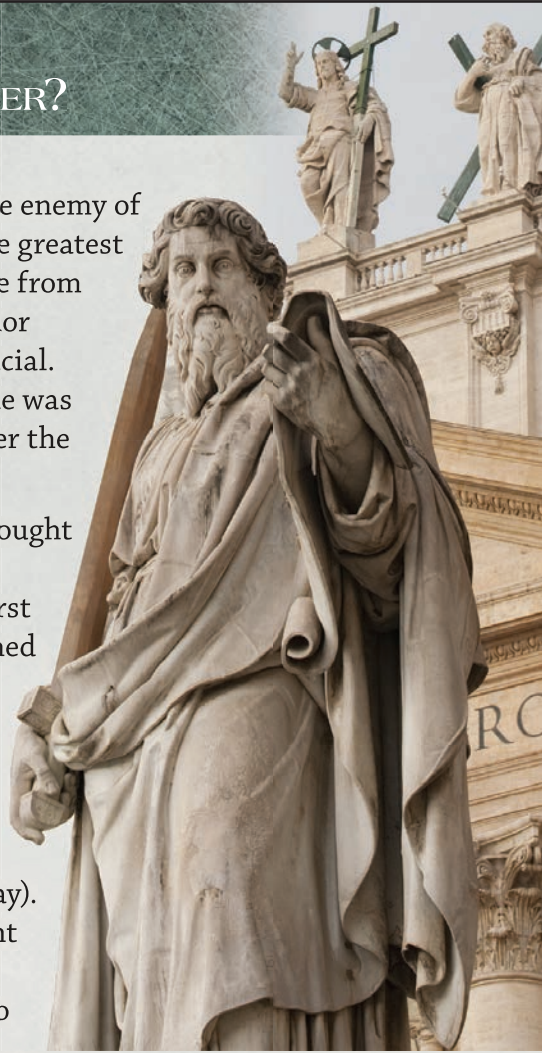
Paul, the author of Romans, was a one-time enemy of Christianity who God transformed into the greatest Christian missionary of all time! Paul came from a well-respected Jewish family in Asia Minor (Turkey today) where his father was an official. As a young man, Paul—whose Jewish name was Saul—was sent to Jerusalem to study under the great teacher Gamaliel.

Paul, belonged to a group of people who thought the followers of Christ were dangerous. He hated Christians and participated in the first execution of a Christian leader, a man named Stephen. Paul was determined to destroy Christianity everywhere (Acts 7:54–8:3).

Paul hated Christians so much that he asked the chief priest in Jerusalem to give him authorization to arrest any follower of Jesus in Damascus (about 100 miles away). On his way from Judea to Damascus, a light from heaven blinded him. He fell to the ground and a voice said, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Paul answered, “Who are you?” The voice said, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Get up! Go into the city, and you will be told what to do.” Paul went to a house and waited for a Christian man named Ananias to come restore his sight (Acts 9:1–12).

During the early years of Christianity, Jesus’ disciples preached only to Jews, so most converts at that time were Jewish. As Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire, they told their neighbors about Jesus. Many of these Gentiles (non-Jews) then became followers of Jesus too (Acts 11:19–21). While traveling throughout the Roman Empire, the apostle Paul preached and ministered to Gentile Christians. Paul became one of God’s powerful tools to spread the good news of Jesus.

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When Was It Written?

Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans at the height of the Roman Empire, probably in AD 57, during the rule of Nero. He wrote it just after his Corinthian letters and just before he headed to Jerusalem with the relief fund gathered for the believers there (Rom. 15:25–27).

TO WHOM WAS THE LETTER WRITTEN?

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome. In the first century, Rome was the center of nearly all that happened in the Mediterranean world. The church at Rome during this time was a mix of both Jewish and Gentile believers. There was a large Jewish presence in Rome, as we learn from the expulsion order given under Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2–3). Many Christian believers were already there before Paul made his first journey to Rome around AD 57.

Though there is no mention of who first brought the gospel to Rome, Christianity had spread quickly to the capital city of the Roman Empire, probably through travelers engaged in business, political, and religious activities. By the time of the great persecution under Emperor Nero (AD 64), the historian Tacitus could say a “great multitude” of Christians lived in Rome.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.— Romans 5:8

Outline of Romans

1. Introduction: An Apostle to the Gentiles (1:1–17)
2. God Is Right to Judge and Save (1:18–3:20)
3. The Power of the Gospel (3:21–8:39)
4. God’s Righteous Plan for Israel and Gentiles (9:1–11:36)
5. The Power of the Gospel in the Life of Believers (12:1–15:13)
6. Conclusion (15:14–16:27)

