

Introduction to St Paul's letter to the Romans

*“Romans is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy themselves with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes”
(Martin Luther 1483-1546)*

Romans wasn't Paul's first letter (he had written several before this) but those who put the NT together in 2nd and 3rd centuries placed Romans as the 1st letter after Acts because they recognised its importance as a masterpiece of Christian teaching.

What do we know about the Church in Rome?

1. Paul wasn't the founder, as he was with many other Churches that he wrote to. In fact he'd never even been there when he wrote this letter. He knew the Church existed and knew some people there.
2. Paul desperately wanted to visit them.
v13 “I want you to know dear brothers and sisters that I planned many times to visit you but I was prevented until now” (NLT)
(Acts 15:24) He reveals his desire to go to Spain and planned to visit Rome on route. He never made it to Spain and only managed to reach Rome as a prisoner.
3. Almost certainly, the Church was founded by some of those who were converted on the day of Pentecost, when Peter stood up and preached and thousands were converted. (Acts 2:10) we read a long list of nationalities and places where people were from, and amongst them we find “visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism”. These Jewish and Gentile converts to Judaism were visiting Jerusalem for the Passover feast and would return home to Rome afterwards. Those who had become Christians after hearing Peter preach took the message of the Gospel with them and formed small house Churches in Rome, mostly made up of converts from Judaism to Christianity.
4. But in AD49, probably only 15 years or so later, all Jews were

expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius. Acts 18:2 refers to this and other writings of the time speak of trouble caused by Jews in Rome and resulting in the Emperor totally excluding them from anywhere in Rome and the surrounding area. So the leadership of the Church in Rome was completely down to those of a Gentile background.

Why did Paul write this long letter to the Church in Rome?

Claudius's decree eventually lapsed and Jews began to return to Rome and many Jewish Christians with them. As they joined or rejoined the Church, which was now predominately made up of Gentile believers, problems began to arise. Jewish Christians wanted to hold on to some of their OT customs and encouraged adherence to aspects of the law of Moses, first 5 books of OT. Gentile Christians had never known the requirements of the law and didn't want any extra complications to their NT faith. Paul writes to address the theological and practical issues to show that the Gospel is

- for everyone who believes, Jews and Gentiles
- is entirely centered on Jesus who is the fulfilment of the promises of the OT
- will result in transformed lives for Jews and Gentiles.

When and where did Paul write this letter?

Paul probably wrote Romans around AD57, near to the end of his 3rd missionary journey, when he spent 3 months in Corinth. He mentions in 16:1 a Church in Cenchrea which was a port just outside Corinth. He had visited and founded Churches in many major cities in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece and even as far as Ilyricum, a Roman province that is now Serbia and Croatia. He was on his way back to Jerusalem before hopefully heading to Rome on his way to Spain.
Romans 16:3 He greets Priscilla and Aquila, who have a Church meeting in their home in Rome. NB No buildings – just meetings in houses. They had been amongst those who were evicted in AD49 and found their way to Corinth where they met Paul and worked with him for about 18 months

and went on to lead the Church in Ephesus.

Paul calls them his co-workers and says they once risked their lives for him.

They were his main link with the Church in Rome.

What are the main themes of Romans?

- The Gospel is Good News – Heralding Christ’s victory
cf Emperor winning battle & sending Herald to declare his victory.
Gospel is all about heralding how, through Jesus, we can be made right with God, totally forgiven
- Jews and Gentiles are both equally in need of the Grace of God. all have sinned and fallen short but none are beyond His mercy & love
- Salvation comes through faith and trust in Christ and no other way. Jews cannot rely in keeping the OT law. Christ is fulfilment of OT
- Believers are adopted into God’s family and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who guides, empowers and frees us to follow Christ
- Nothing and no one can separate us from God’s love.
Our inheritance is undeserved but is guaranteed
- Detailed explanation of where Jews fit into God’s future plans, alongside Gentiles from every nation
- Our lives must be dedicated to Him and our mindset transformed
Our relationship to God should demonstrated in our lives
- All Christians, Jews and Gentiles, must accept and love one another
We put others first and seek to encourage and help one another

All of these are carefully explained by Paul and applied to our lives TODAY

Tom Wright “Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome is his masterpiece. It covers many different topics from many different angles, bringing them all together in a fast moving and compelling line of thought. Reading it sometimes feels like being swept along in a small boat on a swirling , bubbling river. We need to hold on tight if we’re going to stay onboard. But if we do, the energy and excitement of it all is unbeatable”