

## Book Study #1

## ROMANS

## Introductions

### Importance : Author : Date/Place : Recipients : Occasion/Purpose : Summary

#### **Before we begin this journey...**

##### Importance

As we embark upon our journey of discovery in Romans, a few introductory comments will provide a basic overview that we can build on in the studies ahead. *"This Epistle is the chief book of the New Testament, the purest gospel. It deserves not only to be known word for word by every Christian, but to be the subject of his meditation day by day."* (Martin) Luther also spoke of it as *"a light and way into the whole Scriptures."*

##### Author

It is almost universally agreed that the author of Romans is Paul the apostle. Not only is he identified as such in the letter (1:1, 5), but both the external and internal evidence testify clearly to his authorship. The letter is referred to as Paul's by the church Fathers (the pastors and theologians of the early church), and the early lists of New Testament books list Romans as one of Paul's letters. The internal evidence includes the strong linguistic and theological similarities to Paul's other letters.

##### Date and Place of Origin

From the description Paul gives of his circumstances, it is not difficult to place the writing of Romans relative to his journeys. He considered his church planting work in the Eastern part of the Roman empire to have been completed. He was about to set out for Jerusalem with the offerings collected from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, before going on to Spain (15:18-28). This corresponds with the three months he spent in Greece (i.e. Achaia) after passing through Macedonia (Acts 20:1-3; 24:17) during his third missionary journey. The possible dates for this time can be narrowed to A.D. 54-59, based on the events of Roman history which form the political background of Acts. It is likely, in view of Paul's close relationship with the Corinthian church, that he spent these three months in Corinth, the capital of the province of Achaia. The commendation of Phoebe, a "servant of the church in Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:11) points to Corinth, as Cenchrea was Corinth's eastern port, and the Gaius mentioned in Rom. 16:23 may be the same one baptized by Paul in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14).

##### Recipients

The recipients of this letter were the believers in Rome, whom Paul had never visited (1:7, 10). The church consisted of both Jewish and Gentile Christians (15:7-12).

##### Occasion and Purpose

The occasion of the letter, as Paul indicates, is his plan to visit Rome to spend some time in fellowship with the believers there, ministering to them and being ministered to by them, before proceeding on to Spain (1:18-16; 15:14-33). Paul's purposes in writing the letter include the following: (1) informing the Roman Christians of his plans to visit them, (2) informing them of his plans to go to Spain, possibly with a view to securing their support, (3) soliciting their prayers (15:30-32). However, these purposes do not explain the content of the main portion of the letter (1:16b-15:13). Why did he choose this letter to present such an extended treatment of the central doctrines of the Christian faith?

## Summary

**After identifying justification by faith as the theme** of the letter in 1:16-17, Paul first lays out the cause of man's utter alienation from God--his sin. No man is righteous before God, but rather "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" (3:9). In light of this fact, the righteousness which comes from God through faith in Christ is the only means of justification (3:21-31). Abraham is no exception, for he also was justified by faith rather than works (4:1-25).

**The life which results from justification** is described in 5:1-8:39. It is a life characterized by peace with God, due to our separation from Adam and union with Christ (5:1-21); a life characterized by obedience, since our justification, rather than giving us license to sin, actually frees us from the tyranny of sin (6:1-7:25); a life characterized by the indwelling of the Spirit and the certainty that the possibility of condemnation for the believer has been forever abolished (8:1-39).

**Paul then discusses the status of the Jewish people before God**, arguing that their rejection of Christ does not indicate the failure of God's promises. Rather, it reveals that God's promises apply only to those who are sons of Abraham through faith, demonstrating that salvation is according to the sovereign will of God. Although Israel has been cut off from God due to unbelief, her rejection is not final. Finally, Paul exhorts his readers to fulfill the duties of obedience to which Christians are called and concludes with greetings to individuals.