

## ROMANS STUDY GUIDE

### AUTHOR

Little doubt surrounds the author of Romans. **Paul** names himself as the author (Rom. 1:1) and the content of the book further points to Paul as its author.

Little is known about Paul's birth, except that he was likely born within a decade of Jesus's birth. Born in the city of Tarsus, a chief city within the Roman province of Cilicia (modern southeast Turkey), one would think he would have quite the mixture of Greek, Jewish, and Roman influences. However, either his family moved to Jerusalem when he was young, or he was sent there for schooling under Gamaliel I, a ranking rabbi of the time. Paul was also known as Saul, his Hebrew name (Acts 13:9). Use of two names was not uncommon in that era, using whatever name served the best purpose for the surrounding culture. Though Paul did most of his ministry to Gentiles, he considered himself a Jew, calling attention to his Benjamite heritage, circumcision, Hebrew ancestry, and Pharisaic training (Phil. 3:5). However, he was not afraid to call upon his Roman citizenship when necessary. His writings demonstrate high level reasoning and a strong grasp of language. It is likely Paul knew Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, but it is also possible he was familiar with Latin, the increasing language of the Roman empire.

Paul likely witnessed Jesus' crucifixion, later becoming a persecutor of the early church. His personal encounter with the risen Christ while traveling to Damascus changed the course of his life. Paul is known as one of the strongest thinkers in the early church and completed 4 missionary journeys, starting & following up on churches along the way. He is believed to have been martyred in Rome in the mid- to late AD 60s.

### ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

The book is written to the Romans, a church Paul had not started or visited, though he was making plans to visit them soon (1:11) and had awareness of some of the people within the church (16:13-15). No one knows who started the church in Rome, but it was probably by believers affected by Pentecost (Acts 2:7-12) who shared their faith and started a house church movement. The church most likely consisted of Jewish Christians. In Rome, Jewish Christians were predominantly poor, though there were some groups who were wealthier and better educated. These differing groups lived in different parts of the city and had their own leaders. It is presumed that Phoebe delivered the letter to the Roman church association (16:1-2).

The main language of the Jewish community in Rome was Greek. It is believed the Jewish community numbered around 50,000 with many Romans converting to Judaism prior to the gospel being preached in the city. Aristocratic Romans resented other Romans converting to Judaism, which created ethnic tensions. In the AD 40s, the Roman emperor, Claudius, expelled the Jewish community from Rome (Acts 18:2), leaving the church entirely composed of Gentiles until Claudius' death, when the edict was repealed and Jewish Christians could return.

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The result was Jewish and Gentile Christians having different cultural ways of expressing their faith in Christ, leaving Paul to address tensions between the two valid expressions. In short, what Roman Christians needed was racial reconciliation and cross-cultural sensitivity. Paul reminds Jewish readers they are as hopeless without Christ as Gentiles, spiritual lineage from Abraham is what matters, Jews are equally descended from sinful Adam, and that the Law does not justify Israel. He reminds Gentiles they were grafted into Judaism & should not be anti-Semitic and must respect the practices of their Jewish siblings. Christ is therefore the primary agent of racial reconciliation and unity, in whom Paul follows Christ's example.

**DATE**

Paul most likely wrote the letter to Romans during his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey as he worked to finalize plans to visit Rome (Acts 19:21). His stay in Corinth for three months, most likely during the spring of **AD 56 or 57**, would have provided the time needed to compose such a reasoned commentary on the Christian faith.

**LITERARY GENRE & STRUCTURE**

Paul had been preaching the gospel for nearly 20 years by the time he writes Romans, therefore, this letter presents a mature statement of Paul's gospel understanding. In fact, this letter is considered one of the greatest expositions of Christian doctrine anywhere in Scripture. The letter to the Romans is unique in that it doesn't address any specific church problems, but is more of an explanation of the gospel Paul has preached.

Introduction (1:1-17)
Body (1:18-15:13)
Revelation of the Righteousness of God (1:18-8:39)
Vindication of the Righteousness of God (9:1-11:36)
Application of the Righteousness of God (12:1-15:13)
Conclusion (15:14-16:27)

**OBSERVATION WORDS** *(Continued on next page)*

- **Jesus**-- Don't just notice the references, but what do you learn about Him through those references? Names, functions, His emotional responses, how others address Him, etc.
- **Holy Spirit** – When He's named directly, what He does, note miracles, etc.
- **God** -- Different ways He's referenced & what you learn about Him, how Jesus speaks of Him, etc.
- **Righteous/Righteousness** – What do you learn about righteousness? How does one get it?
- **Good News/Gospel** – What is it? How do you describe it?

- **Law** – Purpose, effect, who it applies to, etc.
- **Circumcision** – Purpose, role for Gentiles, etc.
- **Sin** – Description, effect, what you learn about it, etc.
- **Power** – What kinds, how does Paul describe it, etc.
- **Grace** – How is it described, what you learn, how it differs from mercy, etc.
- **Mercy** – What it is, how it differs from grace, etc.

### SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did the Lord teach you through this book? How will you apply this lesson to your life?
- What did you learn about God through this book?
- What did you learn about Jesus through this book?
- What did you learn about the Holy Spirit through this book?
- How do you describe the Gospel/Good News? What did Jesus do to make it the good news?
- What is a true Jew? What is a true Christian?
- What is the purpose/meaning of circumcision? How does it apply (or not) for Gentiles?

- Describe faith. What is it? What does it do? Why do you need it? How do you get it?
  
- Compare & contrast Adam and Christ.
  
- What is the purpose of the Law? How do sin & law work together and apart from each other?
  
- How do you describe the powers that Paul talks about?
  
- How do you describe the Spirit-controlled life (make sure to include aspects of ch. 12-15)?  
Where in your life do you need more Spirit-controlled living?
  
- What is mercy? What is grace? How are they similar and different?

**Your Key Word** – How do you summarize the whole book in one word or short phrase?

**Your Key Verse** – What verse stands out to you as the summary of the whole book, or a verse that the Lord used to teach you something important. Why did you choose the verse you did?

**Your Key Chapter** – What chapter summarizes the book, is a turning point, or just stands out to you? Why did you choose this chapter?