

Romans (June 16)

Reading Romans

The tap of a centurion's staff quietly roused the soldiers. With the day at hand, the men would need to wipe leisure from their eyes and shake sloth from their limbs. Dawn meant armor, attention, and duty. Such discipline by Roman troops enabled the Roman Empire to rise and conquer its enemies.

Paul's letter to the Romans alludes to the duty and discipline of troops, comparing their calling to the Christian's calling. However, Paul's encouragement to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" reminds us also that our attention to duty is not the basis for our salvation. Our conquering champion, Jesus, brought salvation to us through his personal sacrifice and atoning death. His victory has roused us from the darkness of death. Clothed in his righteousness alone, we stand steadfast – more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Author, Date, and Place of Writing

The writer of this letter was the apostle Paul. No voice from the early church was ever raised against his authorship. The letter contains a number of historical references that agree with known facts of Paul's life. The doctrinal content of the book is typical of Paul, which is evident from a comparison with other letters he wrote.

The book was probably written in the early spring of AD 57. Very likely Paul was on his third missionary journey, ready to return to Jerusalem with the offering from the mission churches for poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem.

Recipients and Theme

The original recipients of the letter were the people of the church at Rome, who were predominantly Gentile. Jews however must have constituted a substantial minority of the congregation. Paul greatly desired to visit the Roman church, but he could not go to Rome at this time because he felt he must personally deliver the collection taken among the Gentile churches for the poverty-stricken Christians of Jerusalem. So instead of going to Rome, he sent a letter to prepare the Christians there for his intended visit in connection to Spain. For many years Paul had wanted to visit Rome to minister there, and this letter served as a careful and systematic theological introduction to that hoped-for personal ministry.

Paul's primary theme in Romans is the basic gospel, God's plan of salvation and righteousness for all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike. None of Paul's other letters states so profoundly the content of the gospel and its implications.

Special Characteristics

- Romans is the most systematic of Paul's letters. It reads more like an elaborate theological essay than a letter.
- Paul places a high emphasis on Christian doctrine and touches upon sin, salvation, grace, faith, righteousness, justification, sanctification, redemption, death, and resurrection.
- The letter has widespread use of Old Testament quotations. Although Paul regularly quotes from the Old Testament in his letters, in Romans the argument is sometimes carried along by such quotations (see especially chapters 9-11).

Blessings for Readers

The teachings in Romans are foundational to the Christian faith. Romans explains, step-by-step, why and how God saves us in Jesus. As you read Romans, reflect on the examples of faith Paul provides from the Old Testament and from his personal struggles. These examples show how God works through the word in our lives, despite our weaknesses. The final chapters apply these Christian teachings in practical ways for individuals, families, and congregations. This most detailed letter of Paul truly offers us a wealth of comfort.