

Caesar. During the life of Christ and the apostles, Rome was the political military center of the western world. When Paul wrote Romans, Nero was Caesar (a.d. 54-68). The city had many magnificent buildings, palaces, and theaters. But it also had huge slums with hundreds of thousands of people living in poverty. The population of Rome at this time was about a million people. Although located on the Tiber River, Rome is 15 miles (25 km) from the Mediterranean, and its main port was 150 miles (250 km) away at Puteoli, where Paul landed when he eventually arrived as a prisoner (Acts 28:13-14). The church there was probably started by Roman Jews converted during their visit to Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost of Acts 2 (see verse 10).

Paul and the Roman Believers

Although Paul had never been to Rome before he wrote this letter, he knew many people there (Romans 15 and 16). In the last chapters, he also revealed a lot about the structure of their church. He described a citywide unity with several (5 are mentioned) small groups of believers assembling in different homes. Paul gave no direction in the book about how the Romans were to organize or structure their church. He offered no instruction on how they should choose leaders or run their assemblies. He did, however, recognize the whole city as one unit (Romans 1:7), and individual house churches as gathering points around local leaders. These churches apparently did not see themselves as independent from other churches and leaders.

The Theme of Romans

The book develops the theme “the righteous shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). Paul says God’s **righteousness** was revealed out-

wardly through nature (chapter 1), inwardly through our conscience (Romans 2) and through the Scripture given to the Jews (3:1-8). But we, both Jews and Gentiles, have all rejected God’s righteousness (3:9-20). Nevertheless, God graciously provided **justification** through the blood of Christ to all who receive Him by faith (3:21–5:21). This salvation also provides us with **sanc-tification** (holiness): positionally before God, experientially as we battle the old flesh–sin nature, and ultimately when we stand before Christ in glory (chapters 6-8). Our confidence in this is because of our **predestination** (8:28–9:29). Because of that confidence, we do **evan-gelism** (9:30–10:21). This is urgent because the church itself is a **dispensation** which temporary interrupts God’s program for Israel (chapter 11). The way we are to **apply** this is by presenting our bodies a living holy sacrifice to God (12:1-2). That means pursuing our gifts (12:3-8), living without hypocrisy (12:9-21), submitting to our government (13:1-7), loving our neighbor (13:8-14), respecting the liberty of others (chapter 14) and bearing one another’s burdens (chapter 15).

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BOOK PANORAMA

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BOOK PANORAMA

Romans

By Dr. David A. DeWitt

I don’t think I would get much disagreement either today or by the church fathers through all of history if I said, without any exception,

Paul’s epistle to the Romans is the greatest theological treatise ever written

Romans has been described as “the flagship of the fleet of Pauline letters” (*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1876). But it is also the whole fleet of major doctrines surrounding what Paul calls “salvation”—the deliverance of the sinner from his sin. The book directed the writings of Augustine, changed the life of Martin Luther, dominated the theology of John Calvin, and impacted the ministry of John Wesley. It could be said that Romans inspired: the Reformation of the 1500s, the Great Awakening of the 1700s, and the evangelicals of the 1800s and 1900s.

Paul, a Bondservant of Christ

No one disputes the fact that Paul wrote Romans. Paul (his Greek name) was also Saul (his Jewish name), and like his Old Testament namesake, King Saul, he was from the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5). He was also a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25) and was born about, or a little after, the time Christ was born, so he was about the age of the other apostles (possibly as much as 10 years younger than Peter, since he held the coats rather than participating in the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7). Paul was born in Tarsus (Acts 9:11), but he spent much of his early life

in Jerusalem as a student of the noted teacher Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Like his father before him, Paul was both a Roman citizen and a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; Philippians 3:5). Paul probably never married (1 Corinthians 7:7; 9:5). Some argue that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin and, therefore, married. But the Sanhedrin was liberalized in Paul's day. It had non-Levite priests, so it might also have single Pharisees. Besides, Paul was also too young to be on a conservative Sanhedrin.

After persecuting Christians, Paul was supernaturally converted on the road to Damascus by Christ Himself (Acts 9). After miraculously escaping Damascus with his life (Acts 9:23-25, 2 Corinthians 11:32-33), he briefly visited Jerusalem, then spent 3 years in the Arabian Desert, southeast of the Dead Sea. During this time, he studied the Scriptures, found Jesus Christ revealed in the Old Testament, and received new revelation from God (Galatians 1:11, 12, 17, 18). After this, he returned for an unknown period of time to his hometown of Tarsus until Barnabus recruited him to service in Antioch. Paul made three missionary journeys to the Roman-controlled Greek cities of Asia Minor and Greece. But he also longed to go to Rome and on to Spain (Romans 15:29-32). He wrote Romans during his third journey and sent it from Cenchrea (a port near Corinth), probably with Phoebe (Romans 16:1).

Rome—and Romans

Rome was founded in 753 b.c., but the Roman Empire did not become prominent until the intertestament times when it stopped the Syrians from conquering Egypt and Greece. It became dominant under Julius Caesar's conquests (around 50 b.c.) and a world empire under his nephew Augustus

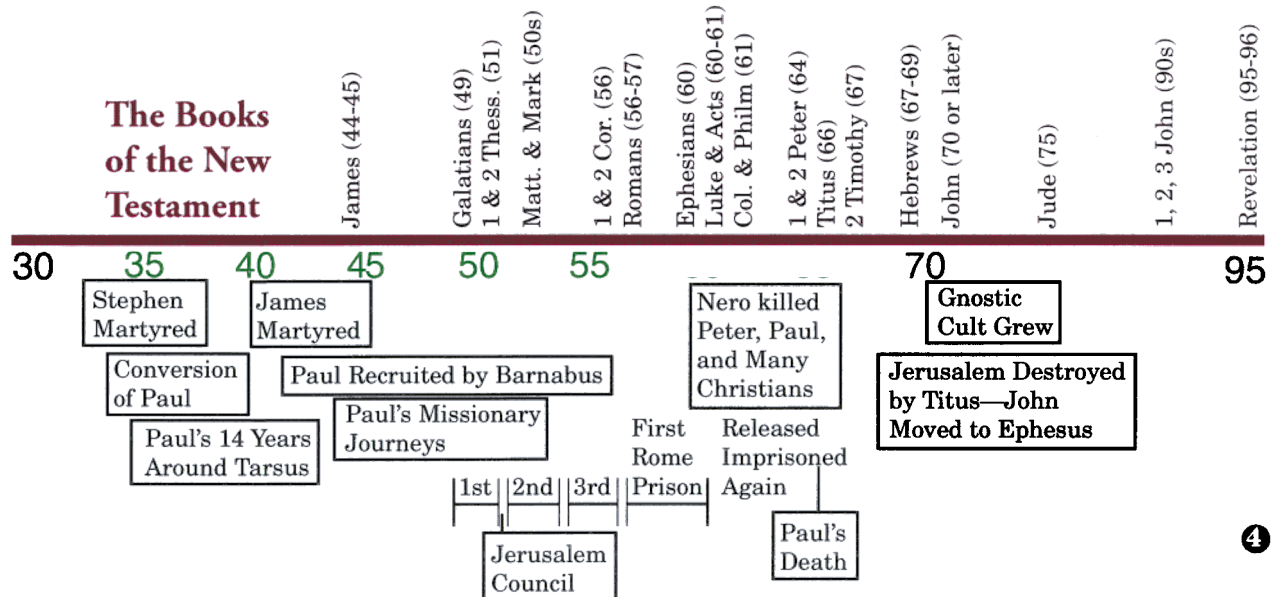
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Romans

Theology

TR <i>The righteous shall live by faith</i>	Righteousness Needed 1:1-17	Righteousness The standard we rejected 1:18-3:20	Justification The solution God offered 3:21-5:21	Sanctification The life God expected —positionally —experientially —ultimately 6:1-8:25	Predetermination The choice God made 8:26-9:29	Evangelism The method God initiated 11:1-36	Dispensationism The ages God established	Practice <i>Application to the Individual</i> <i>Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice</i> <i>Application to the Christian Community</i> <i>(at Rome)</i> 12:1-15:13	15:14-16:27
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The Books of the New Testament



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