

Romans

Date:

It is thought that Paul wrote this letter to the Church in Rome from Corinth, while on his third missionary journey, in A.D. 57.

Setting:

Having completed his work in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, he hoped to travel to Rome and then on to Spain; but first he needed to go to Jerusalem to deliver the money he had collected for the church there (Rom.15:19–32). While in Jerusalem he was accused of, and arrested for teaching against the “Law”. He was then transferred to Rome (approx a.d. 60) for trial after appealing to Caesar based on his Roman citizenship.

Theme:

Romans provides the fullest expression of Paul’s theology, though it is doubtful that he intended it to be a complete summary statement. For example, Romans lacks any detailed treatments of Paul’s doctrine of Christ (see Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20), of the church (see Ephesians), or of last things (see 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess. 2:1–12).

The theme of Romans is the revelation of God’s judging and saving righteousness in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the cross of Christ, God judges sin and yet at the same time manifests his saving mercy.

Purpose:

It is believed that Paul wrote the letter to address particular issues of concern to the Roman church. Specifically, he addressed matters of interest for a church that included both Jewish and Gentile Christians:

- (1) Can one be right with God through obeying the law (Rom. 1:1–3:20)?
- (2) What can be learned from Abraham, and is he the father of both Jewish and Gentile Christians (4:1–25)?
- (3) What role does the law play with reference to sin (5:20; 7:1–25)?
- (4) What does the salvation of Gentiles indicate about the future of Israel as God’s people (9:1–11:36)?
- (5) Should Christians observe OT food laws, and how should they relate to fellow believers on such matters (14:1–15:13)?

Paul’s selection of themes (gospel and law; the significance of Abraham; the future of Israel) suggests significant tensions between the Jews and Gentiles in Rome. Paul wrote Romans so that they would be united in the gospel he preached, and so that they would comprehend how the gospel spoke to the issues that divided them.

A closer look at Romans reveals another purpose as well. Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to rally around his gospel so that Rome would become the base of operations from which he could proclaim the gospel in Spain (**15:22–24**). If Roman Christians did not agree with Paul’s gospel message, especially on the issues being debated among Jews and Gentiles, then they would not support his proposed mission to Spain. Paul needed to explain the gospel in some detail so that the Christians in Rome would become the base from which he could proclaim the gospel in new regions.