

# Paul's Letter to the ROMANS

## UNIT ONE

### The Background of the Letter

#### The Time and Place of Writing

- On Paul's third missionary journey he resolved to visit Rome.
- Christianity was established in Rome but Paul had not preached there.
- The final chapters of Acts show how he reached Rome as a captive.
- Romans 15 suggests that Paul wrote from Corinth, possibly early in 57AD.

#### Christianity in Rome

- Visitors from Rome were present on the Day of Pentecost.
- The origins of the church in Rome were Jewish – there were many Jews in Rome who may have been converted.
- The expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius may refer to trouble between Jews and Jewish Christians.
- By the time of Paul's letter, the church at Rome also included Gentiles.

- The word 'church' does not appear at the beginning of Romans, only towards the end.
- Some suggest that there were different house congregations, and Paul may have been trying to unite them.

## The Structure of Romans

- **Chapters 1-8**
  - The revelation of the righteousness of God in the saving work of Jesus.
- **Chapters 9-11**
  - The problem of Israel's unbelief and how God in his righteousness will save both Jews and Gentiles.
- **Chapters 12-16**
  - The practical implications of the theological arguments in the first eleven chapters.
- **Beginning: Paul's desire to visit Rome (1:1-15)**
  - Address and Greeting (1:1-7)
  - Paul and the Roman Church (1:8-15)
- **The Gospel of God's Righteousness (1:16-8:39)**
  - The theme of the Gospel (1:16-17)
  - The wickedness of Jews and Gentiles (1:18-3:20)
  - The revelation of God's righteousness in the death of Christ (3:21-4:25)
  - The realisation of the End-Time blessings in Christ (5:1-8:29)
- **The Righteousness of God and the Problem of Israel (9-11)**
  - Paul's lament (9:1-5)
  - God's mercy and his elective purposes (9:6-29)
  - Israel's guilt and fall (9:30-10:21)
  - The mystery of God's saving plan (11:1-36)

- Responding to the Mercies of God (12:1-15:13)
  - The common life of Christians (12:1-13)
  - Christians and those outside the body of Christ (12:14-13:14)
  - Christian liberty and Christian love (14:1-15:13)
- Ending: Paul's personal notes (15:14-16:27)

## The Purpose of Romans

- The beginning: Paul's desire to visit Rome (1:1-15)
  - Paul introduced himself as an apostle by God's calling, not by self-appointment.
  - He was set apart for the task of proclaiming the gospel, which can only be fully understood in the light of the Old Testament.
  - Paul has been commissioned to take the gospel to all nations, and the Romans therefore fall within his responsibility.
  - Paul tells the Romans that he constantly gives thanks for their faith and prays for them.
  - He wants to visit them, to serve them and be served by them.
  - He stresses that his plans to visit have often been frustrated, and regards a visit as part of his obligation as Apostle to the Gentiles.
- The ending: Paul's relationship with the Christians in Rome (15:14-16:27)
  - Paul is conscious of having written 'very boldly by way of reminder'.
  - He has written because of his role 'to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God'.
  - He aims to bring Gentiles to glorify God in fellowship with believing Jews.
  - Paul has now preached over a wide area, and states his intention to take the gospel even further, to Rome and then on to Spain.

- Before he can visit Rome, he must first return to Jerusalem, with the collection made by Gentile churches for Christians there.
- He asks them to share in a prayer for deliverance from unbelieving Jews.
- Paul begins the final chapter with a commendation of Phoebe, who may have been the bearer of the letter.
- This is followed with a series of greetings to individuals, who Paul knew either personally or by repute.
- Finally, there is a doxology (ascription of praise to God).
- **Summary and Conclusion**
  - Paul wrote with three important journeys in mind – to Jerusalem, Rome and Spain.
  - He is afraid that the collection he takes to Jerusalem will be unacceptable and he will have to defend his understanding of the gospel.
  - He seeks to secure the prayer support of the Roman Christians.
  - He also seeks support for his proposed mission to Spain.
  - Paul defends the conversion of the Gentiles as a crucial part of God's plan.
  - He also argues that his law-free gospel is not incompatible with the Old Testament scriptures.
  - There was a view among Gentile Christians in Rome that God had rejected the Jews because of their unbelief.
  - This may have been a cause of tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians – certainly Paul knew of problems.
  - He was concerned to ensure the freedom of the Gentiles in the gospel while maintaining their fellowship with Israel.
  - Romans can therefore be described as:
    - An extended explanation of Paul's gospel and of his role in God's world-wide mission, leading into certain practical exhortations with particular relevance to the situation in Rome.