

~ACTS~

Lesson 66- Introduction to the Book of Romans

We are continuing our study in the book of Acts and find ourselves in chapter 20 as Paul leaves Ephesus after being there for three years, then travels to Macedonia, and then on to Corinth, [Acts 20:1-3](#). Last time we saw that when he came to Macedonia, he wrote what we know as 2 Corinthians and we spent last lesson taking an overview of that letter. You remember that it was always Paul's plan to leave Ephesus and return to Macedonia and Achaia to strengthen the churches and collect the contribution for the saints in Jerusalem, [Acts 19:21](#); [1 Cor 16:1-7](#). But because of the prideful hearts of the Corinthian church, Paul determined in himself that he would not visit the church again in sorrow, [2 Cor 2:1-3](#). But now because of the good report from Titus in Macedonia, Paul commits himself to come again to the church in Corinth, [2 Cor 7:5-16](#).

Paul comes to Corinth and stays there for three months. And we can assume it was a good visit because while he was there, Paul writes his masterpiece called the book of Romans. If the church in Corinth would have been in a disordered state, I don't believe Paul would have written this letter under duress, [2 Cor 12:14, 20-21](#); [10:10-11](#).

- There are a couple of clues within the letter that tell the book of Romans was undoubtedly written while in Corinth
 - Gaius and Erastus, the treasurer of the city (travel companion with Paul, [Acts 19:22](#)) were both from Corinth and with Paul in Corinth when he wrote this letter, [Romans 16:23](#).
 - Phoebe from Cenchrea delivered the letter of Romans, [Romans 16:1](#)

It is here in Corinth that Paul writes to the church in Rome (58ad spring- probably March, [Acts 20:6](#)), so as we have been studying the book of Acts along with the life of Paul, we are going to step over and take an overview of this epistle. The book of Romans is such an amazing letter there is no way to spend just one lesson taking an overview. So today we will look at the historical context and what was going on in the heart of Paul to prompt this letter. Then next week we will start our overview.

- Paul had an earnest desire for many years to visit the Christians in Rome, [Romans 1:10-15](#); [15:22-26](#).
 - Paul had been planning to come to them after he went to Jerusalem to deliver the collection for the saints, [Acts 19:21](#); [1 Cor 16:1-4](#). But through the Spirit, he knows hard times, tribulation and chains await him, [Acts 20:22-24](#); [21:12-14](#).
 - He asks the Roman church to pray for deliverance in Judea, [Romans 15:31-32](#).
 - The Lord Himself told Paul that he would go to Rome, [Acts 23:11](#).
 - Paul knew he would go to Rome, however little did he know it would be as a prisoner, [Acts 27:1](#); [28:16](#).
 - When Paul finally gets to Rome, even as a prisoner, his ministry is extremely fruitful. In the two years Paul spends in Rome under house arrest, 60-61ad, he will write 5 more epistles known as his prison epistles: Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon. And then about 5 years later he will write his final letter, 2 Timothy, from a dungeon in Rome awaiting his death in 66ad.
 - 6 of his 14 epistles are written from Rome as a prisoner.

Before we take an overview of this epistle, it is important to understand the historical context of the letter. There is an historical side of this letter that greatly enhances our understanding of the doctrinal truths found in this letter.

There is no other letter quite like the book of Romans. All 14 of Paul's letters have some type of a personal feel, whether its encouragement, exhortation, admonition, or a harsh rebuke. But this letter, although it

does have some personal points, mainly at the beginning and the end, Rom 1:1-15; chapters 15-16, is primarily detailing the Gospel that Paul preached as he established the churches and the doctrine of our Christianity. This letter is the definitive explanation of the doctrine of our justification by grace through faith; a masterpiece of literature that thoroughly explains how we are saved in and through Jesus Christ alone, apart from the works of the Law.

The book of Romans was not written to Jews only or Gentiles only. It's a letter written to the church in Rome... "*To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints,*" **Romans 1:7**. These are former Jews and former Gentiles who are now called Christians. There are times in the letter when his focus shifts toward the Jews and then to the Gentiles, but only with the purpose to show the plan of God in bringing both Jew and Gentile alike into one body in Christ, Rom 2:17-29; 3:1-20; chapters 9-12. And it is important to understand the dynamics of this church and their understanding of the Gospel message especially in relation to the Hellenistic synagogues of Rome still teaching the Law.

How did the church get started in Rome?

- Paul had never visited Rome, and yet Believers were there before Paul was in Christ, **Romans 16:7; Acts 28:14**.
 - The church was probably established as a result of Pentecost in 32ad, Acts 2:10.
 - However, their understanding of the New Covenant was probably incomplete. The book of Acts has shown us the slow transition from Judaism to Christianity. The Jerusalem Council meeting made it evident that even 18 years after the cross, Christians were still debating how one is truly saved. Are we saved by the Law of Moses or by grace through faith apart from the Law? Acts 15:1-11.
 - The answer is we are saved by grace through faith and nothing else and this was the Gospel message that Paul preached throughout the world, Acts 13:39.
- It is unknown who started the church in Rome, but it is clear Christianity had come there at some point early on.
 - However, the message of the Gospel at that time was extremely limited because all they knew is what Peter taught them on Pentecost, Acts 2:14-40.
 - They knew of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus, but they had no knowledge of the Gentiles coming into the church apart from the Law. In fact these Jews were still bound under the Law themselves.
 - Peter was still eating kosher food up 9 years later until Cornelius in Acts chapter 10 about 41ad, Acts 10:14.
- But evidently over the years, Paul's Gospel message had spread to the church in Rome because Paul had dealings with certain Christians, even Gentile Christians who were fellow-workers with Paul and had traveled to Rome, **Romans 16:3-16**.
 - Notice that Aquila and Priscilla are at the beginning of that list which tells us they are back in Rome after being with Paul for over 6 years. (Aquila and Priscilla probably left Ephesus when Paul began traveling throughout Asia for 9 months, Sept 56 – May 57ad)
 - Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome in 49ad, Aquila and Priscilla were a part of that expulsion, but then Claudius died in 54ad and the ban toward the Jews was lifted.
 - Then Nero took power and reigned from 54-68. Burned Rome in 64ad and blamed the Christians
 - Aquila and Priscilla may have even been one of those who heard Peter preach at Pentecost in 32ad and came back and started a house church in Rome, Acts 18:2.

A church without a shepherd

- Paul having not been to Rome yet and with the deep persuasion from the Jews, it is evident that the church in Rome didn't have a good grasp of our justification by grace through faith alone.
 - As I have been studying this, it has become clear to me that the church in Rome, up until this point, didn't have Paul's direct influence as a shepherd to fend off the false teachings of the Jews and the Judaizers.
 - In the churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Corinth, Paul continued to visit them and send representatives to shepherd the flock. This was his deep concern for the churches.
 - Rome wasn't a product of Paul; therefore, they weren't established with this type of leadership.
 - The Jews in Rome were making it very difficult for the Christians and they were attacking the message of the freedom of the Gospel, **Romans 3:8; 16:17-18**. But before Paul, there wasn't a shepherd to fend off the wolves.
 - Remember in Ephesus Paul said that "*...for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears,*" Acts 20:31,.
 - As in many of his other epistles, he warns of deceivers making false accusations against the message of the Gospel.
 - It seems that there was no direct attack against Paul, as there was in the other cities (Galatia, Corinth, Macedonia), but an overall hatred of Christianity in general, **Acts 28:16-22**.

The Doctrine of Christianity

- Paul is writing this letter to set in order the doctrine of our Christianity. It is a written account of what Paul was teaching in all the churches he established. It is the revelation of our New Covenant in Christ. And now the Holy Spirit has not only written this on account of the church of Rome, but for The Church as a whole.
 - Everywhere Paul went he taught the Truth of the Gospel and our freedom in Christ. And because of this message of Truth, for 2,000 years, the enemy has been attacking Paul and his epistles saying they are contrary to the Gospel that Jesus taught.
 - But the Truth is Paul's teachings are the revelation of Jesus Christ as it was shown and entrusted to him. He isn't teaching a different Gospel; he is teaching the fulfilled Gospel in Christ.
 - A Gospel message that Jesus could not reveal during His earthly ministry, **1 Cor 2:7-8**, but chose to reveal His New Covenant to Paul through His Spirit, **John 16:12-13**.
- The book of Romans is the doctrine of the revelation of the mystery that Jesus couldn't speak about, **Rom 16:25**; Eph 3:3-7; 2:4-9, 14-18.
 - This revelation was given directly to Paul. This is why Paul calls it, "my Gospel," Romans 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8; Gal 1:12.
 - It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the revelation of our New Covenant in Jesus.
 - God revealed parts of this to Peter on the rooftop in Joppa. And Peter started gaining the understanding of our freedom in Christ, Acts 15:11.
 - But this revelation was given to Paul as God's chosen vessel to bring the Gospel message to the ends of the earth, Acts 9:15-16; 26:15-18.

The book of Romans is the definitive book on the doctrine of our Christianity. It explains the doctrinal system and method of our justification by grace through faith and there are no other writings in the world that even come close to the masterpiece that the Holy Spirit inspired through the Apostle Paul.

Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on the epistle to the Romans:

This epistle is in truth the chief part of the New Testament and the purest Gospel. It would be quite proper for a Christian, not only to know it by heart word for word, but also to study it daily, for it is the soul's daily bread. It can never be read or meditated too much and too well. The more thoroughly it is treated, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.