

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

I. BACKGROUND

A. Author

The apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans (1:1).

B. Date and Place of Writing

Book	Date	Place of Writing
James	40-45	Jerusalem?
Galatians	48	Syrian Antioch
1 Thessalonians	49-51	Corinth
2 Thessalonians	53-55	Corinth
1 Corinthians	53-55	Ephesus
2 Corinthians	55-56	Macedonia
Romans	57	Corinth
Philippians	62	Rome
Colossians	62	Rome
Philemon	62	Rome
Ephesians	62	Rome
1 Timothy	62-64	Macedonia?
Titus	62-64	Nicopolis
1 Peter	62-63	Rome
2 Peter	64-67	Rome
2 Timothy	64-67	Rome
Jude	Mid-60s	Unknown
Hebrews	60-70	Unknown
1 John	85-95	Ephesus
2 John	85-95	Ephesus
3 John	85-95	Ephesus

C. Recipients

Romans 1:7

D. Purpose

Paul had two main purposes for writing Romans:

1. To address particular issues of concern to the Roman church, which included both Jewish and Gentile Christians:

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

2. To rally the Christians in Rome around his gospel so that Rome would become the base of operations by which Paul could proclaim the gospel in Spain (15:22-24)

II. THEME

The gospel is the theme of Romans. And the message of the gospel is that God brings guilty sinners into relationship with himself and destines them to eternal life when they believe in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Statement of the letter's theme: **1:16-17**.

The word "gospel" and the related verb "preach the gospel (evangelize)" are particularly prominent in the introduction and conclusion of the letter (cf. 1:1, 9, 15; 15:16, 19).

But Romans is not an abstract theological treatise. The gospel that Paul presents in this epistle is a life-transforming message. Romans is bookended by this phrase: "the obedience of faith" (1:5; 16:26). The gospel that Paul proclaimed changes people (cf. chapters 12-15) because it makes us true worshipers of God, as we worship him with our entire lives (12:1-2). And this redounds to God's glory!

III. OUTLINE (based on Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 33-35)**I. Introduction (1:1-17)**

- A. Salutation (1:1-7)
- B. Thanksgiving (1:8-15)
- C. Statement of theme (1:16-17)

II. The Heart of the Gospel: Justification by Faith (1:18-4:25)

- A. The universal reign of sin (1:18-3:20)
 - 1. All persons are accountable to God for sin (1:18-32)
 - 2. Jews are accountable to God for sin (2:1-3:8)
 - 3. The guilt of all humanity (3:9-20)
- B. Justification by faith (3:21-4:25)
 - 1. Justification and the righteousness of God (3:21-26)
 - 2. "By faith alone" (3:27-4:25)

III. The Assurance Provided by the Gospel: The Hope of Salvation (5:1-8:39)

- A. The hope of glory (5:1-21)
 - 1. From justification to salvation (5:1-11)
 - 2. Hope in Christ's triumph over Adam's sin (5:12-21)
- B. Freedom from bondage to sin (6:1-23)
 - 1. "Dead to sin" through union with Christ (6:1-14)
 - 2. Freed from sin's power to serve righteousness (6:15-23)
- C. Freedom from bondage to the law (7:1-25)
 - 1. Released from the law, joined to Christ (7:1-6)
 - 2. The goodness and impotence of the law (7:7-25)
- D. Assurance of eternal life in the Spirit (8:1-30)
 - 1. The Spirit of life (8:1-13)
 - 2. The Spirit of adoption (8:14-17)
 - 3. The Spirit of glory (8:18-30)
- E. The believer's security celebrated (8:31-39)

IV. The Defense of the Gospel: The Problem of Israel (9:1-11:36)

- A. Introduction: The tension between God's promises and Israel's plight (9:1-5)
- B. Defining the promise: (1) God's sovereign election (9:6-29)
 - 1. The Israel within Israel (9:6-13)
 - 2. Objections answered: The freedom and purpose of God (9:14-23)
 - 3. God's calling of a new people: Israel and the Gentiles (9:24-29)

- C. Understanding Israel's plight: Christ as the climax of salvation history (9:30-10:21)
 - 1. Israel, the Gentiles, and the righteousness of God (9:30-10:13)
 - 2. Israel's accountability (10:14-21)
- D. Summary: Israel, the "elect", and the "hardened" (11:1-10)
- E. Defining the promise (2): The future of Israel (11:11-32)
 - 1. God's purpose in Israel's rejection (11:11-15)
 - 2. The inter-relationship of Jews and Gentiles: A warning to Gentile believers (11:16-24)
 - 3. The salvation of "all Israel" (11:25-32)
- F. Conclusion: Praise to God in light of his awesome plan (11:33-36)

V. The Transforming Power of the Gospel: Christian Conduct (12:1-15:13)

- A. The heart of the matter: Total transformation (12:1-2)
- B. Humility and mutual service (12:3-8)
- C. Love and its manifestations (12:9-21)
- D. The Christian and secular rulers (13:1-7)
- E. Love and the law (13:8-10)
- F. Living in light of the day (13:11-14)
- G. A plea for unity (14:1-15:13)
 - 1. Do not condemn one another (14:1-12)
 - 2. Do not cause your brother to stumble (14:13-23)
 - 3. Put other people first (15:1-6)
 - 4. Receive one another (15:7-13)

VI. The Letter Closing (15:14-16:27)

- A. Paul's ministry and travel plans (15:14-33)
 - 1. Looking back: Paul's ministry in the east (15:14-21)
 - 2. Looking ahead: Jerusalem, Rome and Spain (15:22-29)
 - 3. A request for prayer (15:30-33)
- B. Greetings (16:1-23)
 - 1. Commendation of Phoebe (16:1-2)
 - 2. Greetings to Roman Christians (16:3-16)
 - 3. A warning, a promise, and a prayer for grace (16:17-20)
 - 4. Greetings from Paul's companions (16:21-23)
- C. Concluding doxology (16:25-27)

IV. WHY STUDY ROMANS?

1. It adds depth and breadth to our understanding of the gospel.
2. It teaches us about who we are and what we *really* need.
3. We learn that we are saved through faith alone in Christ alone, and that salvation is *entirely* by God's grace.
4. It teaches us about how the relationship between the old and new covenants, between the law and gospel, and between the people of God in the OT and NT.
5. It engenders hope in Christ and encourages endurance amidst suffering.
6. It shows how the gospel motivates Christian obedience, teaching us why and how we ought to live godly lives now.
7. It reveals the majesty of God's awesome plan of salvation and it humbles us before God's absolute sovereignty.
8. We learn how to apply the gospel to all of life—in our relationships, in the church, in the world, etc.
9. It teaches about unity among believers, and how we can maintain our unity in Christ.
10. It shows how Paul carried out his missionary work and grows our understanding of the goal, message and method for missions.