

Background to the book of Romans

Note the map of Paul's Missionary Trips 1-3:

He only gets as far west as Thessalonica or Corinth.
There's only one trip to Rome - as a prisoner

Barclay:

Paul is writing to a church

- he had never visited
- whose founding he had nothing to do with (we don't know who founded it).
- In Acts, after the shipwreck, they make it to Naples (Puteoli) where they are met by Christians from Rome who then bring Paul to Rome on the Appian Way



Rome was

- the greatest city in the world,
- the capital of the greatest Empire the world had ever seen,
- whose Emperor was the most powerful person in the world

Paul wanted to see Rome

Acts 19:21 ²¹ Now after these things had been accomplished, Paul resolved in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia, and then to go on to Jerusalem. He said, "After I have gone there, I must also see Rome."

Acts 23:11 ¹¹ That night the Lord stood near him and said, "Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome."

Paul wrote the book of Romans (the Occasion of this writing)

- From Corinth, at the end of his 3rd Journey sometime in AD 58 (Acts 20:3?)
- To ask them for help in the collection for the poor Jerusalem church
- To show unity between all the churches (both Gentile & Jewish churches -young & old churches)

Why is Paul writing this letter? He plans to visit them, on his way to Spain - Romans 15

How Paul (almost) finishes this letter: Paul's Plan to Visit Rome - Romans 15:23-33

...I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you ²⁴when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. ²⁵At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; ²⁶for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. ²⁸So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; ²⁹and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

³⁰I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, ³¹that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³The God of peace be with all of you. Amen.

1. v24: P wants to evangelize in Spain
2. v20: P doesn't want to "build on another's foundation" in Rome so he'll visit Rome only for a little while (on his way to Spain).
3. v26: Bringing an offering from Macedonia & Achaia for the church in Jerusalem (drought)
4. v27: P wants the Gentile churches to aid the Jewish church
5. v31: P knows persecution is ahead in Jerusalem - asks the Romans to pray for him (15:30-31)

Paul's Letter to the Romans is different than his other letters

- Most letters are written to answer some particular situation that has arisen
- Yet P has never visited Rome, and does not address any particular incident that he knows about
- It's a personal letter to those people that would turn into a Christian Manifesto or Treatise
- P knows of people in Rome. In ch 16, note all those he mentions to receive his greetings
16:21 - even P's secretary, Tertius, sends his greetings!

Romans is like his other letters

- Dictated to a secretary - similar to other letters - pacing about, not at a desk
- Written to elevate Christ and unify the churches
- P pours out his heart - lots of long sentences, funny grammar, complicated structure
- Epistles are like listening in to one side of a telephone conversation - we need to infer what the other person is saying, or what caused P to say what he did

Why visit Spain? So what?

Rome had opened up Spain - Roman roads, aqueducts - Spain was the new frontier

A blaze of new thinkers and authors - Seneca, Martial, Lucan, Columella, Pomponius Mela, Quintilian

Paul needs Rome as his new base to head west, just as Antioch in Syria had been his base for Journeys 1-3.

A Brief Overview of Romans -

Introduction (1:1 -17)

The wrath of God 1:18 - 3:20

The grace of God 4:21 - 8:39

The plan of God 9 - 11

The will of God 12:1 - 15:13

A Letter of Introduction for Phoebe 16

Romans 1: 1-17 (Introduction)

1. Salutation (1: 1-7)

From Paul, to the church in Rome

His credentials -

v1 A servant (slave) of Jesus Christ. If Christ is his Lord, then he is Christ's slave.

v2 Called to be an Apostle (like the prophets were also called

Set apart for the gospel - by God (Galatians 1:15)

by the Church in Antioch (Acts 13:2 - "Set apart for me Barnabas & Saul")

v3-4 He declares what the Gospel is:

A Gospel of the Incarnation - Christ was really and truly a man

A Gospel of the Resurrection - Christ is not dead and gone - but still lives

v5 He received 2 things:

Grace - a free, unearned gift

Apostleship - a Task - to be the apostle to the Gentiles

2. A Prayer of Thanksgiving (1: 8-15)

Note the aspects of giving thanks:

I'm thankful for you!

I remember to pray for you.

I want to strengthen you

We encourage each other

3. The Power of the Gospel (1: 16-17)

Not ashamed

The Power of God for everyone who has faith - Jews and Greeks

God's righteousness is revealed by faith

Questions:

1. Note the 2 credentials that Paul lists for himself in vv.1-2: he is a servant of Jesus, and he has been set apart as an Apostle. What credentials would you list for yourself in describing your faith?
2. In vv.3-4 note the 2 events which Paul alludes to when describing the gospel - the incarnation and the resurrection (in other words, Christmas and Easter). How important are these 2 holidays to your faith?
3. Note Paul's thanksgiving prayer for the Romans. Who do you give thanks for? Do you pray for them?
4. Have you ever been ashamed of the gospel (or of any Christians)?