

Romans: More Resources

Romans-The following topics are expanded below

- Click on any of the topics below to get more information that will help you with your individual or small group study.
- When was Romans written and how does it fit into the chronology of New Testament books?
- Here is a chart showing the major events of Paul's life from the book of Acts, along with the dates they happened and the letters he wrote.
- At the time he wrote his letter to the church at Rome, Paul had never been there. So who founded the church?
- Even though the church in Rome was founded by converted Jews, it ended up being a Gentile church.
- One of the major issues Paul deals with in Romans concerns the tension between law and freedom, which was a big point of disagreement between Jews and Gentiles.
- Does Paul encourage us to worship or serve God in a certain way, or is there more to it than that?
- Why did Paul speak so highly of governments in Romans 13:1-7, even though the Roman authorities eventually put him to death?
- What happened to Paul during the last few years of his life?

Dates for When the Books of the New Testament Were Written

Even though the book of James appears near the end of the New Testament, it was one of the earliest written. Here is a chart showing when the books of the New Testament were probably written.

Written around the year 50

James
Mark

50/51 – 53/54

Galatians
1 and 2 Thessalonians

53/54 – 57/58

1 and 2 Corinthians
Romans

60/61 – 63

Colossians
Philemon
Ephesians
Philippians

63-67

1 and 1 Peter
Matthew
Luke
Acts
1 Timothy
Titus
2 Timothy
Jude

67-96

Hebrews
Gospel of John
1, 2, and 3 John
Revelation

A Chronology of Paul's Life From the Book of Acts

Book of Acts	Activity	Date	Letter Written
9:1-9	Conversion	34-35	
9:26-29	Visit to Jerusalem	37-38	
11:27-30	Second visit to Jerusalem	48-50	
13-14	First Missionary Journey (Cyprus and Galatia)	50	Galatians
15	Jerusalem Council	51-53	
16:1-18:22	Second Missionary Journey (Galatia, Macedonia, Greece)	51-53	1, 2 Thessalonians
18:23-21:4	Third Missionary Journey (Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece)	54-57	1, 2 Corinthians Romans
21:15-26:32	Arrest in Jerusalem, trials and imprisonment in Caesarea	58-60	
27-28	Voyage to Rome; Roman imprisonment	61-63	Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon
	Release from prison, further work	64-66	1 Timothy Titus
	Final imprisonment and death.	67	2 Timothy

Who Founded the Church in Rome?

We know that Paul did not found the church in Rome, and neither did the apostle Peter. So how did the church get started? The book of Acts gives us a clue. Fifty days after Jesus ascended into heaven, the day of Pentecost was celebrated in Jerusalem. This annual feast routinely attracted Jews from throughout the Mediterranean world, including "visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism)." We know that on this particular day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon all believers in power (Acts 2:1-4). Peter then preached a powerful sermon, resulting in the conversion of more than 3,000 (Acts 2:14-42). It's likely that some of the Roman visitors were converted, and they were the ones who went back home and started the church.

Passages in Romans That Show the Church Was Predominantly Gentile

- 1:5-6 – Here Paul writes, “Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them...”
- 1:13 – “...I want to work among you and see good results, just as I have done among other Gentiles.”
- 11:13 – “I am saying all of this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles.”
- 15:15-16 – “For I am, by God’s grace, a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles.”

The Theological Tension between Law and Freedom

Among the church in Rome were the Jewish Christians who believed that all converts to Christianity should observe the Jewish law (including circumcision). The Gentile Christians favored “law-free” Gospel. John R.W. Stott speculates that this conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians could have been at the root of the “disturbances” made by the Jews in Rome that led to their expulsion by Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49. Whether or not this was the reason, the Jews—including Jewish Christians—had to leave Rome and were not able to return until after Claudius’ death in 54.

They were not in the minority, but the conflict continued. The Jewish Christians saw themselves as privileged and the law as necessary, while the Gentile Christians were strong advocates of a law-free Gospel. Stott sums it up this way: “This the Jewish Christians were proud of their favored status, and the Gentile Christians of their freedom, so that Paul saw the need to humble them both.”

What Paul Means by “Worship” in Romans 12:1

The NIV translates Romans 12:2 like this: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship.” In the NIV, the word “spiritual” could also be translated “reasonable” or “rational.” The worship God wants from us goes beyond what we do on the weekend in church. He wants us to worship in every day of our lives with a complete understanding of what God has done for us and what He wants us to do. This attitude won’t come simply by flicking on a “worship” switch at church. We need to allow God to transform us into new people by changing the way we think. “Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is (Romans 12:2).

We should consider every part of our lives—whether it’s at home or on the job—as opportunities to serve and worship God. The idea that you divide your life into two compartments—sacred and secular—goes against God’s plan. We need to live our entire lives before God every day.

Paul and Government

In Romans 13 Paul urges believers to obey the government. Was he naïve about the potential for governments to oppress people, or did he have something else in mind?

Even though the Roman government was at times cruel and oppressive, Paul’s experience with the authorities was very positive. He used his own Roman citizenship to prevent a severe beating (Acts 22:24-30), and later when the authorities uncovered a plot hatched by the Jewish leaders to kill Paul, a Roman commander gave Paul full protection (Acts 23:12-35).

At the same time, Paul was well aware of the potential for governments to be corrupt and unjust. What Paul is doing in Romans 13 is describing how governments *are supposed to function*. *God has ordained governments to protect and serve its citizens, and we as citizens are required to submit to those in authority over us.*

The Final Years of Paul's Life

Paul was imprisoned in Rome the first time from A.D. 61 to 63. During this time he wrote the "prison" Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul was released just before Rome was burned, probably at the instigation of Nero, who subsequently blamed the Christians and unleashed a time of intense persecution.

By God's sovereign grace, Paul was free during this time. He traveled to Ephesus and Macedonia, and may have gone as far as Spain. He also wrote his first letter to Timothy and his letter to Titus.

Paul was arrested once again in 67. During this time he wrote his second letter to Timothy, a poignant "last will and testament" that includes this classic passage:

- *As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return (2 Timothy 4:6-8).*

Not long after he wrote these words, Paul was judged guilty of crimes against the Emperor and condemned to death. Paul was beheaded on the order of Nero in 67.