

As the capital of the great Roman empire, Rome was the center of the world that was known to the people of the New Testament. It is fitting that Paul's epistle to the Romans occupies a central place in his writings. Just as the Romans were systematic engineers, soldiers, and lawmakers, the book of Romans presents the most systematic exposition of Christian belief in the Bible,

We know from the first chapter that Paul wrote to the Romans before he ever visited them. Most scholars date the letter around 57 AD and believe that it was written from Corinth. Its audience was a mix of Jewish and Gentile Christians. Jews were well established in Rome at this time, numbering in the thousands and meeting in as many as eleven synagogues. Although most Romans looked down on the Jews as outsiders, presumptuous in proclaiming a unique God, some admired them. For example, the early Romans had forbidden making images of gods, so the Jewish rejection of idolatry seemed a return to a purer religion.

The rampant materialism and immorality that corrupted Rome as her empire expanded made many despair of finding righteousness through their empty civic rituals in the various temples that dotted the city. Much of the Roman world was ripe for the arguments put forth by Paul in Athens: “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything … The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed” (Acts 17:24-25, 30-31). Who could stand before that Man? Those for whom He had shed His own blood, so they might have “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Rom. 3:22).

Ironside points out that Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews are the three books that cite the verse, “**The just shall live by faith**” (Hab. 2:4). Each book develops a portion of this crucial verse:

Romans tells how a sinner can be made just.

Galatians assures us that we live by same faith with which were justified, not by added works.

Hebrews proves that faith in Christ is better than all that came before, and even the patriarchs were justified by faith.

We can see three main sections as we study Romans:

Doctrinal (Chapter 1-8): The righteousness of God revealed to all men in the gospel

Dispensational (Chapters 9-11): The righteousness of God harmonized with the history of Israel

Practical (Chapters 12-16): The righteousness of God displayed in the believer

As you study Romans, note the parallels and contrasts with the book of Hebrews.

Questions:

1. How was Paul a servant, or slave, of Christ Jesus? Am I one too?
2. Paul says he was set apart, or separated, for the gospel. What was he separated from?

3. What are some scriptures where the gospel had been promised?
4. Two claims are made for Jesus as a son: One for His human birthright and one His spiritual. Why are they both important?
5. How did Paul receive apostleship? Is that possible for someone today?
6. Is verse 7 an appeal for more saintly living? Explain.
7. Is Romans written to a single assembly like other epistles?
8. In verse 8, Paul characteristically commends his readers, in this case for their faith. Why would the Romans' faith be known through the whole world?
9. Verse 10 describes a duty so important the Paul invokes God as a witness that he has complied. What is the duty?
10. What does Paul mean by the spiritual gift in verse 11? What "harvest" does he hope to get in return?
11. What is Paul's obligation, or debt, in verse 14 and how might a trip to Rome help fulfill it?