

# INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

November 11, 1986

- I. The church in Rome. At an early stage in his missionary labors Paul recognized the importance of the strategic centers for the propagation of the gospel, and Rome, the metropolis of the world, was an obvious choice. Although he did not himself found it, he considered this church a part of his field as apostle to the gentiles.
  - A. The origin of the church. On this subject we know virtually nothing for certain, but there are some indications which suggest a possible reconstruction. Paul had never visited the church at the time of writing the epistle and it seems that by the time of writing it had become fairly well established. The data available is as follows:
    1. It is almost certain that no apostle founded it as:
      - a. Paul claims in Rom.15:20 that he did not build on another man's foundation, and yet he regards the Roman church as within his own canon.
      - b. The claim that Peter founded it is brought under serious suspicion by the fact Peter was still in Jerusalem at the time of the council (49AD), whereas it is almost certain that a church existed in Rome prior to this. (This is admitted by the Roman Catholic scholar A. Wikenhauser in his New Testament Introduction, 1958, p. 399.)
      - c. Suetonius records that Claudius banished Jews from Rome in 49AD because there had been rioting at the instigation of one called Chrestus. While this may not be Christ, there is a strong possibility that Christians were involved in the matter.
    2. There is no reference in this epistle to Peter, and it is difficult to imagine that Paul could have written as he did if Peter had in fact founded the church. This inference is further supported by the fact that Priscilla and Aquila, who came from Rome, were already Christians when they arrived at Corinth and became companions of Paul. If so, the church existed before 49AD, since Priscilla and Aquila were banished under the edict of Claudius. But this date is before Peter moved from Jerusalem.
    3. There is mention in Act.2:10 of visiting Jews and proselytes from Rome who were among the crowds and may well have been among those converted on the day of Pentecost. Could these have been founders of the church? To maintain that a church of believers could not have come into being without apostolic agency is not only unhistorical (e.g. the church at Pisidian Antioch), but denies the work of the Holy Spirit. Christian travelers would bring to Rome accounts of apostolic preaching and teaching.
    4. Early external evidence connects the names of both Peter and Paul with Rome. Clement of Rome suggests that they both were martyred there. By the time of Tertullian, the tradition of a double martyrdom was generally accepted. There is a strong possibility that this tradition is correct, but it tells us nothing about the origin of the church at Rome.
  - B. The composition of the church.
    1. In Rom.1:5ff, Paul includes the readers among the gentiles to whom he has been particularly sent, while in 1:12-14 he compares them with the other gentiles.
    2. In Rom.11:13, the apostle says "*I speak to you Gentiles,*" and it cannot easily be maintained that a minority is here being addressed in view of 11:28-31, where the readers are said to have obtained mercy through Jewish unbelief.
    3. In Rom.15:16, the apostle particularly appeals to his commission among the gentiles, which would clearly have less weight if directed mainly to Jews.
    4. From the evidence of 1 Clement 6:1 and Tacitus (Annals, XV, 44) it would seem the church was of considerable size by the time of the Nero's persecutions.

## II. Occasion and date.

### A. The data for fixing the occasion for the writing of Romans.

1. Paul had been intending to visit the church, but had been prevented (15:21ff; 1:13). His

purpose was to preach the gospel among them and to impart some spiritual gift (1:11,15).

2. He had just completed his collection for the poverty stricken believers at Jerusalem (15:25) after having proclaimed the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricium. He was intent on going to Jerusalem. This would identify the occasion with Act.20:1ff, and date the epistle in the year after Paul left Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Paul was in Greece at the time of writing.
3. This conclusion is confirmed by the commendation of Phoebe (16:1,2) who belonged to the Church of Cenchrea, the port of Corinth; the greeting of Gaius (16:23), Paul's host at the time, who is probably the same Gaius mentioned in 1Cor.1:14; the greeting of Erastus, who held the important post of City Treasurer (16:23); and the mention of Timothy and Sopater as sending greetings, since these were Paul's companions when he left Greece on his last journey to Jerusalem.

#### B. The date for Romans.

1. It was written during Paul's stay of three months at Corinth.
2. Working from Gallio's appointment to the proconsular office at Corinth, it is possible to calculate that Paul's departure from Corinth on his third missionary journey took place around February of 57AD
3. Consequently, the epistle was written between Nov.56 and Feb.57AD.

### III. Purpose. (Why was this letter written at all? And why should this letter take the particular form and have the particular emphasis that we find in it?)

#### A. Paul's immediate purpose is to create interest in his ministry in the West, including Rome and beyond (Spanish mission).

1. In the opening up of a new field it would be of great advantage to have the cooperation of the Roman church, which might become to him in the West what Antioch had been to him in the East.
2. This well-rounded statement of the message of the gospel would prepare them for his future ministry.

#### B. Paul recognized a need to present an apologetic and digest of the gospel as he had been proclaiming it to various groups, including the practical application of doctrine to various aspects of life in the church and in the world.

### IV. Characteristics.

The lengthy introduction is explained by the fact he was unacquainted with the church personally.

- A. The conclusion of the letter contains the names of a large number of people, and there appear to be two endings.
- B. The main body of the letter resembles more that of a treatise than a letter.
- C. Extensive use is made of the Old Testament, either by direct quotation or use of its terminology (there are more quotations from the OT than all other epistles combined).
- D. The doctrinal discussion proceeds in the fashion of a debate as though Paul had before him one who took issue with this position.
- E. The formal and placid spirit of Romans stands in contrast to the informal and polemic character of Galatians, with which it has considerable affinity in content.
- F. The vocabulary of Romans is rich in theological terms.

### V. Outline of contents.

- A. Salutation and introduction, 1:1-15.
- B. Theme, 1:16,17.
- C. The universality of sin and condemnation, 1:18-3:20.
  1. As respects the gentiles, 1:18-32.
  2. As respects the Jews, 2:1-16.

3. The aggravation of the Jew's condemnation, 2:17-29.
  4. The anticipation of the Jew's objections, 3:1-8.
  5. The condemnation of the whole world, 3:9-20.
- D. The righteousness of God in justification, 3:2-15:21.
  - E. The righteousness of God in experiential sanctification, 6:1-8:39.
  - F. The problem of Israel's unbelief resolved, 9:1-10:21.
  - G. The restoration of Israel, 11:1-36.
  - H. The Christian way of life, 12:1-15:36.
  - I. Greetings and conclusion, 16:1-27.