

# Background introduction to romans

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Out of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, fourteen are attributed to the apostle Paul. The Roman is the longest and most widely acknowledged as the best of his epistles. Paul follows the prevalent custom of identifying himself at the very beginning, in the very first line of Romans: Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called [to be] an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, [Rom1: 1].

It is mature and contained in tone, being the last of the epistles believed to have been written by him. Named after its addressees, the Romans was meant for the believers in Rome " God's beloved in Rome" [Rom1: 7], who were part of an established branch of an early church, where Paul already had known acquaintances. Written in A. D. 56-58, in Corinth, [Unger, 1959] Paul sought to address an audience of predominantly Greek and gentile followers, in a time when Christianity was still emerging from its origins in Judaism.

The period it was written in can be easily and accurately verified in that it has dated mentions of the apostle's sojourns to Jerusalem on philanthropic missions [Rom15: 25], and repeated references of this particular epistle in Corinthian, which was written around the A. D. 57. The venue of authorship is proven beyond doubt as well:

" Numerous instances in the Corinthian epistles point to the fact that the epistle to the Romans was written from Corinth not long after Paul penned 2 Corinthians, that is, A. D. 56". [Unger, 1959]

Through this gospel, Paul tried to reach out to the church in Rome that he had not visited so far, and attempted to establish a connection by praising the inmates and referring to his old acquaintances. This epistle is not meant to be a comment on an existing situation, like the one addressed to the  
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Corinthians. It broadly engages in topics pertaining to theology, and its message can be found in the line:

" The Gospel . . . is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith" [Rom1: 16-17].

The faithful in those years were separated by long distances, and were more or less disparate communities being touched upon and gradually consolidated by the teachings of the apostles: the second coming of Christ was seen as imminent, hence dispensing with the need to commit His teachings to the written word. The Romans was possibly the first text that documented the doctrine of Christianity in clearly defined terms, and related the New Testament to the Old as one fulfilling the prophecy of the other [Coffman, 1983-99]. The purpose behind authoring this significant gospel was clearly a vigorous affirmation in faith as the only means of salvation, and a call for the various groups to unite in this belief.

The predominant discourse of Romans comes across in the four doctrines. First is the Atonement of Christ, which discusses the aims behind atonement of sins and creates a contrast and comparison between the teachings of Christ and the commandments of Moses followed by the Doctrine of Justification, where personal integrity is paramount. The third is the Doctrine of Joint Heirship with Christ which promises the glory of the heavenly kingdom to all those who achieve exaltation, and finally, the Doctrine of Election, where the sinners who are damned have the eternal promise of being chosen to be saved.

The Romans is thus a gospel that defined the general laws of Christianity as they are meant to be followed by the believers to this day. It is an

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undiminished, ageless voice, recorded on the pages of time, by one of the foremost proponents of the Christian faith.

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