INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ROMANS

AUTHOR: Paul.  {ref. Rom. 1:1}

After centuries of scholarly study of the New Testament, no serious question has been raised regarding the letter’s human authorship.  Paul identified himself as the writer in the first verse. Furthermore, a fair amount of personal information appears in the letter that points to Paul’s life and ministry {1:13, 11:1; 15:14-32}.

In 16:22, a coworker of Paul named Tertius described himself as the one “who wrote this letter”. This should be understood to mean that Tertius served as Paul’s scribe, the letter’s content came from Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and Tertius wrote down what Paul said. This was not only common practice for Paul, but also many others during this time.

Note that as Peter was the apostle to the Jews, Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles {ref. Acts 9:15; 13:46; Rom. 11:13}.  Paul’s conversion to Christianity is recorded in Acts 9:1-22.

DATE & PLACE OF WRITING:

A.D. 56-58.  Many New Testament historians agree that Paul wrote Romans near the end of his third missionary journey. During that time frame, Paul spent time in Ephesus (see Acts 19:8, 10), Macedonia and Achaia (ref. Acts 19:21; 20:1), and Greece (ref. Acts 20:3). Because of his plans to visit with the Corinthian church in Greece (ref. 1 Cor. 16:5-6), Corinth¹ is the most likely place where Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans. The exact date of writing is difficult to pin down, but most conservative scholars settle on a date sometime around A.D. 56 or 57.

The following scriptures confirm that Paul wrote this letter from Corinth:

\[\text{Acts 18:1-2; 20:1-4} \Leftrightarrow \text{Romans 16:1, 3} \\
\text{[1 Cor. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:19-20]} \Leftrightarrow \text{Romans 16:23.}\]

OCCASION & PURPOSE:

The apostle planned to leave Greece and go to Palestine with the collection he had gathered from the Gentile churches. Paul wanted this collection to be presented to the poor saints at Jerusalem by him personally along with representatives from the Gentile churches. He felt that this gesture by the Gentiles would show their love for their Christian brothers in Palestine and demonstrate the unity of the church. He then intended to go to Rome. From Rome he wanted to go to Spain. Before Paul turned his back for a time on his westerly goals, he penned this mighty letter to the Romans and sent it westward.

What kind of writing is Romans?  Is it a doctrinal treatise or a textbook on systematic theology?  We know that Paul was writing to a group (or groups) of believers in Rome. The fact that it expresses powerful, profound yet sublime thoughts about God does not invalidate the classification of this book as a letter. The personal nature of this book is evidenced by the fact that Paul had prayed for the readers unceasingly {1:9-10} and longed to have fellowship with them {1:11}.  He wanted them to pray for him because of the dangers that threatened {15:30-32}.

¹ Cenchrea (sen'kre-a; "millet").  The eastern harbor of Corinth, the modern name of which is still Kenchreae, although the popular name is Kikries.  It is about eight miles from Corinth.  Paul once sailed from this port <Acts 18:18>.  He also makes reference in <Rom. 16:1> to the church established there.
Paul's thoughts are developed logically, but he surely does not try to develop all of his doctrinal teaching [e.g., the Second Coming of Christ, the Rapture and the coming Man of Sin]. Nor is Romans a controversial essay—a polemic for Pauline Christianity contrasted with Jewish Christianity. The [unity] and [oneness] of believers is central in the metaphor of the olive tree in found in chapter 11.

Hence the book of Romans is not a doctrinal treatise or a textbook of systematic theology, but a personal letter which contains profound doctrinal truths expounding on the foundational principles of the Christian faith. [ref. MAJOR THEMES].

Paul wrote this letter under the Spirit's inspiration, but what prompted Paul to write Romans? What did he hope to accomplish in the letter? In Rom. 15:23-24 Paul acknowledged that he had long desired to visit with believers who lived in the Empire's capital city. He now felt his missionary work throughout Asia Minor and Macedonia was at the point that he could look farther westward toward Italy and Spain. He had one responsibility yet to fulfill, that of helping to deliver a relief offering to the Christians in Jerusalem (ref. 15:25). After that, Paul planned to visit Rome, to encourage the believers, to evangelize, and then to make his way to Spain. (His journey to Rome would not happen exactly as Paul envisioned it, but he would get there.)

The apostle hoped to accomplish several things in his letter. First, he wanted to introduce himself. Second he desired to expound clearly the Gospel that he proclaimed. Third, he hoped to pave the way for Christian unity among Jewish believers and Gentile believers. Finally he wanted to encourage and instruct the believers in Rome about living a distinctively Christian lifestyle.

Summary:

Paul was writing to proclaim the Gospel, a message built on the foundation of the Law and Prophets in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the Person and work of the LORD Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote the most thorough explanation of the Gospel found anywhere in the Bible, leaving a priceless document for all generations to use.

Because the book of Romans is so heavily packed with Christian doctrine and theology, it has been referred to as the “Christian Magna-Charta” and the “Constitution of the Christian Faith”.

Note that the book of Romans has similarities to the book of Galatians and Hebrews but discusses the major Christian doctrinal themes in much greater detail.
MAJOR THEMES:

Paul’s major themes in his letter to the Roman Christians define classic Christian doctrine and theology and include:

- The sovereignty of the LORD
- God’s Holiness
- The nature of man
- The source of rejection of the Truth
- The universality of sin
- The righteousness of God
- The work of the Holy Spirit
- The basis of Salvation: The blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ
- Justification through faith by grace alone & not works
- The role of the Law
- The place of Israel in God’s plans
- Christian challenge of living in a pagan environment
- Christian unity & concern for others

KEY PASSAGES:


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OUTLINES:

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I. Introduction, Salutation and Greeting (1:1-15)
II. Doctrinal Exposition (1:16-8:39)
   A. The Major Theme (1:16-17)
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IV. Practical Exhortation (12:1-15:13)
   A. The Christian & Consecration (12:1-2)
   B. The Christian & Spiritual Gifts (12:3-8)
   C. The Christian & Fellowship (12:9-16)
   D. The Christian & Mankind (12:17-21)
V. Conclusion (15:14-16:27)

Outline of Romans (from Foundations For Our Faith, Adrian Rodgers)

I. The Sin of Mankind [Chap. 1-3]
II. The Salvation of God [Chap. 4-6]
III. The Sanctification of Man [Chap. 7,8]
IV. The Sovereignty of God [Chap. 9-11]
V. Our Sacrifice to God [Chap. 12]
VI. Our Service to God [Chap. 13-16]

Brief Outline from Explore the Bible Adult Leader Guide: Romans; Fall © 2011 Lifeway Christian Resources.

I. Introduction (1:1-17)
II. The Gospel for All Without Distinction (1:18-8:39)
III. The Place of Rebellious Israel (9:1-11:36)
IV. The Challenge of Transformed Christian Living (12:1-15:13)
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   B. Paul’s Plans for Traveling 15:22-33
   C. Paul’s Praise and Greetings 16:1-27

Bibliography
(4) Barnes Notes.
(5) Thru the Bible Commentary: The Epistles (2 & 3 John, Jude); J. Vernon McGee, Thomas Nelson; Nashville. ©1991.
(8) Explore the Bible Adult Leader Guide: Romans; Lifeway Christian Resources. © 2011 Fall edition.