

# **BOOK OF ROMANS**

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The book of Romans was written by Paul. Some say it was written in the year 56, some say 57 and some say 58. I tend to support the year 57. The exact date is not really that important to understanding the historic context that influenced its writing.

To truly understand the context of the letter we must go clear back to 19AD. Tiberius banished all Jews from Rome in 19AD. Outside of Rome in the rest of Italy the banishment was used only as a convenience or a way to extort money from Jewish businesses. In 49AD Claudius brutally enforced the ban in all of Italy. This banishment lasted until 55AD. Therefore, up until 55AD the Christian church in Rome was made up of primarily Gentile believers. Only Jews who had taken Roman names or were Roman citizens could have remained in Rome. In this time the church grew and leaders were established from its mostly Gentile membership. In early 55AD the Jewish expulsion ended and Jews started drifting back in to Rome. With the return of the Jewish Christian believers to the Roman Christian church also came the influence of the “Mosaic Law”. The “circumcision group” had entered the picture, conflict was brewing. Paul was aware of the friction in the Roman Christian church and had long desired to go to Rome to address the believers there. The problems in the Roman church were not unique to the Roman church and Paul had faced the same difficulties in churches everywhere he went.

Paul most likely was in Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey when he wrote the epistle to the Romans. By this time Paul had spent 22 years preaching the Gospel of Grace. He had experienced every kind of resistance to, and perversion of, the Gospel given him by Christ. Paul had previously written Galatians, the Thessalonian letters and first and second Corinthians. None of the Gospels of Luke, Mark, Matthew or John (in chronological order) had been written yet. Therefore, the thoughts and concepts of the Romans letter are the original thoughts of Paul, influenced only by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

It is clear in the opening of the Romans letter that Paul intended to visit the Roman church. But first he had to visit Jerusalem.

I believe the epistle to the Roman church was the culmination of three years of inspiration from Christ and 22 years of preaching the Gospel of Grace. It was time for Paul to present, in writing, the most precise definition of what a Christian is, what a Christian should believe and how a Christian should live. This letter was written to a church in conflict, BUT it was intended to all Christians in all times. This is the greatest of Paul’s written works.

In chapters 1 through 8 Paul lays down the truth of salvation through Christ. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 seem to be a parenthetical insertion of a special message. Then chapters 12 through 16 are a continuation from chapter 8.

Chapter 9 is a brief assessment of past relationships between the God and the Jew. Chapter 10, “the Jew from the first century to now” is primarily addressed to the Jews in Christ but is also of interest to the Gentiles. The future of the “Remnant of Israel” is the subject of chapter 11.

**SUMMATION:** There are three things that are of critical importance in understanding God’s message in Paul’s writings. First you must know the writer. Then you need to understand the different cultures he was writing to. Finally, what was going on in the world they were living in when he was writing? Keep in mind as you read Romans you are reading the very first, all-inclusive, written, catechism of the Christian faith. I hope that by understanding people and times you can find a deeper understanding of ROMANS. By Walter Cates 12/17/2019