

# The Book of Romans

(ΠΡΟΣ ΡΩΜΑΙΟΥΣ)

A photograph of ancient Roman ruins, featuring several tall, fluted columns and stone walls. The scene is set against a bright, golden sunset sky, with the sun low on the horizon to the right. The foreground shows the ground with some scattered stones and debris.

Background  
and  
Theme

# Luther on Romans

*“This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest Gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it everyday, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.”*

*“In this epistle we thus find most abundantly the things that a Christian ought to know, namely, what is law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross; and also how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, be he righteous or a sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe—and even toward our own selves” (LW 35:380).*



# Background

It is historically natural and fitting that the Letter to the Romans has always been of special interest and import to Western Christendom. With this letter, St. Paul is looking westward and he hopes of coming to Rome of which he had been cherishing "*for many years*" (15:23).



Paul met Aquila and Priscilla as early as A.D. 50. An edict of Emperor Claudius banishing all Jews from Rome had brought them, destined to be so dear and so valuable to Paul, to Corinth, where Paul was then beginning his work.



# Background





# Background

They could tell him of the church (or, more accurately, churches) in that key city of the empire, its life, its problems, and its possibilities, especially its possibilities as a missionary center for the western part of the Roman Empire. It was this last point that was no doubt of greatest interest to Paul, whose missionary strategy had as its chief object the founding of churches in the key cities of the empire. That strategy had carried him from Antioch to Corinth and Ephesus.



# The Occasion of the Letter

It was probably in late summer A.D. 55, when Paul was about to conclude his work at Ephesus and was about to return to

Jerusalem with the offering gathered among the Gentiles for the poverty-stricken saints of Jerusalem, that Paul gave expression to his long cherished hope of going to Rome: **"After I have been there [Jerusalem], I must also see Rome"** (Acts 19:21).



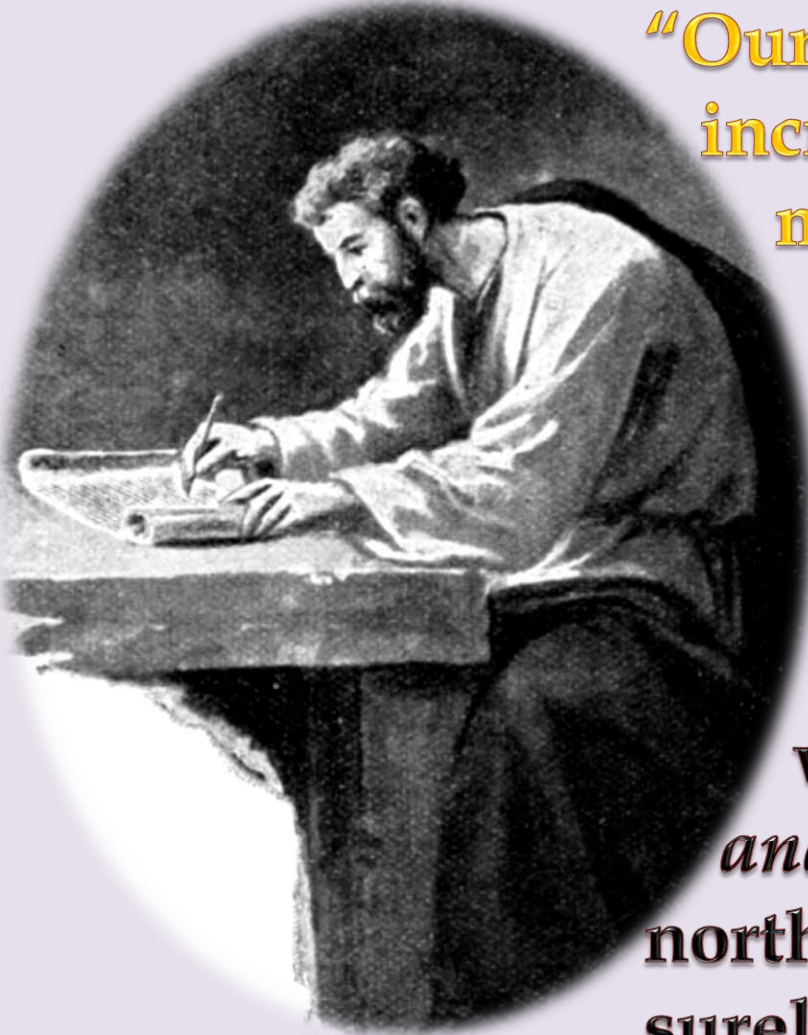


# The Occasion of the Letter

He spoke of that hope again when he wrote to the Corinthians from Macedonia a few weeks later:

**"Our hope is that as your faith increases, our field among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you"** (2 Cor. 10:15-16).

*"Lands beyond you"* — this expression coming from a man who had been working his way westward *"from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum"* in northwestern Greece. Romans 15:19 surely points to the West.

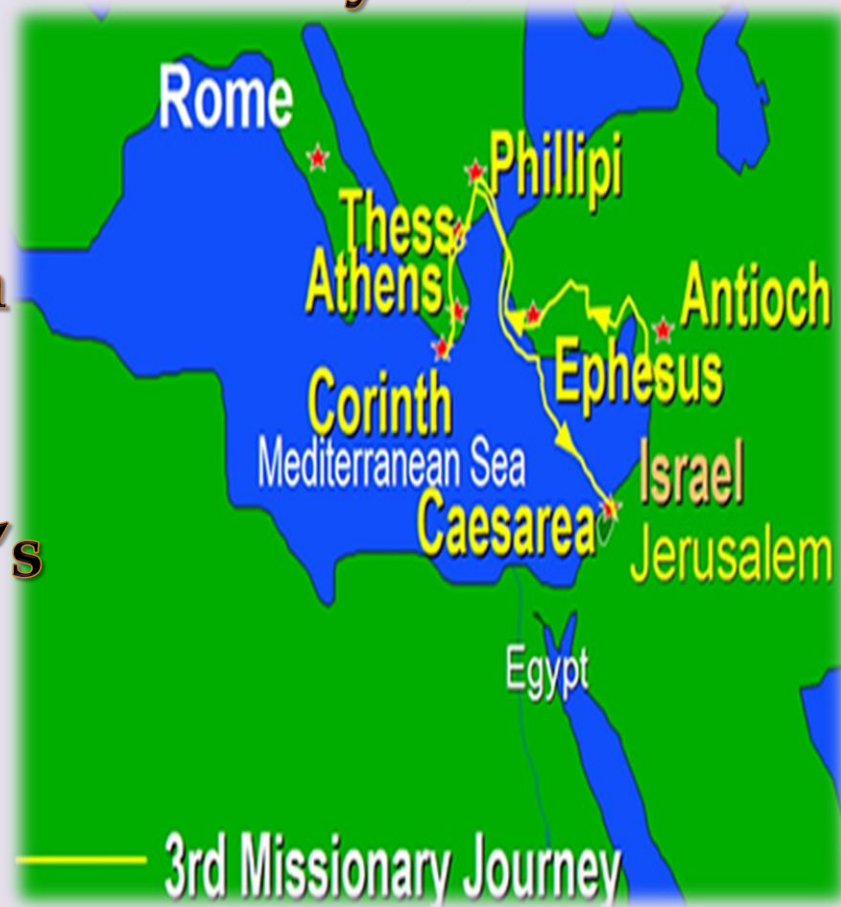




# The Occasion of the Letter

The letter itself enables us to fix the time of its writing. Paul is about to conclude his work in the East, so that he no longer has *“any room for work in these regions”* between Jerusalem and Illyricum (Rom. 15:23; cf. 15:19).

He is about to go to Jerusalem with the collection gathered in Macedonia and Achaia (Rom. 15:25–27; cf. 2 Cor. 8, 9). All this points to the close of Paul's third missionary journey and the winter of A.D. 55–56.

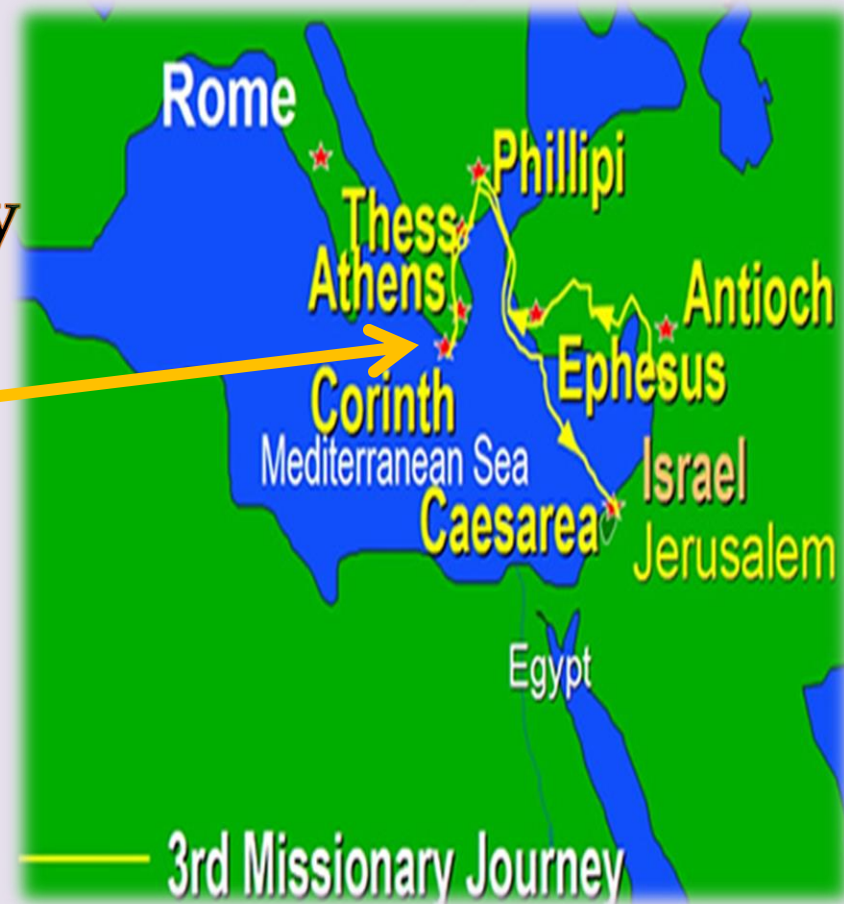




# The Occasion of the Letter

The place of writing is fairly certain also. Paul spent three months in southern Greece at the close of his third missionary journey.

He had promised the Corinthians that he would stay with them or *“even spend the winter”* with them (1 Cor. 16:6). Corinth would, therefore, seem to be the most likely place of writing.



# The Occasion of the Letter

This is confirmed by three notices in the letter. In 16:23, Paul sends greeting from *“Erastus, the city treasurer”*; Erastus is associated with Corinth in 2 Tim. 4:20, and an inscription found at Corinth mentions an Erastus as a city official there.

In Rom. 16:1, Paul commends to the brethren a woman named Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, the eastern harbor town of Corinth (*she is possibly the bearer of the Letter to the Romans*).

Again, in Rom. 16:23, Paul mentions Gaius as his host and transmits his greetings to the Romans. A Gaius was a member of the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14); but since Gaius was a very common Roman name, this is not a particularly weighty piece of evidence.



# *The Purpose of the Letter*

His purpose in writing is clearly stated in the letter itself; to prepare for his visit to Rome. Yet, Rome is not his ultimate goal. St. Paul has made it his ambition as an apostle to the Gentiles *“...to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named,”* lest he *“build on another man’s foundation”* (Rom. 15:20). His task is to lay foundations, not to build on foundations already laid by others (1 Cor. 3:10). The foundation has long been laid in Rome. So his language in Romans indicates that the church there had been in existence for some time; the faith of the Roman Christians is already being proclaimed *“in all the world”* (1:8); their obedience is known to all (16:19); and Paul has longed for many years to go to them (15:23).

# *The Purpose of the Letter*



Non-Christian sources indicate that there was a church in Rome as early as A.D. 49 and perhaps earlier. Paul, nor any other early source, points to any single person as

the founder of the Roman church; Christianity may have come to Rome through the agency of a number of nameless men such as the “*...visitors from Rome...*” who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:10) and, returning to Rome, brought with them the Word of God “*...sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ*” (Acts 10:36).



# *The Purpose of the Letter*

The “...*visitors from Rome*...” present at Pentecost were most likely Jews, and the church at Rome was no doubt strongly Jewish in its beginnings. At the time when St. Paul wrote to them, the church was no longer chiefly Jewish; indeed, Paul speaks of it and to it as basically a Gentile church (1:13-15; cf. 1:5-6; 11:13, 28-31). However, there remained in it, no doubt, a strong Jewish-Christian element. The presence of this element helps explain why Paul in this letter expounds the LORD’S Gospel by setting it in contrast to Judaism (the works of the Law, circumcision, descent from Abraham) and why he speaks at such length (chaps. 9–11) of the relationship between old Israel and the new Israel, the Church!



# *The Purpose of the Letter*

Paul plans to spend some time in Rome to enrich and be enriched by his association with the Roman saints and to proclaim the Gospel there (1:11-13; 15:24). But he is looking beyond Rome to Spain (15:24-28). Paul hopes to be “...*to be helped on my way...*” there by the Romans (15:24). The expression “...*to be helped on my way...*” (Gr: προπεμφθῆναι) seems to have become almost technical for the support, both moral and material, given to missionaries by established churches or individual Christians (Acts 15: 3; 20:38; 21:5; 1 Cor. 16:6, 11; 2 Cor. 1:16; Titus 3:13; 3 John 6). Paul evidently hopes that Rome may become his missionary base in the West; as Syrian Antioch had been for him in the East.



# *The Purpose of the Letter*

Everything that we know of St. Paul's preaching and methods (i.e., his practice of revisiting established churches and his continued contact with them by letter or via emissaries) makes it clear that he did not aim at creating a vague, emotional, and enthusiastic movement; but, rather, the firmly rooted, grounded, and established Church of Jesus Christ in which the Word of Christ dwelt richly. What he looked for and strove for in the Roman church, which was to be his base in the West, was that it had a full and thorough understanding of the Holy Gospel.



# Before We Begin:

The “*Righteousness of God*” is God’s end-time saving action in Christ Jesus that has resulted in a changed status: This changed status for sinners is a legal status grounded in God’s action in His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus, the Christ! And this saving action is being revealed in the Gospel. This Gospel, St. Paul calls the “*power of God*” since by its very declaration, God claims His people. Therefore, justification is the content of the Gospel, and not only a consequence of it. The “*Righteousness of God*” and the “*Gospel*” are not abstract ideas or concepts, but realities that are tangible and personal in Jesus Christ.



# Before We Begin:



*justification*

SO

LET'S DO THIIIIIIIIIIIIIS

Next Week:  
Romans  
1:1-15

