

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

AN INTRODUCTION

1. THE LETTER IS ASIAN, NOT WESTERN

Paul's Letter to the Romans is based on his letter to the Galatians, Galatia being an Asian province of Rome.

We find the same for the Letter to the Colossians, another Asian city, providing the first draft for the letter to the Ephesians, another city of Asia. Seven letters in all are addressed to the seven Churches of Asia (Revelation 1-3).

Each of these letters must be understood from an Eastern and Asian point of view, and not put such an emphasis upon them, as theologians tend to do, from a Greek or Roman point of view.

The Bible is an Eastern book. Eden was in Asia; Babylon, the symbol of anti-God and anti-Christ, is Eastern (Iraq). The Holy Land is in West Asia. Christ was an Asian, and an Easterner. The three large monotheistic religions all come from Asia - the religion of Abraham, the father of the Jews, the religion of Jesus Christ, and the religion of Mohammed, the founder of Islam. There are other world religions - all Asian, all from the East - the religion of Zoroaster (Persia), the religion of Confucius (China), the religion of Hinduism (India), and the religion of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha (Enlightened one) of North India.

Whatever the Western world considers as elements of its religion which have made its nations great, actually all have come from Asia, from the East - for good or ill!

America, the most virile and one of the more recent, of the Western nations, has produced several of its own religions in the last century and a half - Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, the Church of Scientology - but none has made such an impact on world history that the great Asian religions have made.

The Apostle Paul thought as an Asian, and acted as an Asian. He spoke Greek fluently, and he was a Roman citizen; but he was a Jew through and through, and he thought as an Easterner. All his Christian instincts took him first to Asia. The First Missionary Journey, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, was entirely among Asians, and the Second Missionary journey began in Asia, then, on the divine command, passed over to Europe.

Nine of Paul's friends, who are mentioned in Romans Chapter 16, were Asians:

Priscilla and Aquila (Christian Jews) (3)
Andronicus and Junia (kinsmen) (7)
Herodian (kinsman) (11)
Timothy (from Lystra) in Asia (21)
Lucius, Jason, Sosipater (kinsmen) (21)

2. THERE ARE TWO GREAT AND MAJOR THEMES IN ROMAN.

These two themes are at the heart of the gospel message. The Letter to the Romans presents us with the gospel according to Paul. The word 'gospel' occurs 10 times in Romans:

1:1, 9, 16; 2:16; 10:16; 11:28; 15:16, 19, 29; 16:25

(1) Paul was very angry that other gospels were being preached (Galatians 1:6-8)

(2) Paul rejected the Jewish belief in the Law and good works to make a man right with God.

(Galatians 3:1-3)

(3) Paul longed to bring the gospel to Rome, for it had been revealed to him by Christ.

(Romans 1:15; 15:20)

(4) What he preached was his very own gospel, and he believed in it with all his heart.

(2:16; 16:25)

The two great themes in Romans are these:

1. How can sinners be made right with God? (Job 11:2) To answer this very difficult question, Paul went back to father Abraham, the founder of his race and his religion. (See chapter 4:1)

2. The mighty theme of God's election - God's choosing - of men and women according to his will, and not man's will. Salvation is based on his grace, not on our works. This theme is found throughout the Bible, and all Jews were familiar with it:

- Abel animal was accepted by his sacrifice, but Cain's was rejected.
- Noah and his family were saved, but all else died in the Flood.
- Isaac was of the promise, but Ishmael, though circumcised, was rejected. Jacob, an evil twisted man, was chosen, and mighty Esau the hunter was rejected. (Romans 9:13 compare Malachi 1:2-3)
- Israel was rejected and exiled into Babylon, but God elected Israel again (Malachi) under the Old Covenant.
- When Israel crucified the Messiah, they were finally as a nation in AD 70, but God has elected them again (Romans 11:24) under a New Covenant.

**3. WE MUST NOW CONSIDER AT LENGTH SOMETHING OF THIS
EASTERNER, THIS ASIAN, CALLED ABRAHAM (OR ABRAM, WHICH WAS
HIS ORIGINAL NAME)**

Let us consider, first of all, the family of Abraham.

Abraham's family members are mentioned both in Galatians and Romans:

Abraham: 9 times in Galatians. (3:6-9, 14, 16, 18, 29; 4:22)

9 times in Romans. (4:1-3; 4:9, 12-13, 16; 9:7; 11:1)

Isaac: 1 in Galatians (4:28)

2 in Romans (9:7, 10)

Sarah: 2 in Romans (4:19; 9:9)

Hagar and Ishmael: (Galatians 4:28-31 compare Genesis 21:10)

Who was Abraham?

He was a gentile before there were any Jews, of the line of Shem, living in Ur of the Chaldees in Babylonia (now Iraq).

- He was an idolater (Joshua 24:2)
- He did not know God (Genesis 12:1-3)
- He was uncircumcised until the age of 99, when God instructed him (Genesis 17:24)
- He was familiar with child sacrifice to the gods (Genesis 22:1-2)

Why did God call Abraham?

- (1) To go out to a land of promise (Genesis 12:1). This became a symbol of the pilgrim Church seeking a heavenly country (Hebrews 11:8-10).
- (2) To have a son in his old age, impossibly to a barren woman (Sarah), who was past the age of bearing children (Genesis 15:1-5)
- (3) To have a change of name - from ABRAM (Mighty Father), to ABRAHAM (Father of many nations) See Genesis 17:16.
- (4) To learn the way of righteousness (Genesis 15:6).
- (5) To learn that Jehovah is not a tribal God, but the God of all nations (Genesis 22:17-18); for Abraham would be the spiritual father to all those among the nations who would believe as he did (Romans 4:16-17a).

4. **A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS.**

The letter was written in Corinth, in Greece, in the house of a wealthy Christian called Gaius (16:23). Paul used Tertius to write as he dictated (16:22). The letter came to Rome by a deaconess of the church in Cenchrea (near Corinth) see 16:1-2.

Most theologians regard Romans as Paul's masterpiece, his greatest letter. John Chrysostom — the golden-mouthed preacher, and bishop, of Constantinople — commanded the letter to be read to him every week. Listen to the two great architects of the Reformation of the Church in the 16th Century:

Martin Luther of Germany — '*The chief book of the New Testament, and the purest gospel.*'

John Calvin of France — '*For me it opened the door to all the treasures of the Scriptures.*'

The teaching of Romans is summed up at the beginning (1:16-17). The rest is like a long sermon, explaining the gospel summed up in these two verses.

Romans, as most of Paul's letters, has 2 divisions: DOCTRINE (1-11), and PRACTICAL (12-16).

[1. **THE TEACHING OF ROMANS** (Chapters 1-11)]

- (1) Justification by faith is at the heart of the gospel. (1:1-17)
 - (b) Greetings to the Christians in Rome, and a personal statement regarding them (1-13)
 - (b) Paul has a personal spiritual debt to pay (14-15)
 - (c) A summary of Paul's gospel (16-17)
- (2) All the nations need this doctrine of justification by faith (1:18 - 3:20)
 - (a) The desperate need of the gentile world (1:18-32)
 - (a) The religious Jews need God's grace just as much as the Gentiles (2:1-29)
 - (c) Sinners can say nothing to defend themselves before God (3:1-20)
- (3) How can sinners be justified before God? (3:21-31)
 - (a) Through grace and not by Law (21-24)
 - (b) Through the blood of Christ (25)
 - (c) Through faith (26-31)

- (4) Justification by faith is not a new doctrine (4:1-25)
 - (a) All about Abraham's faith (1-4)
 - (b) David confirmed this (5-8)
 - (c) Abraham was justified before circumcision (9-12)
 - (d) God's promise was matched with Abraham's faith (13-22)
 - (e) Faith is required from sinners today (23-25)
- (5) The blessing that result from justification by faith (5:1-21)
 - (a) Five immediate blessings: peace, access, joy, glory, love (1-5)
 - (b) Those for whom Christ died (6-11)
 - (c) The contrast between Adam and Jesus Christ (12-21)
- (6) Justification by faith and sin. (6:1-23)
 - (a) The picture of baptism (1-9a)
 - (b) The picture of the king (9b-14)
 - (c) The picture of slavery (15-23)
- (7) Justification by faith and the Law (7:1-25)
 - (a) The picture of marriage (1-6)
 - (b) The Law, indwelling sin, and the convicted unbeliever (7-13)
 - (c) The Law, indwelling sin, and the converted believer (14-25)
- (8) The freedom and victory of those who are justified by faith (8:1-39)
 - (a) Free from condemnation (1-11)
 - (b) The true children of God (12-17)
 - (d) Sufferings (18-31)
 - (e) God's great love (32-39)
- (9) Justification by faith and the unbelieving Jewish nation (9:1 - 11:36)

- (a) Israel has rejected her Messiah (9:1-5)
- (b) God has a purpose in her rejection (9:6-13)
- (c) God's judicial hardening (9:14-29)
- (d) Israel's failure to be justified by faith (9:30-33)
- (e) Israel needs to leave the Law (10:1-14)
- (f) Israel's rejection of the gospel (10:14-21)
- (g) Israel not totally rejected (11:1-10)
- (h) Israel not finally rejected (11:11-36)

2. THE PRACTICAL SECTION OF ROMANS (12-16)

The behaviour of those that are justified:

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| (1) | Towards God (12:1-2) | Service. |
| (2) | Towards themselves (12:3) | No conceit. |
| (3) | Towards the Church (12:4-8) | Gifts. |
| (4) | Towards other Christians (12:9-13) | Love. |
| (5) | Towards enemies (12:14-21) | No revenge. |
| (6) | Towards the State (13:1-7) | Subjection. |
| (7) | Towards neighbours (13:8-14) | Example of Christ. |
| (8) | Towards the spiritually weak
(14:15 - 15:7) | Consideration. |
| (9) | To everybody (15:8-33) | Behaving with honour |
| (10) | Final greetings and benediction (16:1-27)] | |

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