

# Bible Study # 13

1/5/16

# Background for Paul's Letter to the Romans

# Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century

- Occupied a position of influence unique in the annals of history, and was the imperial capital of the Roman Empire
- Was the magnetic center of the civilized world and one of the most cosmopolitan cities that ever existed
- Contained the seat of absolute and centralized government whose domain governed the known world allowing freedom of commerce and safe travel
- Had a population that is estimated at not less than 1,300,000 of which  $\frac{1}{2}$  were slaves, while only a few thousand owned private property
  - Many of these slaves came through the practice of selling prisoners of war and from the inhabitants of captured cities
- Thus, in almost every wealthy household there was a great mixture of races

# Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century

- The largest and most important class of “freedmen” contained men of culture and ability who filled posts of responsibility in their former masters’ households
- Legionaries were recruited from all parts of the empire
- There were preachers and teachers of many philosophies, cults and modes of worship including Greek, Egyptian and Phrygian
- The everyday language of Rome was Greek

# Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century

The Jews formed one of the most marked and important sections of this large alien element occupying more than a dozen synagogues

- The Jewish colony in *Rome* may be traced back to 63 BC when Pompeii captured *Jerusalem* and brought back a large number of prisoners who were sold as slaves
- These Jews were aloof from their Gentile neighbors and absolutely refused to mingle or share their lives except when coerced or given favored treatment

From the above we can see how *Rome* was a seed-plot ready for the planting of the new religion like *Christianity*

# Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century

- The early Church at the time of Nero's reign (54 -68 A.D.) grew up under the shadow of the synagogue system
- This movement soon became a force sufficiently dangerous to draw down upon it the fanatical antagonism of the Jews
- Tumults and disorders seem to have arisen in the Jewish quarter in 50 A.D. in sufficient strength to force the Roman government to take strong action leading to the expulsion of the Jews
  - Remember that Aquila and Prisca were exiled in 51 A.D. as discussed in Acts 18:2
- In the eyes of the Roman authorities, the Christians were a Jewish sect

# Background on the Letter to the Romans

- The origins of the Church of Rome are difficult to discern
- It may have begun with Christian Jews returning from the feast of Pentecost at *Jerusalem* (Acts 2:10)
  - Remember that 3000 Jews were converted and baptized on Pentecost and many returned to their home towns where they started preaching the gospel
- According to the historian Eusebius, Peter visited *Rome* 42 A.D. although he did not remain there as he was present at the Council of *Jerusalem* in 49 A.D., and, according to Paul, was in *Antioch* shortly after the Council (Gal 2:12)

# Background on the Letter to the Romans

- Remember also, that after Peter was released from imprisonment in the Temple by an angel he told the disciple to tell James that he was going away (possibly by ship to Rome)
- It is believed that Paul wrote this letter from *Corinth* in 58 A.D. during the final months of his Third Missionary Journey
- It is by far the most systematic and doctrinally profound of all of Paul's letters (with the possible exception of Hebrews)
- The letter is addressed to the Christians of *Rome*, whom Paul plans to see on his way to *Spain* (Rom 15:25)



# Purpose of Paul Letter to the Romans

- Paul's Purpose was to:
  - Introduce himself and his teachings to the Roman Christians in preparation for his planned visit
    - It was one of the few churches to which Paul wrote before making a personal visit
  - Establish the Roman Church as his missionary base for a new phase of evangelization as he turned his attention and energies toward *Spain*
  - Ease tensions that were straining the unity and fellowship of the Roman Church

# Themes and Characteristics

- It is the work of profound theological reflection
- It is the longest and most mature letter Paul had written after he had been preaching and defending the gospel for two decades
- It is stamped with the imprint of his wisdom, depth, and spiritual energy
- It is also full of things that are “hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16)

# Themes and Characteristics

- His style is more formal and weaves back and forth through a maze of theological mysteries concerning:
  - Sin, judgment, righteousness, justification, sanctification, salvation, suffering, law, grace, son ship, election, mercy, sacrifice, and the triune God
- The body of the letter can be divided into three major parts:
  - Salvation in Christ (1:16 – 8:39)
  - Restoration of Israel (9:1-11:39)
  - Christian Living (12:1-16:23)

# Outline of the Letter to the Romans

- 1. Prologue (1:1-15)
  - A. Greeting (1:1-7)
  - B. Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:8-15)
- 2. Salvation in Christ (1:16-8:39)
  - A. Theme: The Righteousness of God (1:16-17)
  - B. Condemnation: The Universal Corruption of Gentiles and Jews (1:18-3:20)
  - C. Justification: The Gift of Grace and Forgiveness through Faith (3:21-5:11)
  - D. Jesus Christ: The New Adam (5:12-21)

# Outline of the Letter to the Romans

- E. Sanctification: Holiness in Christ ( 6:1-8:11)
- F. Glorification: The Spirit, Sonship, and Suffering (8:12-39)
- 3. Restoration of Israel (9:1-11:36)
  - A. Israel's Election (9:1-29)
  - B. Israel's Rejection of the Gospel (9:30-10:21)
  - C. Israel's Resurrection and Salvation (11:1-36)
- 4. Christian Living (12:1-14:23)
  - A. Christian Conduct in the Church (12:1-21)
  - B. Christian Citizenship (13:1-7)
  - C. Love Fulfills God's Law (13: 8-14)
  - D. Christian Fellowship and Flexibility (14:1-23)

# Outline of the Letter to the Romans

- 5. Epilogue (15:1-16:23)
  - A. Admonition (15:1-7)
  - B. Summary of the Epistle (15:8-13)
  - C. Paul's Ministry and Travel Plans (15:14-34)
  - D. Personal Greetings (16:1-23)
- 6. Closing Doxology (16:25-27)

# Introduction to Romans

- Romans is the **longest and most complex theologically** of Paul's Epistles because he:
  - Did not found the Church of Rome
  - Has never met this community
    - Telling them what to do would be like talking to someone else's kids!
- Paul has the authority of an Apostle but he believes that he must speak to them with quite a bit of deference because:
  - The Church of Rome is, from a Jewish point of view, as far away as one can get from the mother church in *Jerusalem* – it is at the end of the earth even though it is the center of the Roman Empire

# Introduction to Romans (Cont)

- Remember when Paul had his difficulties with the Judaizers in *Antioch*, **the church sent him to *Jerusalem* for clarification**
- He was afraid that if he alienated the congregation in Rome they could completely disregard his teachings
- The **Thanksgiving Section** is the most elaborate, longest and most complex of any of his letters because he is once again dealing with the Judaizers issue that he discussed in his letter to the Galatians
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# Introduction to Romans (Cont)

- Many incorrectly see the Letter to the Galatians as an outline for the Letter to the Romans
- This is not really the case, although the letter to the Romans is a much more elaborate and longer version of the letter to the Galatians because Paul had a great deal of time to develop his arguments before composing the letter
- It is very important that we read Romans within the proper context
- Because it is listed first in the cannon and is the longest letter, people often jump in and drown within the first section or quickly fall into total confusion

# Introduction to Romans (Cont)

- Remember Paul wrote this letter near the end of his Third Missionary Journey knowing that he had to return to *Syria* (Antioch) before going to *Rome* on what he hoped would be his fourth Missionary Journey
- Unfortunately, it did not work out that way as his fourth journey would become known as his “trip in chains”

# Romans 1

# Romans 1

- **Romans 1:1** *“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God”*
  - As in most of his letters, Paul begins with his **“introductory section”**
  - Paul knows a great deal about the church in Rome even though he has never been there
    - Later (Rom 16) we will see him name 25 or 30 people he knows from that church
    - At that time that church would be about the size of a modern local parish with 50 to 100 people

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- He knew that the Church was fairly balanced between Jewish and Gentile Christians, but that it had some serious problems
- Once again Paul addresses the familiar controversy:
  - The Jewish Christian called on the Gentile Christians to practice the precepts of Judaism **including circumcision and Kosher** if they wanted salvation (implying if they didn't, they would be second class Christians)
  - The Gentile Christians mocked the Jews by reminding them that they were the **ones who killed Jesus** and had ancestors who worshipped the golden calf, and served evil kings who worshiped pagan gods

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- To address both groups, Paul divided his tone between each side who were, most likely, sitting on opposite sides of the church listening to this letter
- Thus, the Church in Rome was physically divided causing Paul to be very careful not to offend either side with his arguments
- Speaking about this setting Father Sebastian jumped forward to discuss some issues in our modern church

# Church History

- First is the fact that the Protestants were the ones to move away from immersion for Baptism in order to downplay the liturgical aspects of the sacrament of baptism
- In fact this has led to some denominations not longer seeing Baptism as a sacrament
- Prior to the Protestant Reformation all churches had big baptismal fonts where the members could be immersed
- Second, it was the Protestants who introduced the use of wooden Pews into their churches to provide some comfort during their long sermons
- Eventually the Catholic church adopted this practice

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- **Romans 1:2-7** *“which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son,...* Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
  - Most likely the Jews were happy about Paul’s words concerning the oracles of the Old Testament
  - The Gentiles were happy as Paul addressed their belief that through baptism they had been “raised from the dead”
  - This led Paul to focus on the “obedience of faith” which he will show is not based on obedience to the “kosher laws” \*



# Romans 1 (Cont)

- **Romans 1:8-15** *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.... so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”*
  - This is the “thanksgiving section”
  - The “**world**” here refers to the **Roman Empire**
  - The Christians throughout the empire were aware that there was a Church in *Rome*
  - Paul had most likely heard about them from members, like Aquila and Priscilla, who he met in his travels
  - As a result he wanted to go to *Rome* and speak to them

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- Paul hoped to visit the Church in *Rome* to help fix some things he had heard were wrong
- He tells them that he wants to strengthen them while they strengthen him
  - Notice how he is not trying to be insulting to either side
- A “**barbarian**” is a **non-Greek speaker**
- All those in the Church of *Rome*, the aristocracy and those who were educated most likely spoke Greek
  - Greek was to the Roman Empire what French was to Europe

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- Although Rome was not a Greek city, it contained a fair amount of Greek influence
  - Only the average people in the marketplace spoke **Old Italian** known as “**Latin**”
  - The Greeks called all non- Greek languages “barbarous”
- Not only is Paul not being insulting here, he is trying to build a positive relationship with them
- Yet, when he arrives in *Rome* he will find himself in a city that is the far away from the Greek world

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- At this point in his missionary journeys Paul has preached the gospel to Gentiles who speak Greek and who have studied Greek philosophy
- Now he is going to preach the gospel to **non-Greek Gentile “barbarians”** and who have not studied philosophy
- A better translation of *Rom 1:14* would be that he wants to preach the gospel to “those who are schooled in philosophy versus those who are not schooled in philosophy”\*

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- **Romans 1:16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
  - Again, Paul is using the word “Greek” to mean a non-Jew
  - The Jews of that time referred to non-Jews as “Greeks”
    - So he saying “Jew first and then Gentile”

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- **Romans 1:17** *For in it the **righteousness** of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of man who by their wickedness suppress the truth.”*
  - Paul’s use of “**righteous through faith**” was based on the fact that the Jewish Christians in Rome, and elsewhere, believed:
    - That righteousness was not just by faith in Jesus and the new covenant
    - But one also needed to be circumcised and keep the kosher laws to be righteous\*

# Definitions

- **Righteousness:**

- The quality of being morally right or justifiable
- The state of moral perfection required by God to enter heaven
- In OT it was one who obeyed the Torah (Phil 3:6)

- **Justification:**

- To set something right, or to declare righteous
- To be made righteous, just, holy and acceptable to God – from a state of sin to a state of grace

# Definitions (Cont)

- **Justifying Faith** - According to Paul:
  - That faith of the convert that leads to Baptism
  - How a man is brought from sin to salvation
- **Works** – According to Paul
  - Works of the Mosaic Law (Torah)
  - No one can earn or merit the free gift of grace by obedience to the Torah
  - None of the tenants of the Torah, apart from the grace of Christ, can bring about justification of the sinner



# Romans 1 (Cont)

- **Romans 1:18** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.”*
  - Here, we see the typical first century **Jewish understanding** of the Gentile world
  - They believe that the Gentiles were under the wrath of God because God had revealed himself to them through “natural revelation” and yet they had not accepted him

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- They understood “natural revelation” explained creation which they understood was a sacrament of God
  - The rain falls, the sun shines, the trees grow, the blessings and fruit they received were all part of God’s natural revelation
- This is why our Catholic sacraments use material aspects of the creation in each of the sacraments
- Paul continues:\*

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- **Romans 1:19-23** *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. That is creation. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature commonly namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.... Their senseless minds were darkened.”*
  - Paul is telling them that when the Gentiles turned away from creation and the worship of the true God, they fell into the darkness and confusion of paganism
  - They ended up worshiping animals and other things that were beneath them

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- **Romans 1:24 -25** *“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Ex 32)*
  - Paul reminds them that if they want to go and worship animals and other things, **God will not stop them**
  - He will let them continue to snowball in their sin and wickedness without restraint

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- But then Paul points out that even though the Jews received the “**special revelation**” on **Mt Sinai** (the Torah), they still turned to worship the golden calf
- The Gentiles with “natural revelation” fell into paganism while the Jews with “special revelation” also fell into idolatry
  - What irony

# Romans 1 (Cont)

- **Romans 1:26-32** *“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.... Those who do such things deserve to die, through natural revelation they not only do them but approve those who practice them.”*
- If you follow the story from **Ex 32** to the end of the Old Testament you will find that the Jews are not much better off than the Gentiles even though they had been given the **“special revelation”**
  - So it is clear that as Paul is talking about the Gentile world, he is also telling the story very carefully in a way that would cause the Jews would start to squirm