

ROMANS

Contents:

[Background](#)

[Author](#)

[Date and Location](#)

[Recipients](#)

[Purpose](#)

[Unique Features](#)

[Comparison with Other Bible Books](#)

[Outline](#)

[Timeline](#)

BACKGROUND

In Paul's day, all roads literally led to Rome. It was the heart of the Roman Empire, and Paul had long desired to visit the city ([Acts 19:21](#)) but, after nearly 10 years of missionary travels (see [Date and Location](#)), had been unable to do so ([Romans 1:13](#)). Paul hoped that, once he made it to Rome, the Christians there would help him take the gospel to the western edge of the empire ([Romans 15:28](#)). When Paul learned that Phoebe, from the Corinth area ([Romans 16:1](#)), was going to Rome on business, he sent this letter with her, to share his vision with the believers in Rome and hopefully to enlist them in his missionary cause. Paul himself would not make it to Rome until about three years later, when he arrived there as a prisoner of Rome and lived under house arrest ([Acts 28](#)).

Paul also saw this letter as an opportunity to help the Roman believers become better grounded in the essential principles of their faith (see [Purpose](#)).

All of Paul's letters were delivered by friends. The Roman postal system was for government business only.

AUTHOR

Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles. Born Saul in the Cilician city of Tarsus, Paul was Jewish by birth, Roman by citizenship, and Greek by culture. Educated as a Pharisee, he was dramatically converted to Christ ([Acts 9](#); [Acts 22](#); [Acts 26](#)) and became the foremost evangelist as well as the foremost theologian of the early church. Luke tells the story of Paul's life and ministry in Acts. Paul himself explains the faith in Christ that propelled that ministry in his 13 letters (Romans-Philemon). Some scholars believe he also wrote Hebrews.

DATE AND LOCATION

Late winter of A.D. 57 or early spring of 58, about 22 years after Paul's conversion, during the last three months of his third missionary journey while he was in Greece ([Acts 20:3](#)), just prior to returning to Jerusalem with an offering for the poor ([Romans 15:26](#)). More specifically, he was probably in Corinth, staying in the home of Gaius ([Romans 16:23](#); [1 Cor. 1:14](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Epistles of Paul, The](#)

RECIPIENTS

Romans is addressed to "those who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ . . . in Rome" ([Romans 1:6-7](#)). There were small groups of believers meeting all over the city ([Romans 16:3-5](#), [10-11](#), [14-15](#)).

Paul's personal greetings to many of them ([Romans 16:3-16](#)) suggest Paul had led them to Christ in other cities, and then, probably for economic reasons, they had relocated to the empire's capital city.

PURPOSE

- To announce his plans to visit the Christians in Rome, and to enlist support in his mission ([Romans 15:24, 28-29](#))
- To teach the fundamental doctrine of salvation in order to fortify them against the Judaizers ([Romans 1-8](#))
- To explain the unbelief of Israel and vindicate God's faithfulness in his dealings with that nation ([Romans 9-11](#))
- To give practical instruction in Christian living ([Romans 12-16](#))

UNIQUE FEATURES

- Romans is the most complete summary of Christian doctrine. If all of the Bible were lost except Romans, scarcely any fundamental doctrine would be lacking.
- As he explained the gospel in Romans, Paul quoted from the OT more often than in all his 12 other letters combined—showing how important the OT is to understanding the gospel.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Genesis:

- In Genesis, Abraham is the patriarch of Israel; in Romans he is the patriarch of all who believe ([Romans 4:16](#)).

Galatians:

- Galatians, with its discussion of justification by faith, could be called "Romans in shorthand."

James:

- Romans shows the *root* of salvation: faith alone. James shows the *fruit* of salvation: good works.

OUTLINE

1. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED ([Romans 1:1-17](#))

1. Salutation ([Romans 1:1-7](#))

2. Paul and the church in Rome ([Romans 1:8-17](#))

II. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED (JUSTIFICATION) ([Romans 1:18-5:21](#))

A. Universal need for justification ([Romans 1:18-3:20](#))

- B. God's provision of justification ([Romans 3:21-31](#))
- C. OT illustrations of justification ([Romans 4](#))
- D. Certainty of justification ([Romans 5:1-11](#))
- E. Universal effectiveness of justification ([Romans 5:12-21](#))

III. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPARTED (SANCTIFICATION; GLORIFICATION) ([Romans 6-8](#))

- A. Questions about sanctification ([Romans 6](#))
 - A. Identified with Christ ([Romans 6:1-14](#))
 - B. Enslaved to righteousness ([Romans 6:15-23](#))
- B. New relationship in sanctification: free from law ([Romans 7](#))
- C. New power in sanctification: The Holy Spirit ([Romans 8:1-17](#))
- D. Present sufferings, future glory ([Romans 8:18-39](#))

IV. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS TOWARD ISRAEL ([Romans 9-11](#))

- A. Israel's rejection ([Romans 9-10](#))
- B. The positive outcome of Israel's rejection ([Romans 11](#))

V. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS APPLIED ([Romans 12:1-15:13](#))

- A. The principle of righteousness ([Romans 12:1-2](#))
- B. Applications of righteousness ([Romans 12:3-15:13](#))
 1. In church and community ([Romans 12:3-21](#))
 2. Toward government ([Romans 13:1-7](#))
 3. In social relationships ([Romans 13:8-14](#))
 4. In matters of opinion ([Romans 14:1-15:13](#))

VI. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS PROPAGATED ([Romans 15:14-16:27](#))

- A. Paul's purpose in writing; his plans ([Romans 15:14-33](#))
- B. Greetings, warning, benediction ([Romans 16](#))

TIMELINE

- A.D. 35: Paul's conversion
- c. A.D. 54: Paul desires to visit Rome
- A.D. 57: Paul writes Romans
- A.D. 60: Paul imprisoned in Rome
- c. A.D. 67: Paul martyred

Romans 1:1-7 *A messenger and his Messiah.* Paul began by identifying himself as a messenger (apostle) and slave of Christ ([Romans 1:1](#)), then quickly shifted the focus to Christ, showing that his Messiahship was confirmed both by the OT ([Romans 1:2-3](#)) and by his resurrection ([Romans 1:4](#)). Paul spoke again of his apostolic calling, reminding his readers that they, too, had been called by God ([Romans 1:5-6](#)). He then greeted them in a phrase with which he prefaced each of his 13 epistles: "May grace and peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Peter used the same greeting in both of his letters, as did John in one of his (see [2 John 1:3](#)).

Grace precedes peace. There can be no peace apart from grace (see [Romans 5:1](#); [Isaiah 57:21](#); [Jeremiah 6:14](#); [Luke 7:50](#)). Grace is the unmerited favor of God toward sinners. Someone has suggested that the spelling of the English word *grace* offers a key to its meaning: It is "God's Righteousness At Christ's Expense" (see [Romans 5:20](#); [1 Cor. 15:10](#); [Ephes. 2:8-9](#); [2 Peter 3:18](#)). While grace is often thought of as a NT concept, it is a prevalent theme in the OT as well, beginning with Noah's finding grace in God's sight (see exposition on [Genesis 6:8-13](#)) and continuing throughout the history of God's dealing with his people (often expressed in words other than grace, see [Psalm 103:10-14](#); [Isaiah 55:1-9](#); [Isaiah 63:7-8](#)).

While Paul had not been a follower of Christ during his earthly ministry as were the other apostles (see exposition on [Acts 1:15-26](#)), like them he had seen the risen Lord (see [1 Cor. 9:1](#); [1 Cor. 15:8-9](#)) and had been chosen by Christ himself (compare [Romans 9:15](#) and [John 6:70](#)). No one should enter the ministry unless called by God (see [John 15:16](#); [Matthew 9:38](#)).

Paul described himself as "chosen by God . . . to preach his good news." The term used for "chosen" can also be translated "set apart" or "separated." Paul actually experienced three specific "separations" in his life:

- at his birth (see [Galatians 1:15](#); compare [Isaiah 49:1](#); [Jeremiah 1:5](#))
- at his conversion (see [Acts 9:15](#))
- at his call to missionary service (see [Acts 13:1-2](#))

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

Romans 1:8-15 *Praises, prayers, plans.* The testimony of the churches in Rome was known throughout the empire ([Romans 1:8](#)), resulting in Paul's great desire ([Romans 1:9](#)) to visit them and encourage them in their faith ([Romans 1:10-15](#)). Having received God's mercy, Paul felt indebted to all who had not yet had that opportunity ([Romans 1:14-15](#)).

Paul's prayer to go to Rome was later answered by God but not in the way he might have expected (see [Acts 27-28](#)). Rome would be a fitting climax to Paul's adventures in the great world capitals of his day.

- He had preached at Jerusalem, the religious center of the world, where he was mobbed (see [Acts 21:31](#); [Acts 22:22-23](#)).

- He had preached at Athens, the intellectual center of the world, where he was mocked (see [Acts 17:32](#)).
- And when he finally preached in Rome, the political center, he would be martyred (see [2 Tim. 4:6](#)).

[Romans 1:16-17](#) *Proclaiming God's power.* Paul's motivation in proclaiming the gospel was knowing that God will save everyone who believes it, both Jews and Gentiles. The gospel reveals God's righteousness, which sinners can appropriate by faith. Only through faith can one be justified in God's sight ([Romans 1:17](#); see [Habakkuk 2:4](#) and [Habakkuk: Comparison with Other Bible Books](#)).

[Romans 1:18-32](#) *Denial of God brings defilement of self.* Paul spoke of God's justifiable anger toward a human race that has suppressed the truth about him because of their preference for unrighteousness. Both conscience ([Romans 1:19](#)) and nature ([Romans 1:20](#)) clearly reveal God. God does not reap wrath where he has not sown knowledge (compare [Psalm 19:1-3](#); [Isaiah 40:26](#); [Acts 14:17](#); [Acts 17:22-29](#)). Humankind as a whole neither acknowledges God nor thanks him for his creation and grace ([Romans 1:21](#)). Therefore, God has allowed them to become fools ([Romans 1:21-23](#)) and to sink into idolatry and moral depravity ([Romans 1:24-32](#); compare [Proverbs 1:24-31](#)). Such people know the seriousness of their crimes ([Romans 1:32](#)); nonetheless, they continue and even encourage others to join them.

Notice the devastating results of unthankfulness ([Romans 1:21](#)). Surely unthankfulness was the root cause of the fall of both Lucifer and Adam. The ultimate cure for pride is not humility but thanksgiving. A thankful person is automatically a humble person (see [Phil. 4:6](#); [1 Thes. 5:18](#)).

These God-denying, unthankful people became fools while thinking they were wise ([Romans 1:22](#)). The Greek for "became utter fools" is *moraino*, root of our English word *moron*. This rebellion against God's truth was the beginning of human philosophy, an ill-applied term since it means "love of wisdom" (see [Acts 17:18-21](#); [1 Cor. 1:18-21](#); [1 Tim. 6:20](#); [2 Tim. 3:6-7](#); [2 Tim. 4:3-4](#)).

[Romans 2:1-10](#) *Condemn another, condemn yourself.* Paul knew that many of his readers would immediately pass judgment on the people he had just described (see [Romans 1:18-32](#)). If, however, such readers would reflect on their own lives, they would realize that they were guilty of some of the same sins ([Romans 2:1](#)). Paul's description fit all humanity. All were subject to God's righteous judgment, incurring either his honor or his wrath ([Romans 2:2-10](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

[Romans 2:11-16](#) *All will be judged, by God's law or by theirs.* Judgment would apply to Jews and Gentiles alike. Both would be judged by their law: For Jews, the law of Moses (especially the Ten Commandments); for Gentiles, the law that God had written on their own conscience.

[Romans 2:17-29](#) *"The problem? You don't practice what you preach."* Many Jews boasted of their superior knowledge of God ([Romans 2:17-20](#)), but such knowledge was useless unless correctly applied ([Romans 2:21-24](#)). The circumcised Jew who disobeyed the law was worse off than the uncircumcised Gentile who kept it ([Romans 2:25-27](#)). True membership in God's family is a matter of heart attitude, not of physical birth or ritual purity ([Romans 2:28-29](#); see [Deut. 6:1-5](#); [Deut. 10:16](#); [1 Chron. 28:9-10](#).)

Romans 3:1-4 *"Do Jews have any advantage?"* If both Jews and Gentiles are equally guilty before God, some might ask, what is the advantage of being a Jew ([Romans 3:1](#); see [Deut. 4:32-38](#))? The Jews had great advantage, said Paul, in that God's Word was first revealed to them ([Romans 3:2](#)). Even if some rejected that revelation, God would keep his promises to them ([Romans 3:3-4](#)). Human sin serves only to emphasize God's righteousness. Paul would later speak more fully of the advantages of a Jewish heritage (see [Romans 9:4-5](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

Romans 3:5-8 *"So let's sin, to God's glory!"* Other readers might object that if human sin shows God's righteousness, it seems unfair for God to judge the sinner who, after all, is adding to his glory. Paul dismisses this objection outright: If God can't judge, then he is less than God.

Romans 3:9-20 *High treason against the King of kings.* Quoting several OT psalms, Paul continued to assert that all God's creatures, both Jew and Gentile, sin against their Creator. No one is righteous ([Romans 3:10-12](#)). Rather, they speak ([Romans 3:13-14](#)) and do ([Romans 3:15-17](#)) many ungodly things, with no apparent fear of judgment ([Romans 3:18](#)). Such awareness of sin should humble us before God ([Romans 3:19](#)); the law, far from justifying us, only makes us more aware of our sin ([Romans 3:20](#)). See [Psalm 14:1-3](#); [Jeremiah 17:9](#).

Romans 3:21-26 *The Just justifies the unjust.* The righteousness that could not be had through the law is, however, available through faith in Christ ([Romans 3:21-24](#)), whose blood is the sufficient offering for the sins of all humanity ([Romans 3:25-26](#)). Because the perfect sacrifice has been offered, God can still be "just," or righteous, even while declaring righteous those who don't deserve it but who have faith in Christ ([Romans 3:26](#)).

As required by the law ([Romans 3:21](#); see [Deut. 19:15](#)), Christ's Messiahship was validated by two witnesses:

- the law, through the symbolism of the Temple priesthood and offerings (see [Luke 24:25-27](#); [John 5:46](#))
- the prophets, in their many predictions of Christ (see [Isaiah 53](#); see [Luke 24:25-27](#); [1 Peter 1:10-11](#))

Romans 3:27-31 *No boasting allowed.* Because salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, no one can claim to have done anything to earn it ([Romans 3:27-28](#)). This applies to both Jew and Gentile ([Romans 3:29-30](#)). Rather than making the law void, however, grace actually establishes it, since the law's purpose was to show the need for grace ([Romans 3:31](#); see [Romans 3:20](#)).

Romans 4:1-12 *"We found it apart from the law."* Abraham believed God and was therefore looked upon as righteous ([Romans 4:1-4](#)), even before he was circumcised ([Romans 4:9-12](#)). Circumcision was the seal of his salvation, but faith was its source. He was declared righteous because of his faith. (For the three great instances of this type of imputation or attribution by God in salvation history, see exposition on [Genesis 15:1-11](#).)

Likewise David, finding that no obedience to the law could rid him of his terrible guilt, threw himself completely upon God's grace ([Romans 4:5-8](#); see [Psalm 32](#); [Psalm 51](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

[Romans 4:13-25](#) *Good News for Abraham and us.* God's promise to Abraham and his descendants was based not on the law but on faith ([Romans 4:13](#)), for the law can only bring condemnation ([Romans 4:14-15](#)). Because the promise is based on faith, it is available to all who, because of their faith in Christ, are Abraham's true offspring ([Romans 4:16-25](#)). Because we have believed God's promise of salvation, we have received God's righteousness, just as Abraham did.

[Romans 5:1-5](#) *Faith's fantastic fruits.* Having been justified by faith, we have peace with and access to God; the joyful hope of seeing God's glory; blessed assurance from God amid suffering; and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

[Romans 5:6-11](#) *When, why, and how this happens.* We have the gift of salvation and peace with God because, when we were totally helpless sinners, God in his love sent Christ to die for us.

[Romans 5:12-21](#) *Two men, two acts, two results.* Just as Adam's disobedience brought sin and death to the world ([Romans 5:12, 18](#)), Christ's obedience brought righteousness and life ([Romans 5:18-21](#)). In a long parenthetical statement ([Romans 5:13-17](#)), Paul highlighted the contrast between Adam and Christ:

- Because of the sin of one man, Adam, every human has experienced both physical and spiritual death (see [Genesis 3:19](#); [Ephes. 2:1](#)).
- Because of the righteousness of one man, Jesus Christ, every human can experience eternal life (see [1 Cor. 15:22](#)).

Paul explained once again how the law brings not righteousness but awareness of sin ([Romans 5:20](#); compare [Romans 3:20](#)); the more we are aware of sin, the more we can cast ourselves on God's grace.

[Romans 6:1-14](#) *The cross and the empty tomb: We were there!* Having declared the glory of God's grace ([Romans 5:20](#)), Paul again brought up the possible objection: Why not sin more, to receive more grace ([Romans 6:1](#); compare exposition on ^s[Romans 3:5-8](#))? Again he refuted that heresy in the strongest possible terms ([Romans 6:2-23](#)). As exemplified by baptism ([Romans 6:3-4](#)), we were both crucified with Christ and raised with him, which means that, just as death has no more power over him, sin should have no power over us ([Romans 6:5-7](#)). Because we have died with Christ, we also have the assurance of new and eternal life through his resurrection ([Romans 6:4, 8-10](#)). We should want to live in the reality of that new life, serving God instead of sin ([Romans 6:11-14](#); see [Ephes. 4:22-24](#); [Col. 3:9-10](#)).

Paul presented sin as a cruel tyrant, taxing his subjects beyond all endurance. The only way to be freed from this tyrant is to die to him ([Romans 6:7](#)), which is exactly what we do in coming to Christ ([Romans 6:2-6](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

Romans 6:15-23 *Two slaves, two wages.* Paul repeated the preposterous question of [Romans 6:1](#), asking why people would want to be a slave to sin when they could be God's slave instead ([Romans 6:15-20](#)). Slavery to sin leads to eternal death, while slavery to God's righteousness leads to eternal life ([Romans 6:21-23](#)).

Our enslavement to righteousness should involve the goal of holiness ([Romans 6:19](#)), or "sanctification" (NASB). Concerning the past and present aspects of sanctification, see exposition on [Hebrews 10:1-18](#).

The "wages of sin" is spiritual death, which means separation from God and suffering throughout all eternity in the lake of fire ([Romans 6:23](#); see [Rev. 20:11-15](#)). If God's justice is to prevail (see [Romans 3:4, 26](#)), the greatest crime of all (rejection of him) can only be punished by the greatest penalty of all.

Romans 7:1-6 *Freed at last, from bondage to blessing.* In a further effort to illustrate our freedom in Christ, Paul compared the law, with its tendency to make us want to sin ([Romans 7:5](#)), to a demanding husband. As long as the husband lives, his wife is bound to him; when he dies, she is free to marry another. Likewise, the law and the sinful desires it arouses have no more claim over the believer; he or she is now free to be united with Christ ([Romans 7:4](#); compare [John 3:29](#); [Ephes. 5:25-27](#); [Rev. 21:2](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Three Types Confront the Law](#)

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

Romans 7:7-25 *Sin and the Savior struggle for his soul.* Again a hypothetical question: If the law makes a person want to sin ([Romans 7:5](#)), is the law itself sinful ([Romans 7:7](#))? No, said Paul: The problem is not with the law that reveals sin, but with the sin itself, which uses the law to incite people to sin ([Romans 7:7-11](#)). The law in itself is not evil but "holy and right and good" ([Romans 7:12](#)):

- It is holy because it came from God.
- It is right because it justly condemns the sinner.
- It is good because it leads the sinner to Christ (see [Galatians 3:24](#)).

The law is ineffective in defeating sin (see [Romans 3:20](#)) only because of the weakness of fallen humanity ([Romans 7:14-23](#)). Herein is the real problem: When Paul wanted to do good, he didn't, and when he tried not to do evil, he did. The finest football coach would lose every game if he had an inferior team. The only possible response to Paul's dilemma is despair ([Romans 7:24](#)), and the only answer to that despair is Christ ([Romans 7:25](#)).

As Paul wrote [Romans 7:7-11](#), he may have recalled his bar mitzvah as a Jewish boy, when he formally took on himself the solemn responsibilities of the law. Gone were the carefree days of childhood; he was now accountable to God for his actions.

» **See also:** [Illustration: Three Types Confront the Law](#)

Romans 8:1-4 *To those in Christ, no condemnation!* Expanding on [Romans 7:25](#), Paul explained that Jesus Christ has done for us what the law of Moses could never do: He has delivered us from the law of sin and death. We can experience this freedom from sin as we walk in the power of his Spirit. Paul did not say that there is no fault or sin or imperfection, but that because of Christ there is no condemnation. Note also the time element: There is *now* no condemnation.

» See also: [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

[Romans 8:5-17](#) *Adopted by God, controlled by his Spirit.* Our sinful nature tries to make us focus on our fleshly desires, which lead only to death. The indwelling Spirit, on the other hand, tries to take control of our sinful flesh and to lead us to life ([Romans 8:5-12](#)). If we allow God's Spirit to control us, we will find eternal life ([Romans 8:13](#)). The Spirit leads us ([Romans 8:14](#)) and assures us of our salvation ([Romans 8:16](#)). As God's adopted children, we have the right to call him by the term of endearment Paul used: "Abba, Father" ([Romans 8:14-16](#)). If in this life we are his children, even when that involves suffering, we can be assured that someday we will share in his glory ([Romans 8:17](#)). See exposition on [§John 16:12-15](#). On "adoption" ([Romans 8:15](#)), see exposition on [§Galatians 3:26-4:7](#).

[Romans 8:18-25](#) *Today's grief, tomorrow's glory: No comparison!* Paul looked at the thorns, storms, floods, famine, sin, sickness, and death that characterize the fallen world, and declared that they aren't even worth comparing to the glorious future awaiting God's people. Meanwhile, however, the whole creation "groans" together with us ([Romans 8:19-23](#)) as we await our day of liberation. Our final victory over sin and death will be a victory for all creation as well. Unlike the rest of humankind and creation, however, believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit as an assurance of their future glory ([Romans 8:23-25](#); see [Ephes. 1:13-14](#)).

[Romans 8:26-27](#) *That inward groan of God.* The indwelling Spirit both prays for us and helps us in our prayer life. Just as fallen nature and believers "groan" ([Romans 8:22-23](#)), even God's Holy Spirit groans as he shares our struggles. "Help" implies, however, that even as we lean on the Spirit we must do our share.

[Romans 8:28-30](#) *How can everything turn out good?* Because God foreknew us and has predestined us for salvation, conformed us to Christ, called us, justified us, and promised to glorify us ([Romans 8:29-30](#)), we can be assured that "everything" will "work together" for our good ([Romans 8:28](#)). Note two things this does not mean:

- It does not mean that all things in and of themselves are good, only that they *work together* for good. Joseph understood this (see [Genesis 50:20](#)), though his father did not (see [Genesis 42:36](#)). (See also [Psalm 76:10](#).)
- This promise is not for everyone, only for those who love God and have answered his call. But for these it is an all-inclusive promise, covering the good and the bad, the bright and the dark, the sweet and the bitter, the easy and the hard, the happy and the sad. The promise can be depended on in prosperity and poverty, in health and sickness, in calm and storm, in life and in death.

[Romans 8:31-39](#) *Security in the Savior.* The fact that God would take the radical step of giving his only Son for us should assure us that, if we accept his salvation, nothing in all the universe can separate us from him or from the things he has promised (see exposition on [§John 10:22-30](#)).

[Romans 9:1-5](#) *His anguish for Israel.* Paul now addressed another issue: If God is so perfectly just and righteous in all his dealings with humans (see [Romans 3:4, 26](#)), what about his dealings with his own people Israel? As was true wherever Paul preached, many Jews in Rome, both Christian and non-Christian, would wonder if the gospel meant that God had abandoned Israel (see [Acts 28:28-29](#)). Paul dealt with this important issue at great length ([Romans 9-11](#)). He began by expressing his great

anguish over Israel's rejection of its Messiah, saying he was willing himself to be forever damned if that would save his people (compare [Exodus 32:31-32](#); [Matthew 23:37](#)). On [Romans 9:3-5](#), see exposition on [§Romans 3:1-4](#).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

[Romans 9:6-13](#) *Two kinds of descendants.* God's desire to extend salvation to the Gentiles should not be surprising, for not all of Abraham's physical descendants are among his spiritual children. God chose some and rejected others.

[Romans 9:14-29](#) *What does God do? Anything he wants to!* If God thus chooses some and rejects others, is he being unfair ([Romans 9:14](#))? "Of course not!" says Paul, giving the example of Pharaoh, whom God raised up and then destroyed, all in order to bring glory to himself ([Romans 9:14-18](#); see [Exodus 4:21](#); [Exodus 33:19](#)). But how can God condemn someone he has not predestined for salvation ([Romans 9:19](#))? Such a question hardly even deserves an answer, said Paul, for God has the right to choose one and reject another just as a potter has the right to shape his clay as he sees fit ([Romans 9:20-23](#)). He has the right to choose both Jews and Gentiles, just as Hosea predicted he would ([Romans 9:24-26](#); see [Hosea 1:10](#); [Hosea 2:23](#)). Even the ultimate salvation of Israel will be only by his grace ([Romans 9:27-29](#); see [Isaiah 10:22-23](#); [Isaiah 28:22](#)).

This difficult passage must be balanced by some of Paul's other statements in Romans, such as

- God is absolutely impartial (see [Romans 2:11](#); [Romans 10:12](#)).
- He will save all who ask him (see [Romans 10:13](#)).

The relationship between predestination and free will has perplexed scholars for ages (see exposition on [§1 Peter 1:1-2](#)). Concerning the present passage, note that Paul did not say that God made the clay as it was but that he worked with it as it was (compare [Jeremiah 18:1-6](#); [Isaiah 45:9](#); [Isaiah 64:6-8](#)). The "objects of his judgment" are "fit only for destruction." This last statement has also been translated "prepared for destruction," but it is important to note that in the original Greek, "prepared" is in the middle voice, meaning "to prepare oneself." On the other hand, God himself prepared the "objects of his mercy" for "glory." This difference in verb tense suggests that destruction is the deserved destination of sinners, while glory is the undeserved destination of the saved.

[Romans 9:30-33](#) *So where are we now?* Paul reminded his readers of the current state of affairs: Many Gentiles, with no religious background, were accepting Christ, while many Jews, with all the benefits of their religious heritage, were rejecting him. Why? Because they had sought righteousness by works, not by faith. And when they saw their Messiah on a cross, not a throne, they couldn't accept him.

[Romans 10:1-4](#) *Paul's supreme desire.* Speaking again of his anguish over Israel's unbelief (compare [Romans 9:1-5](#)), Paul expressed his desire that his people abandon their pursuit of righteousness based on the law and instead accept the righteousness Christ offers. Christ is indeed the "end" of the OT law ([Romans 10:4](#); see [Galatians 3:24](#); [Col. 2:14](#); [Hebrews 7:11-19](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

Romans 10:5-13 *It's so simple: Faith plus nothing equals righteousness.* While the person seeking salvation through the law would be forever trying to keep it ([Romans 10:5](#)), the salvation Christ offers is not in some unattainable place; it is as near as our hearts and mouths ([Romans 10:6-12](#)). Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved ([Romans 10:13](#)). Paul had earlier shown that everyone is lost ([Romans 1:18-3:20](#)). He now repeats the good news of [Romans 3:21-31](#): Everyone can be saved! The "anyone" of [10:13](#) echoes the "everyone" of [John 3:16](#).

Romans 10:14-21 *"We must tell them, but they must listen."* Human witnesses are needed to proclaim the gospel ([Romans 10:14-15](#)), but those who hear must respond, as Israel had failed to do time and time again ([Romans 10:16-21](#)).

Romans 11:1-10 *A remnant guaranteed by grace.* Once again Paul asked what many of his Jewish readers were asking: Has God rejected his own people (compare exposition on [§Romans 9:1-5](#))? Certainly not, said Paul. He offered as proof himself ([Romans 11:1](#)) along with many other Jews of his day who had accepted Christ ([Romans 11:5-6](#); see [Acts 6:7](#)). Even in one of the worst times of Israel's history, when Elijah thought all was hopeless, many Israelites had remained faithful ([Romans 11:2-4](#)). A few Jews had found salvation ([Romans 11:7](#); see exposition on [§1 Peter 1:1-2](#)). Unfortunately, however, most remained blinded by legalism ([Romans 11:8-10](#); see [Psalm 69:22-23](#); [Isaiah 29:10, 13](#); compare [2 Cor. 4:4](#); [Ephes. 4:18](#)). OT prophecy spoke often on the "remnant" of faithful Israelites (see exposition on [§Isaiah 10:20-23](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

Romans 11:11-12 *Jewish rejection, Gentile blessing.* Now that Israel had rejected Christ, was it without hope? "Of course not!" said Paul. Its rejection has resulted in salvation for many Gentiles. Someday Israel will accept God's salvation (see [Romans 11:26](#)), and that will result in even greater riches for all the world. This time of greater riches is the Millennium, in which Israel and many Gentiles will participate (see [Isaiah: Background](#)).

Romans 11:13-32 *Jews and Gentiles: Two olive trees.* Paul explained more fully the amazing divine plan hinted at in [Romans 11:11-12](#). He compared the unbelieving Jews to branches that God had broken off from Israel, the olive tree he had cultivated ([Romans 11:24](#)) for so many centuries. The Gentile Christians are like branches from a "wild olive tree" ([Romans 11:17](#)) that have been grafted into the cultivated tree. Someday, after all the Gentiles predestined for salvation (the "complete number," [Romans 11:25](#)) have been grafted into the tree of Israel, "all Israel will be saved" ([Romans 11:26](#)), just as God had promised (see [Isaiah 29:17-24](#); [Isaiah 59:20-21](#); [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)). On "mystery" ([Romans 11:25](#)), see exposition on [§Col. 1:24-29](#).

Romans 11:33-36 *"Only God could know and do all this!"* Marvelling at the wisdom of God's age-old plan to save both Jews and Gentiles, Paul ended his discussion of that plan with a great outpouring of praise.

Romans 12:1-2 *Transformed, not conformed.* Having described the inward condition of the believer who has received God's righteousness ([Romans 1-8](#)), Paul urged such believers to live in a way that outwardly reflects their inward state ([Romans 12:1-15:13](#)). Rather than being conformed to the patterns of this world, Christians are to be transformed by offering their bodies and minds to God. "Transform" is *metamorpho* in Greek, from which we get "metamorphosis," a change such as that of a

caterpillar becoming a butterfly. The same word described Christ's transfiguration (see [Matthew 17:2](#); [2 Cor. 3:18](#); [1 Peter 1:14-16](#); [1 John 2:15](#).)

Living in a world hostile to God, daily "changing the way you think" (renewing your mind) through Bible study and prayer is the Christian's only safeguard ([Romans 12:2](#); compare [1 Cor. 9:24-27](#); [Ephes. 4:23](#); [Col. 3:10](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

[Romans 12:3-8](#) *Serving righteously in the church.* Christians should realistically assess the gifts God has given them, then use those gifts as a part of Christ's body, the church (see exposition on [Ephes. 1:15-23](#)).

[Romans 12:9-16](#) *Behaving righteously toward each other.* Christian relationships should be open and honest, characterized by love, humility, patience, and generosity.

[Romans 12:17-21](#) *Behaving righteously toward one's foes.* Christians should make every effort to be at peace with their enemies, striving to win others to Christ by showing his love.

[Romans 13:1-7](#) *Saints and the state.* Believers should obey civil laws, for human government has been established by God to help maintain social order (see exposition on [Genesis 9:1-17](#)). Such obedience includes cheerfully paying taxes ([Romans 13:6-7](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

[Romans 13:8-10](#) *Love and the law.* The person filled with God's righteousness will be characterized by love, which is the summation of God's law (see exposition on [Matthew 22:34-40](#)).

[Romans 13:11-14](#) *Time to wake up, shape up, look up!* Paul's teaching about faith should motivate Christians to "wake up" and seek victory over sin, for the Lord's return is near.

[Romans 14:1-15:4](#) *Don't judge diets or days.* Christians should not feel bound by religious traditions or regulations not clearly commanded by God. On the other hand, we must not offend those who observe such things ([Romans 14:1-7](#)). All that we do should be done with thanksgiving and praise to God, mindful that he will someday judge us ([Romans 14:8-12](#)). We should try to be a stepping stone of faith for others, rather than a stumbling block or an obstacle ([Romans 14:13](#)). We should not destroy what God is doing in another person's life just for the sake of winning a minor theological debate ([Romans 14:14-21](#)). Nor should we ever violate our own conscience ([Romans 14:22-23](#)). On [Romans 14:11](#), see [Isaiah 45:23](#); [Phil. 2:10-11](#).

The strong, mature Christian is to be tolerant toward the weak, immature believer—out of love, not out of a desire to display one's own spiritual maturity ([Romans 15:1-4](#)). Paul cited Christ's example of selfless service, as prophesied by David ([Romans 15:3](#); see [Psalm 69:9](#)), then went on to comment on the value of OT Scripture ([Romans 15:4](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

Romans 15:5-13 *Jews and Gentiles: One mind, one mouth.* The goal of tolerance among believers is that they might be unified in glorifying God ([Romans 15:5-7](#), [13](#)). It is especially important that Jewish and Gentile Christians be united, for Christ came to save both Jews and Gentiles ([Romans 15:8-12](#)), as foretold by David (see [2 Samuel 22:50](#)), Moses (see [Deut. 32:21](#)), an anonymous psalmist (see [Psalm 117:1](#)), and Isaiah (see [Isaiah 11:10](#)).

Romans 15:14-33 *In closing: His plans and prayers.* As Paul's letter drew to a close, he assured the Roman believers of his confidence in their faith ([Romans 15:14-15](#)) and reviewed his ministry to the Gentiles, the urgency of which had so far prevented his coming to Rome ([Romans 15:16-22](#)). He then spoke of his desire to visit them on his way to Spain, after he had delivered the offering from Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem ([Romans 15:23-29](#); see exposition on [§Acts 20:1-6](#)). He asked them to pray that God would protect him from the unbelievers in Jerusalem and that he would eventually make it to Rome ([Romans 15:30-33](#)). There would be great irony in God's answer to this prayer: Paul was in fact arrested by the unbelievers in Jerusalem (see [Acts 21:27-30](#)), but this led eventually to his ministry among the believers in Rome (see [Acts 27-28](#)).

Romans 15:14-33 *In closing: His plans and prayers.* As Paul's letter drew to a close, he assured the Roman believers of his confidence in their faith ([Romans 15:14-15](#)) and reviewed his ministry to the Gentiles, the urgency of which had so far prevented his coming to Rome ([Romans 15:16-22](#)). He then spoke of his desire to visit them on his way to Spain, after he had delivered the offering from Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem ([Romans 15:23-29](#); see exposition on [§Acts 20:1-6](#)). He asked them to pray that God would protect him from the unbelievers in Jerusalem and that he would eventually make it to Rome ([Romans 15:30-33](#)). There would be great irony in God's answer to this prayer: Paul was in fact arrested by the unbelievers in Jerusalem (see [Acts 21:27-30](#)), but this led eventually to his ministry among the believers in Rome (see [Acts 27-28](#)).

Romans 16:1-16 *"Give my greetings to . . ."* Paul had apparently entrusted his letter to Phoebe, a faithful Christian woman, for delivery to Rome ([Romans 16:1-2](#); see [Background](#)). Concerning Priscilla and Aquila ([Romans 16:3-5](#)), see exposition on [§Acts 18:1-6](#). Including this faithful couple, Paul sent personal greetings to no less than 26 Christian friends living in Rome ([Romans 16:3-16](#); see [Recipients](#)). The list included both Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor—showing the gospel's universal appeal.

» **See also:** [Illustration: Four "Buildings" in Romans](#)

Romans 16:17-20 *Troublemaker alert!* Without naming names, Paul warned about troublemakers and false teachers in the church. On the crushing of Satan, see [Rev. 20:1-3](#), [10](#).

Romans 16:21-27 *"He is able to keep you."* After sending greetings from his coworkers, including Timothy, Paul closed by committing the Roman believers to Christ's keeping power, which is the gospel itself. On God's secret plan, traditionally translated "mystery" ([Romans 16:25](#)), see exposition on [§Ephes. 3:1-13](#) and on [§Col. 1:24-29](#).