

# A Study of Romans



## The Setting

Paul probably wrote this letter during his third missionary journey. He expected that he would be able to travel to Rome and help with the church there. The church appears to have been led by a number of people, including his friends Aquila and Prisca (16:3). This couple had helped Paul when he was in Corinth (Acts 18:2) and traveled to Ephesus with him (Acts 18:18). Apparently, Paul planned a trip to Spain (15:24, 28) and he hoped to stop for a while in Rome and visit with them. Unfortunately, Paul was instead arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27-36) and he never went to Rome as a free man. He did, however, eventually teach there even as a prisoner (Acts 28:30-31).

## Paul's Purpose

Every one of Paul's letters was written for a specific purpose. Sometimes it was correction and other times it was for simple guidance. In the case of Romans, however, Paul's point is entirely doctrinal. He offers little in the way of practical guidance and does not seem to be answering any specific questions. Romans is Paul's expression of the gospel in its doctrinal fullness. The letter addresses several key doctrinal points. Among them are the following:

1. The nature, extent and effect of sin as a presence in the world, rather than specific acts.
2. Faith as a *response* to Christ and the implications of faith in our lives.
3. The definition of true righteousness and holy living, including the work of the Holy Spirit.
4. The relationship of Israel and the church, particularly in light of the covenants of the Old Testament.
5. Love as the means of submitting to the authorities of the world, even as we live in opposition to the world system.

## Structuring This Study

This study will be what is called an inductive, contextual, discussion-based study. Let me explain what all of that implies:

- An inductive study is one which looks first at the text itself. Topics and ideas emerge from the text, and we answer them as they arise. The opposite is a *deductive* study, which begins with main ideas and then presents the text in support of those ideas.
- Contextual study means that we will bring a lot of history and language into the conversation. The language of Romans, in particular, is carefully chosen, and so as we study the text, we need to be able to plumb the depths of Paul's rhetoric and arguments both in their historical and linguistic context.
- A discussion-based means that you will be invited to do more than just listen to a lecture. There are not necessarily "set" questions and answers, although there will undoubtedly be prompts. Don't be afraid to have a study Bible or other resources to consult and ask questions about.