

## Romans: Background

- **Date:** 57 ± a couple of years
- **The church in Rome:**
  - Most probably founded by Roman Jews who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost and brought back to the synagogues in Rome faith in Jesus as the Messiah.
  - “An important event in the history of the Jews in Rome is mentioned by the Roman historian Suetonius. In his *Life of Claudius*, he says that Claudius ‘expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus’ (25:2). Most scholars agree that ‘Chrestus’ is a corruption of the Greek *Christos* and that the reference is probably to disputes within the Jewish community over the claims of Jesus to be the *Christos*, the Messiah.” (Moo, 4-5)
  - Probably the Jews were able to return a few years later at Claudius’ death in 54.
  - This period of time during which the church had no Jews or Jewish Christians undoubtedly changed its direction and thinking.
- **Paul’s situation:**
  - Likely written while Paul was visiting Corinth in Greece (Acts 20:3). Having completed three missionary journeys over almost 25 years, Paul is going to Jerusalem by way of Rome, and after that he plans to start a mission to Spain.
  - In Jerusalem he plans to deliver the offering from the Gentile churches. This is important to him as a practical way to cement the relationship between the Gentile churches on the mission field and the Jewish churches in the home country.
- **Readership:** Romans contains a debate between Paul’s gospel and Judaism—so clearly the readers must include in part Jewish Christians. It also contains statements indicating it’s meant to be read by Gentile Christians. And likely they are the bulk of the recipients.
- **Genre:** Unlike other letters, this is very much a treatise. While it is certainly influenced by its context, it is not driven by questions and issues the way other letters are (e.g. 1 Cor).
- **Purpose:**
  - To resolve disunity in the church at Rome between Jews seeking special status and Gentiles who want to totally disregard the Jews.
  - To summarize Paul’s thinking on the Jewish/Gentile issue, recently developed in his conflict with the Judaizers in Galatia and Corinth, and refute allegations of excess.
  - To present his Gospel prior to seeking support for his Spanish mission (15:24).
- **Themes:**
  - Justification by faith as the basis for the new covenant under Jesus; contrasted with the old covenant under Adam.
  - The place of Jews in salvation history.
  - Why, if the Messiah’s come, there is still suffering and evil and sin: The a-temporal nature of the Gospel, and why Abraham belongs to the *new* era.
  - Ch. 6: *Freedom from slavery to sin*; ch. 7: *freedom from condemnation by the law*; ch. 8: *life in the Spirit*