

Introduction

Although the book of Romans is the first of 13 books, within the canon of Scripture, written by the Apostle Paul, it was not the first one he wrote. Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians and 1 & 2 Thessalonians were all written perhaps from 2—6 years previous to Romans. However, what's important is the purpose and content of the book, not the date it was written. This is why God has given us no absolute information about when particular Bible books were actually composed.

Romans would be a very hard book to understand if the book of Acts were removed. Acts bridges the gulf between Law to Grace; between God dealing with Israel to His work among the Gentiles; between the Kingdom and the Body of Christ and between God using the 12 Disciples to Him using the Apostle Paul. Without the bridge, we would be hard pressed to move from one concept to the other. If the book of Acts is the hallway leading from Israel's prophetic program to the Body of Christ's Mystery program then Romans can be thought of as the entryway, or introduction to the rest of his writings. Romans lays the doctrinal groundwork so that we can understand not only the following 12 books of Paul, but also the entire Bible. According to Ephesians 1:10, Paul's writings, concerning the Mystery, were a gathering up (or summing up) of all things in Christ. In other words, after God revealed everything He was going to reveal to Paul, there was no more to be said. Scripture was then complete and there was no reason for God to give mankind special messages or signs showing that these messages actually came from God. This is why the sign gifts ceased when Scripture was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8—10).

Paul wrote this book around A.D. 57 toward the end of his third journey, probably while he was in Corinth, just before traveling to Jerusalem (Romans 16:25). He dictated it to Tertius (Romans 16:22) and although he doesn't say, he most likely personally signed it (Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17). This is one reason I believe Paul was not the author of the book of Hebrews.

There was probably more than one congregation at Rome. Romans 16:5 speaks of a church meeting in the house of Priscilla and Aquila. Verses 14 and 15 seem to indicate two other groups of believers separate and distinct from the one meeting in Priscilla and Aquila's house. These were not large congregations if they were meeting in someone's house.

Book order

The books of the Bible are not thrown together in an indiscriminate manner. God is a God of order, not chaos. If we look at the universe, we see an amazing amount of order in the paths of planets and stars. We see the same thing if we study molecules, atoms, protons and electrons. Order can be seen in the entire creation. God also has order in the spirit world where there are different files and ranks among the spirit beings (Colossians 1:16). God also demanded that Israel obey His 613 laws and today demands that people within a church behave in an orderly and disciplined manner (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Although Romans is Paul's first book in the Bible, he actually wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Galatians and 1 & 2 Corinthians before he wrote Romans. Logically, Romans sets the stage for the rest of Paul's writings by training the reader in the concepts and doctrine of this new age of Grace. The book order seems to follow the categories laid out in 2 Timothy 3:16:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

Notice the four categories that pertain to the functions of God's word:

Doctrine: Teachings or instruction (1 Timothy 4:6)

Reproof: Correction of wrong practice.

Correction: Correction of wrong doctrine.

Instruction: To nurture a person in righteousness.

These broad categories can be loosely tied to each of Paul's books as follows:

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| Romans: | Doctrine | } Christ and the Cross |
| 1 & 2 Corinthians: | Reproof | |
| Galatians: | Correction | |
| Ephesians: | Doctrine | } Christ and the Church |
| Philippians: | Reproof | |
| Colossians: | Correction | |
| 1 & 2 Thessalonians: | Doctrine | Christ and the Coming (Rapture) |
| 1 & 2 Timothy: | Instruction | |
| Titus: | Instruction | |
| Philemon: | Instruction | |

Much of the above was developed by Bullinger and J.Sidlow Baxter, and I believe it can be helpful in understanding Paul's writings. Just remember that these are general characteristics of each book, not hard and fast rules. Notice how the book of Romans gives teaching and is followed by Corinthians, who needed reproof concerning practical departure from the teaching in Romans, and Galatians who needed correction concerning doctrinal departure from what was taught in Romans. Likewise, Ephesians is concerned with additional doctrinal teaching for the believer, and is followed by Philippians, who needed to be reproofed concerning departure from proper practices of living as found in Ephesians. They were not united. As Paul states in 1:7—that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. This is followed by Colossians who needed correction concerning a doctrinal departure from the teaching in Ephesians. They were being turned away from Paul's teaching to believe wrong doctrine. As Paul says in 2:8—Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

General outline

There are three main sections that Romans can be divided up into. Chapters 1—8 are focused on doctrine. These chapters are rich in teaching us about our new relationship with the Lord in this Dispensation of Grace. Chapters 9—11 are an aside where Paul speaks to Israel about the changes that are going on. It is within these chapters that Paul justifies why God cast Israel temporarily aside as a nation. These chapters can cause confusion if it is not kept firmly in mind that Paul is not speaking directly to us. Paul then finishes Romans with down-to-earth, practical, every day application of what we had just learned in the previous chapters.

Since God turned away from the nation of Israel temporarily to begin a new work among the Gentiles, He raised up the Apostle Paul. Although he felt that he was one that didn't fit in (1 Corinthians 15:8—11) he realized that he was called by God to fulfill a special purpose (Galatians 1:15), that of announcing and proclaiming the Mystery, the Gospel of the Grace of God (Romans 16:25—26). The introduction of this new program is contained in the book of Romans. It is a gateway book in our understanding of this marvelous manifestation of God's grace, and specifically about our justification by faith (Romans 1:16—17). A study of Romans should set us firm and unmovable in our faith (Romans 1:11; 16:25).

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