

## The Establishment of the Church in Rome

The Bible does not record for us the establishment of the Lord's church in Rome. It is clear, however, that upon the writing of Paul's epistle to the Romans there was already an established congregation of Christians in the heart of the Roman empire. In the epistle to the Romans, Paul speaks of their faith that was **"spoken of throughout the whole world"** (1:8) and their obedience that had **"become known**

Some have described the book of Romans as "the Gospel according to Paul." This is a fitting description, in that the Apostle addresses what Jesus' coming meant for mankind.

to all" (16:19). Paul tells the brethren that he had wanted to come to them **"these many years"** (15:23), which indicates that brethren had been serving the Lord in Rome for a number of years before Paul wrote the epistle.

The history of the church in Rome may go back to the beginning of the gospel, when the Lord's church was first established on the day of Pentecost. Luke tells us, through the Holy Spirit, that on the first Pentecost after Jesus' death, burial and resur-



**Claudius Caesar**  
(Emperor A.D. 41-54)

who obeyed the gospel that day (Acts 2:41), no doubt some of them were from Rome. If that is the case, when these new converts returned to Rome they would have taken their faith with them and established local congregations in their homeland.

The first century Roman historian Seutonius gives us some information regarding when the church in Rome began to grow in prominence. He writes that Claudius, during his reign, "expelled the Jews from Rome, because of the continuing tumult at the influence of Chrestos"<sup>1</sup> (*Claudius*, 25). Luke records this incident, declaring that **"Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome"** (Acts 18:2). The date of this expulsion is agreed to have been A.D. 52, which would place Christians living in Rome who

rection there were in Jerusalem **"visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes"** (Acts 2:10). Of the 3000

had converted from Judaism there by that time.

Two Jews effected by this expulsion were Aquila and Priscilla. Paul first met this couple in Corinth shortly after they had come from Italy (Acts

18:2). Luke does not record their conversion to Christ. This may indicate that they were already Christians before leaving Italy.

Upon the writing of the epistle to the Romans, Aquila and Priscilla had returned to Rome (Rom. 16:3). This could have occurred after Nero came to power in A.D. 54. A congregation in Rome met in their house (Rom. 16:5).



**Nero**  
(Emperor A.D. 54-68)

## Roman Catholic Claims

Roman Catholic tradition claims that Peter and Paul founded and organized the church in Rome. It is

# Introduction to Romans

## Lesson 1

<sup>1</sup> *Chrestos* probably refers to Christ. In his commentary on Seutonius, Joseph B. Pike writes, "The tumults referred to were probably due to contentions between Jews and Christians, for the Romans regarded the latter simply as a sect of the former. By the name *Chrestos*, Seutonius probably refers to Christ, who from the Roman point of view might well be the one who caused the disturbances" (*Pike's Seutonius: Selected Lives*, 264).

evident from Paul's epistle, however, that a church existed in Rome before Paul came to them (Rom. 1:9-13; 15:22-24). There is also no indication that Peter had left Jerusalem by this time (Acts 15:2-7). Of the twenty-six people who were members of the church in Rome addressed by name in the epistle, there is no mention of Peter (16:3-15). While it is likely that Peter went to Rome (1 Pet. 5:13), there is no scriptural evidence that he and Paul established the church in Rome.

### Date and Place the Epistle was Written

The date of the writing of the epistle is generally agreed to have been around A.D. 57. This would have been just before Paul's final journey to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21). Paul probably wrote the epistle during his short stay in Achaia (Acts 20:3), most likely from the city of Corinth. Three internal factors support this conclusion: (1) Paul commends Phoebe **"a servant of the church in Cenchrea"** (16:1).<sup>2</sup> Cenchrea was a suburb of the city of Corinth. (2) Paul was the guest of **"Gaius"** (16:23). Paul converted a Corinthian named Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14). (3) A greeting is offered from **"Erastus, the treasurer of the city"** (16:23). Paul elsewhere speaks of an Erastus in Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20, see p. 91).

If the date of A.D. 57 is correct, the emperor at that time was Nero. Only a few years from this date Nero would begin the first major Roman persecution of Christians. In the tenth year of his reign, blaming Christians for a fire that burned

## Outline of Romans

- I. Introduction and proclamation of faith (1:1-17).
- II. The problem of sin (1:18-3:31)
  - A. The sinfulness of the Gentile world (1:18-32).
  - B. The sinfulness of the Jews (2:1-29).
  - C. All the world is under sin (3:1-31).
- III. God's solution to the problem of sin (4:1-6:23).
  - A. Salvation by grace through faith (4:1-5:5).
  - B. Christ's death for sin (5:6-21).
  - C. Freedom from sin in Christ (6:1-23).
- IV. The problem of the Law (7:1-8:39).
  - A. The Law could not conquer sin (7:1-25).
  - B. Christ conquers sin (8:1-39).
- V. The problem of Israel's rejection (9:1-11:36).
  - A. The church is the spiritual Israel (9:1-33).
  - B. Salvation is available to the Jews (10:1-21).
  - C. Israel's rejection opened the way for the Gentiles (11:1-36).
- VI. Offering a "living sacrifice" (12:1-15:13).
  - A. The Christian's living sacrifice (12:1-21).
  - B. Submission to civil authority (13:1-7).
  - C. Walking in light and love (13:8-14).
  - D. Love for brethren (14:1-15:13).
- VII. Final greetings and commendations (15:14-16:27).

much of the city of Rome, Nero began committing some of the most cruel and horrifying acts of persecution ever known. It was during this time (according to historical tradition) that Peter and Paul were both put to death.<sup>3</sup> Lasting from A.D. 64-68, this persecution would unleash hatred and prejudice against Christians that would revive again and again in later persecutions. The second century Roman historian Tacitus, gives us a glimpse of how Romans felt about Christians. He writes:

The originator of this name was Christus, who was executed by Pontius Pilate the procurator, in the reign of Tiberius. Although the dangerous superstition was repressed at the time, it broke out afresh not only in Judea, the origin of this evil, but also through the city [of Rome], which is where all things atrocious or disgraceful from every place flow together and fill up. (Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15. 44).

Since Paul does not address any specific persecution in the epistle, it

<sup>2</sup> Some late manuscripts add postscripts at the conclusion of the epistle claiming that Phoebe carried the letter from Corinth to Rome. This may well explain why she is "commended" to the brethren.

<sup>3</sup> The fourth-century historian Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, claims Peter was crucified and Paul was beheaded during this persecution (2.25).

is likely that he was writing to them at a time before such dangerous resentment began to be poured out on Christians.

### Focus of the Book

The New Testament books that record the life of Jesus are called the *Gospels* because they record the life and teaching of Jesus. Some have described the book of Romans as “the Gospel according to Paul.” This is a fitting description, in that the Apostle addresses what Jesus’ coming meant for mankind. The epistle addresses three major problems and offers the divine solution to each of these problems. First, *the problem of sin (1:18-3:31)*. Paul devotes the first three chapters to illustrating the pervasiveness and destructiveness of sin and then two chapters to the explanation of God’s solution to this problem (4:1-

6:23). Second, in the heart of the book, he addresses *the problem of the Law (7:1-8:39)*. To these Christians who had come to Christ out of Judaism, he demonstrates that while the Law of Moses did not offer a lasting solution to the problem of sin, the Law of Christ does. Third, *the problem of Israel’s rejection of Jesus (9:1-11:36)*. In the last half of the book the Apostle devotes three chapters to help these Jewish Christians understand why their own nation had rejected the Messiah who was sent to them. The book ends with practical instructions regarding how



Via Appia, the road by which Paul entered Rome (Acts 28:15). Courtesy of FreeStockPhotos.com.

Christians must offer themselves to God as “living sacrifices” in contrast to the old animal sacrifices that were killed and offered up (12:1-15:13).

### Questions

- What three statements in the book of Romans make it clear that a church was in Rome before Paul wrote this epistle and where are the statements found?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).
- What does Luke tell us about those assembled on the day of Pentecost that could explain the establishment of the church in Rome (Acts 2:10)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Why had Aquila and Priscilla left Rome (Acts 18:2)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Who was the emperor when this happened? \_\_\_\_\_
- What does the Roman Catholic church claim about the establishment of the church in Rome? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 List three reasons that this could not be true:
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

5. When is it believed that Paul wrote this epistle? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Where was Paul believed to have been when he wrote this epistle? \_\_\_\_\_

List three statements in the epistle that support this conclusion:

a. \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).

b. \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).

c. \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).

7. What are three problems addressed in the book of Romans, and where are these problems addressed?

a. \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).

b. \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).

c. \_\_\_\_\_ ( \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ ).

