

# Read the New Testament in a Year

## Supporting Notes & Questions

**Beginning Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

*Prepared by Howard Jackson*

**Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome.**

**Background:** When did he write the letter? Paul wrote this letter to the Christian brothers and sisters in Rome around 57AD before his last trip to Jerusalem. The Emperor Claudius had evicted all of the Jewish community from Rome before 50AD, but Nero had invited them all back in 54AD. The Christian Jews returned to a Gentile-led church, which could have raised issues, later made critical by outside influences.

Why did he choose the themes in it? Paul sets out his scriptural justification for including non-Jews in the Church and excluding obedience to the Torah (the Jewish Law) from it. As the "Apostle to the Gentiles", it looks like he wanted to settle the arguments over these matters with the Jewish Christians once and for all. But in doing so, he also established a sound base for Christian belief and practice.

Where did he write it? At the time of writing it, Paul was probably in Corinth. He had taken responsibility for collecting money from the churches in the area for poorer Christians in Jerusalem and he planned to take the money there himself. Then he intended to take the Good News to Spain, visiting Rome on the way. Last month's readings in Acts gave the background story of his later arrest and imprisonment in Jerusalem, his voyage as a prisoner to Rome and his first meeting with the Christians there.

What was the context? It is important to note that Paul was writing almost three centuries before the doctrine of the Trinity was developed in an attempt to settle the question "was Jesus a man or a god?" The formula "Father, Son and Holy Spirit", used from the start in Christian baptism, described how God is seen at work in three ways. First as creator of the universe, second working through Jesus and third as the Holy Spirit transforming the personality and life of the Christian believer from within. Paul's encounter with the eye-witnesses and participants of Jesus' ministry led him to describe Jesus as a man like us. But chosen to be the Messiah, powered by God's Spirit to bring God's kingdom into being and, because of his deeds, death and resurrection, was recognised by God as his Son, and given Lordship over the world.

### **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> Romans Chapter 1**

VV1-6 Paul sets out the context of his letter for the Gentile Christians in Rome in terms of the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah and their privileged status as those called to belong to him. Did you realise that "you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ"? (V6)

VV 8-15 Paul has not met the Christians in Rome, but he has heard excellent reports of them. He declares his intention to visit them to preach the gospel to them. What would Paul hear about us? (V8)

VV 16-17 Here Paul introduces the topic of faith and quotes Habakkuk 2:4 "The righteous will live by faith."

VV 18ff. The tone of the letter changes to a commentary on the state of those who do not recognise God, even though the wonders of his creation are plain to see. The result of their suppression of the truth has been their worship of idols and morally bankrupt lives. And God has let them get on with their totally self-centred lives and "enjoy" the hell on Earth it has created. Was Paul right to assume God's wrath was revealed in the way he allowed those who denied his existence to suffer the consequences of their actions? (V18) Does this sound like a warning for today's society? Is it fair to label Paul "homophobic" when his disgust with assumed homosexual acts is a single aspect (V27) of the behaviour of the society, the whole Roman Empire, which was corrupt, violent and committing every conceivable form of sin and depravity (38 listed between VV21 &32)?

#### **Footnote:**

John Wesley was listening to a reading of Martin Luther's Preface to Romans (an outline commentary) when he felt his heart strangely warmed. This experience completely transformed his ministry.

Here is a link to a translation of the Preface for a little supplementary study if you are so minded.

<https://churchages.net/en/sermon/luther/preface-to-romans>