

# Paul and Rome



## SABBATH—JUNE 26

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Acts 28:17–31; Romans 1:7; Romans 15:14, 20–27; Ephesians 1; Philippians 1:12.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. People all over the world are talking about your faith” (Romans 1:8, NIV).

**IN OUR STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS,** we should start with a study of the history and background of the book. Then we should begin with Romans 1:1 and go through the entire book, verse by verse. But because the study of the book has been limited to one quarter, we have had to choose the most important parts for our study. The book could easily take four quarters, not just one, to study. So, only the chapters that have the basic message of Romans will be covered.

It is very important that a student of the book of Romans understand the book's background and history. Without that background, it will be difficult to know what Paul is saying. Paul was writing to a certain group of Christians at a certain time for a certain reason. He knew that reason would help us greatly in our study too.

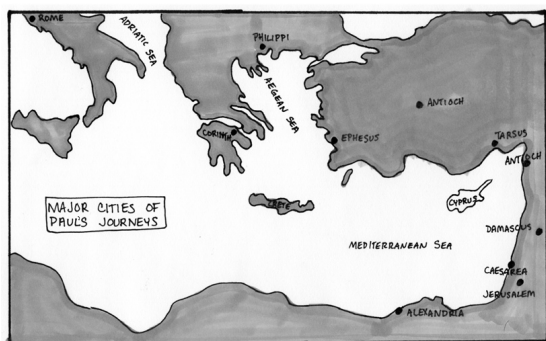
In our imaginations, we must go back in time to Rome and become members of the church group there. Then, as first-century church members, we need to listen to Paul and the words that the Holy Spirit gave him at that time.

Written a long time ago, the book also has timely messages for God's people today, in every land and in almost every situation. We need to listen prayerfully to the words written here and use those words in our lives.

**SUNDAY—JUNE 27****DATE AND PLACE (Acts 18:23)**

Romans 16:1, 2 shows that Paul probably wrote Romans in the city of Cenchreae. The city was near the eastern port<sup>1</sup> of Corinth, in Greece. Paul also spoke of Phoebe, who lived close to Corinth. This makes Corinth part of the background for Paul's letter to the Romans.

One of the reasons it is important to know where Paul wrote the New Testament letters is to figure out the date of writing. Paul traveled a lot. So, knowing where he was at a certain time gives us a clue as to when he wrote his letters.



**Paul wrote the book of Romans in a city near the eastern port of Corinth in Greece.**

Paul started the church at Corinth on his second missionary<sup>2</sup> journey, A.D. 49–52 (read Acts 18:1–18). On Paul's third journey, A.D. 53–58, he visited Greece again (Acts 20:2, 3). He received an offering for the saints in Jerusalem near the end of his

journey (Romans 15:25, 26). This means the Letter to the Romans probably was written early in the year of A.D. 58.

**According to Acts 18:23, what other important churches did Paul visit on his third missionary journey?**

Paul was visiting the Galatian churches. He discovered that while he was away from the churches, false teachers made the members believe they had to take part in circumcision.<sup>3</sup> These false teachers taught that other parts of Moses' law were important and must be kept. Paul was afraid that his enemies might reach Rome before he did. So, he wrote the letter to the Romans to stop false teachers from making the same thing happen in Rome. It is believed that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians when he was in Corinth during the three months he was there on his third missionary journey. He probably wrote the letter soon after he got to Corinth.

“In his letter to the Romans, Paul set down the great principles [rules] of the gospel.<sup>4</sup> He explained his answers to questions that made the Jewish and the Gentile<sup>5</sup> churches disagree. He showed that the hopes and promises had once belonged to the Jews. But they were now offered to the non-Jews also.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,<sup>6</sup> page 373.

1. port—a town on a body of water, where people from far away come to trade.

2. missionary—having to do with the special duty or work that a church sends a person or a group out to do.

3. circumcision—the act of cutting off the skin (called the foreskin) at the end of the penis of a man or a boy.

4. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

5. Gentile—non-Jewish.

6. apostles—the disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven.

When we study any book of the Bible, it is important to know why it was written. We also need to know what situation the book was addressing. So, to understand the Letter to the Romans, it is important for us to understand and know the questions that divided the Jewish and Gentile churches. Our lesson next week will deal with these questions.

**What kinds of issues are dividing your church today? Are the threats more from outside the church or from within? Do you play a part in these struggles? How often have you stopped to question your part, your position, and your attitudes (feelings) about the struggles you are facing? Why is it important for us to examine ourselves?**

## MONDAY—JUNE 28

### PERSONAL TOUCH (Romans 15:20–27)

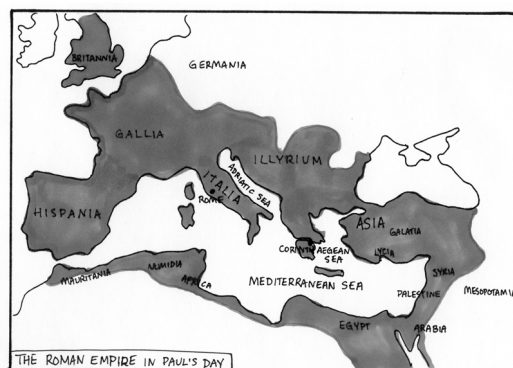
A letter is one thing. But a personal visit is another. That is why Paul told the Romans in his letter that he was going to visit them in person. He wanted them to know that he was coming and why.

**What reasons does Paul give in Romans 15:20–27 for not visiting Rome sooner? What made Paul decide to come to Rome when he did? How important was mission<sup>7</sup> to**

**him? What can we learn about mission and witnessing<sup>8</sup> from Paul's words here? What interesting and important point does Paul make in verse 27 about Jews and Gentiles?**

Paul, the greatest missionary<sup>9</sup> to the Gentiles, always felt it was important that he take the gospel to new areas. In the early days of Christianity, the workers were few. It would have been a waste of valuable missionary power for Paul to work in churches that were already started. So, he left others in charge. Paul said, "I have always wanted to preach the good news where Christ was not known. I don't [do not] want to build on what someone else has started. It is written, 'Those who were not told about him [Jesus] will understand' " (Romans 15:20, 21, NIV).

Paul never planned to settle down in Rome. His goal was to preach in Spain. He hoped to get the support and help of the Christians in Rome for this work in Spain.



**It was not Paul's goal to settle in Rome but to preach in Spain.**

7. mission—the special duty (work) for Jesus that a church sends a person or a group out to do.

8. witnessing—to tell other people about the goodness of God through your words and the loving deeds (acts) you do for them.

9. missionary—a person sent out by a church to spread its religion in a foreign country.

**What important principle can we learn for ourselves about how Paul tried to get help from a church that had already been started so that he could do missionary work in a new area?**

Read the verses in Romans 15:20–27 again. Think about how much Paul wanted to minister<sup>10</sup> and to serve. What inspires<sup>11</sup> you and your actions? How much of a heart for service do you have?

## TUESDAY—JUNE 29

### PAUL REACHES ROME (Acts 28:16)

**What does Acts 28:16 tell us about how Paul finally got to Rome? What lesson can we learn about the unexpected and unwanted things that happen to us?**

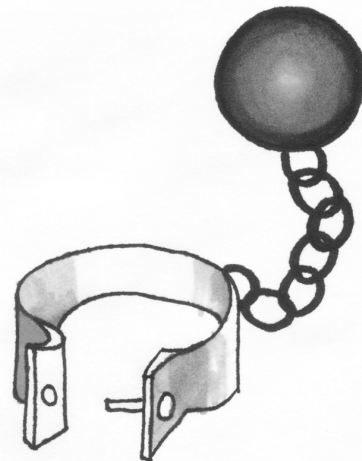
Life can take some very strange turns. Many times our best plans do not come out as we expected or hoped. The apostle Paul did get to Rome after all. But it probably was not as he had expected.

Paul reached Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey with his offering for the poor. He had collected the offering from the church groups of Europe and Asia Minor. But in Jerusalem, unexpected events awaited Paul. He was arrested and put in chains and held prisoner at Caesarea for two years.

Paul appealed to Caesar. About three years after his arrest, Paul arrived in Rome. Paul probably did not expect this when he first wrote to the Roman church about his plan to visit them.

**What does Acts 28:17–31 tell us about Paul’s time in Rome? More important, what lesson can we learn from these verses?**

“It was not Paul’s sermon[s], but his chains, that caused the people in Caesar’s court to become interested in Christianity. It was as a prisoner that Paul set free so many souls from the slavery of sin. And this was not all. Paul said, ‘Because I am being held by chains, most of the believers in the Lord have become bolder. They now speak God’s word more boldly and without fear.’ Philippians 1:14, [NIRV].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 464.



**It was not Paul’s sermons but his chains that caused the people in Caesar’s court to become interested in Christianity.**

10. minister—to help or care for someone or something.

11. inspires—to make someone want to do something; to give someone an idea about what to do or create.

**How many times have you experienced unexpected events in your life that turned out for good? (Read Philippians 1:12.) How can, and should, those experiences give you faith to trust in God when unexpected things happen?**

### WEDNESDAY—JUNE 30

#### CALLED TO BE “SAINTS”<sup>12</sup> (Romans 1:7)

**Read Paul’s greeting to the church in Rome in Romans 1:7. What principles of truth can we learn from his words?**

*Beloved of God.* It is true that God loves the world. But, in a special sense, God loves those who have chosen Him and those who have accepted His love.

We know this as humans.<sup>13</sup> We love those who love us. Love expects love to be returned. When the love we give is not given back to us, love is limited and is not complete.

*Called to be saints.* In some translations the words *to be* are in *italics*.<sup>14</sup> This means that the translators have added in the words. But those words can be removed without changing the meaning. When the words “to be” are removed, we get the words “called saints.”

*Saints* is the translation of the Greek word *hagioi* that means “holy ones.” *Holy* means “dedicated” (faithful). A

saint is a dedicated person who has been “set apart” by God. He or she may have a long way to go in Christian growth. But this person has chosen Christ, so the Lord names him or her a *saint*.

**Paul says that some people were “called to be saints.” Does this mean that some people are not called? How do Ephesians 1:4, Hebrews 2:9, and 2 Peter 3:9 help us understand what Paul means?**

The great news of the gospel is that Christ’s death was for everybody. All of us have been called to be saved in Him. All of us have been “called to be saints” even before the foundation (beginning) of the world. God’s first plan was for all humans to be saved in Jesus. The final fire of hell was meant only for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Sadly, some people do not take advantage of<sup>15</sup> what was offered them. But that should not make us forget the wonder of God’s gift.

**Think about it: even before the beginning of the world, God called you to be saved in Him. Should anything be able to stop you from obeying that call? Explain your answer.**

### THURSDAY—JULY 1

#### KNOWN BY THE WORLD (Romans 1:8)

12. saints—followers of God who are very good, kind, or patient.

13. humans—men, women, and children.

14. italics—letters, numbers, and so on that slant upward to the right; italic type.

15. take advantage of—to make full use of; to gain as much as possible from.

We do not know how the church group in Rome was started. Many believe the church was started by Peter or Paul. But there is no way to prove that. Perhaps lay persons<sup>16</sup> started it. Those people were believers who accepted Christ on the Day of Pentecost<sup>17</sup> in Jerusalem (Acts 2). Later on, they visited Rome or even moved there. Or perhaps, at some later time, believers moved to Rome and witnessed<sup>18</sup> about their faith there.

“Thirty years or so after the time of Pentecost, a church group was started in Rome. No apostles had ever visited, but the church became well-known. Twenty years after Christ was crucified,<sup>19</sup> there was an active, growing church in Rome. This church was strong and very active for the Lord. And the Lord worked for it.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1067.

### How does Paul describe the church at Rome in Romans 15:14?

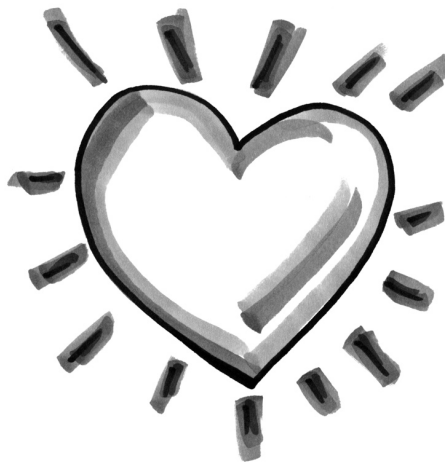
Paul chooses three things that are important in the Roman Christians’ experience:

1. “Full of goodness.” Would people say this of our own experience? As they spend time with us, does our goodness catch their attention?

2. “Filled with all knowledge.” The Bible points to the importance of information and knowledge. Christians are encouraged to study the Bible

and to become well-informed about its teachings. “The words, ‘A new heart also will I give you,’ mean, ‘A new mind will I give you.’ A change of heart is always followed by a clear sense of Christian duty. It is an understanding of truth.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, page 24.

3. “Able . . . to admonish [advise and support] one another.” No one can grow spiritually if he or she is separated from fellow believers. We need to be able to encourage others and, at the same time, have others encourage us too.



The words “a new heart I [Jesus] will give you” mean “a new mind I will give you.”

**What about your local church? What kind of reputation<sup>20</sup> does it have? Or, even more important, does it have one at all? What does your answer tell you about your local church? More important, how**

16. lay persons—workers in the church who are not ministers (preachers).

17. Day of Pentecost—the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers. Read Acts 2:1–4.

18. witnessed—told other people about God through words and loving deeds (acts).

19. crucified—being put to death by nailing to a cross.

20. reputation—what other people think of you.

## can you help improve the situation?

## FRIDAY—JULY 2

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Mysteries<sup>21</sup> of the Bible,” page 706, in *Testimonies*<sup>22</sup> for the Church, volume 5; “Salvation<sup>23</sup> to the Jews,” pages 372–374, in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Read also *The SDA Bible Dictionary*, page 922; and *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, pages 467, 468.

“While in prison Paul was cut off from working in the churches. But he had a wider and more lasting influence<sup>24</sup> than if he had been free to travel among the churches as he had in past years. As a prisoner of the Lord, Paul had a stronger hold on his Christian believers. And Paul’s words, written while in chains for the sake of Christ, gave him greater attention and respect than they did when he was with believers in person.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 454.

“To make sure the Christian church was well set up in Rome was one of Paul’s dearest hopes and goals. A church had already been set up in Rome, and Paul wanted to get the believers to support the work to be done in Italy and in other countries. Paul tried to prepare the way for his work among these believers. Many of them were still strangers to him. So, Paul sent them a letter telling them

about his plan to visit Rome and his hope of starting a church in Spain.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 373.

“The eternal God has shown the separation between the saint and the sinner, between the believer and the unbeliever. The two classes do not blend into each other like the colors of a rainbow. Instead, they are as different as midday and midnight.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, page 390.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. How could your class help improve, if it needs to, the way that other people think of your church?
- ② In class, share stories about situations that at first seemed terrible but later became good. How can you use these experiences to help others who struggle with bad things that were unexpected?
- ③ Think about the idea that we were called to have salvation, even before the beginning of the world (read also Titus 1:1, 2; 2 Timothy 1:8, 9). Why should we find this so encouraging? What does this tell us about God’s love for all humans? Why is it so sad when people turn away from God’s gift of grace?<sup>25</sup>

21. mysteries—things that cannot be fully understood or explained.

22. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

23. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved from sin or evil.

24. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

25. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.