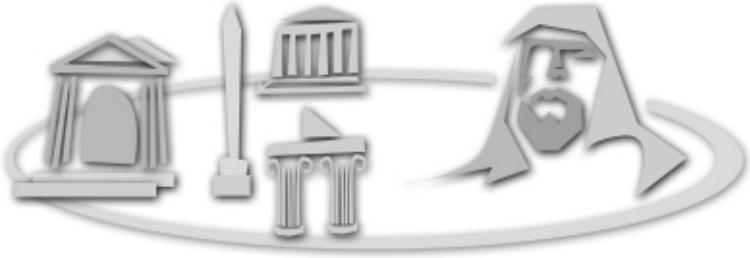


# Paul *and* Rome



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 28:17–31; Rom. 1:7; 15:14, 20–27; Ephesians 1; Phil. 1:12.*

**Memory Text:** “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (*Romans 1:8, NKJV*).

Ideally, in our study of the book of Romans, after a study of the historical background, we should begin with Romans 1:1 and then go through the entire book verse by verse. Because only one quarter has been allotted to the study of the book, we have had to be selective in what parts we can study. The book could easily take four quarters, not one, to explore. Hence, only the key chapters, in which the basic message is contained, will be covered.

It is extremely important that a student of the book of Romans understand the book's historical background. Without that background, it will be difficult for the student to know what Paul is saying. Paul was writing to a specific group of Christians at a specific time for a specific reason; knowing, as much as possible, that reason will greatly benefit us in our study.

We must, in our imagination, go back in time, transport ourselves to Rome, become members of the congregation there, and then, as first-century church members, listen to Paul and the words that the Holy Spirit gave him at that time.

Amazingly enough, though written a long time ago and in a whole other context, the book has messages relevant to God's people today, in every land and in nearly every situation. Hence, we need to heed prayerfully the words written here and apply them to our lives.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 3.*

## Date and Place

Romans 16:1, 2 indicates that Paul probably wrote Romans in the city of Cenchreae, which was near the eastern port of Corinth, in Greece. Paul's mention of Phoebe, a resident of greater Corinth, establishes that place as the likely background for the letter to the Romans.

One of the purposes of establishing the city of origin of the New Testament epistles is to ascertain the date of writing. Because Paul traveled much, knowing where he was at a particular time gives us a clue to the date.

Paul established the church at Corinth on his second missionary journey, A.D. 49–52 (*see Acts 18:1–18*). On his third journey, A.D. 53–58, he visited Greece again (*Acts 20:2, 3*), and at this time he received an offering for the saints in Jerusalem near the end of his journey (*Rom. 15:25, 26*). The Epistle to the Romans was, then, written probably in the early months of A.D. 58.

**What other important churches had Paul visited on his third missionary journey? *Acts 18:23*.**

Visiting the Galatian churches, Paul discovered that during his absence false teachers had convinced the members to submit to circumcision and to keep to other precepts of the law of Moses. Fearing that his opponents might reach Rome before he arrived, Paul wrote a letter (Romans) to forestall the same tragedy happening in Rome. It is believed that the Epistle to the Galatians was written also from Corinth during Paul's three months there on his third missionary journey, perhaps shortly after his arrival.

“In his epistle to the Romans, Paul set forth the great principles of the gospel. He stated his position on the questions which were agitating the Jewish and the Gentile churches, and showed that the hopes and promises which had once belonged especially to the Jews were now offered to the Gentiles also.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 373.

As we said, it is important in the study of any book of the Bible to know why it was written; that is, what situation it was addressing. Hence, it is important for our understanding of the Epistle to the Romans to know what questions were agitating the Jewish and Gentile churches. Next week's lesson will deal with these questions.

**What kinds of issues are agitating your church at present? Are the threats more from without or from within? What role are you playing in these debates? How often have you stopped to question your role, your position, and your attitudes in whatever struggles you're facing? Why is this kind of self-examination so important?**

## Personal Touch

A letter is one thing, a personal visit another. That's why Paul, even though he wrote to the Romans, announced in the letter that he intended to see them in person. He wanted them to know that he was coming, and why.

**Read** Romans 15:20–27. What reasons does Paul give for not having visited Rome earlier? What made him decide to come when he did? How central was mission to him in his reasoning? What can we learn about mission and witnessing from Paul's words here? What interesting—and important—point does Paul make in verse 27 about Jews and Gentiles?

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The great missionary to the Gentiles felt constantly impelled to take the gospel to previously unentered areas, leaving others to labor in areas where the gospel had been established. In the days when Christianity was young and the laborers few, it would have been a waste of valuable missionary power for Paul to work in already entered areas. He said, "So have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation," so that "they that have not heard shall understand" (*Rom. 15:20, 21*).

It was not Paul's purpose to settle down in Rome. It was his aim to evangelize Spain. He hoped to get the support of the Christians in Rome for this venture.

**What** important principle can we take away for ourselves on the whole question of mission from the fact that Paul sought help from an established church in order to evangelize a new area?

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**Read again the verses in Romans 15:20–27. Notice how much Paul wanted to serve; that is, his great desire was to minister and to serve. What motivates you and your actions? How much of a heart of service do you have?**

## Paul Reaches Rome

**“But** when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him” (*Acts 28:16, NKJV*). **What does this text tell us about how Paul finally got to Rome? What lesson can we draw from this for ourselves about the unexpected and unwanted things that so often come our way?**

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Life can take some very strange turns. How often our plans, even the ones formulated with the best of intentions, don't come out as we anticipated and hoped for. The apostle Paul did, indeed, get to Rome, but it probably wasn't as he had expected.

When Paul reached Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey with his offering for the poor, which he collected from the congregations of Europe and Asia Minor, unexpected events awaited him. He was arrested and fettered. After being held prisoner for two years at Caesarea, he appealed to Caesar. Some three years after his arrest, he arrived in Rome, and (we can assume) not in the manner that he intended to when he first wrote to the Roman church years before about his intention to visit them.

**What** do the following texts tell us about Paul's time in Rome? **More important, what lesson can we learn from them?** *Acts 28:17–31*.

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“Not by Paul's sermon[s], but by his bonds, was the attention of the court attracted to Christianity. It was as a captive that he broke from so many souls the bonds that held them in the slavery of sin. Nor was this all. He declared: ‘Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.’ Philippians 1:14.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 464.

**How many times have you experienced unexpected twists in your life that, in the end, turned out for good? (See Phil. 1:12.) How can, and should, those experiences give you faith to trust God for the things from which no good seems to have arisen?**

## Called to Be “Saints”

**Here** is Paul’s salutation to the church in Rome. “To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom. 1:7*). What principles of truth, of theology, of faith, can we take away from his words here?

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*Beloved of God.* While it is true that God loves the world, in a special sense God loves those who have chosen Him, those who have responded to His love.

We see this in the human sphere. We love in a special way those who love us; with them there is a mutual exchange of affection. Love demands response. When the response is not forthcoming, love is limited in its fullest expression.

*Called to be saints.* In some translations the phrase “to be” is in italics, which means that the translators have supplied the words. But they can be left out with the meaning intact. When they are omitted, we get the expression “called saints”; that is, “designated saints.”

“Saints” is the translation of the Greek *hagioi*, which literally means “holy ones.” *Holy* means “dedicated.” A saint is one who has been “set apart” by God. He or she still may have a long way to go in sanctification, but the fact that this person has chosen Christ as the Lord designates him or her as a saint in the Bible’s meaning of the term.

**Paul** says that they 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 universal; it was for all human beings. All have been called to be saved in Him, “called to be saints,” even before the foundation of the world. God’s original intention was for all humanity to find salvation in Jesus. The final fire of hell was meant only for the devil and his angels (*Matt. 25:41*). That some folk don’t avail themselves of what was offered doesn’t take away from the wonder of the gift any more than someone who goes on a hunger strike in a marketplace takes away from the wonderful bounties found there.

**Think about it: even before the foundation of the world, God called you to have salvation in Him. Why should you not allow anything, anything at all, to hold you back from heeding that call?**

## World Reputation

**“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom. 1:8).**

It is not known how the congregation in Rome became established. The tradition that the church was founded by Peter or Paul is without historical foundation. Perhaps lay persons established it, converts on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (*Acts 2*) who then visited or moved to Rome. Or perhaps at some later period converts moving to Rome witnessed to their faith in that world capital.

It is surprising that, in a few decades from Pentecost, a congregation that apparently had received no apostolic visit should be so widely known. “Notwithstanding the opposition, twenty years after the crucifixion of Christ there was a live, earnest church in Rome. This church was strong and zealous, and the Lord worked for it.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1067.

“Faith” here probably includes the broader sense of faithfulness; that is, faithfulness to the new way of life they had discovered in Christ.

### **Read Romans 15:14. How does Paul there describe the church at Rome?**

Paul selects three items as worthy of note in the Roman Christians’ experience:

1. “Full of goodness.” Would people say this of our own experience? As they associate with us, is it the abundance of goodness in us that attracts their attention?

2. “Filled with all knowledge.” The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the importance of enlightenment, information, and knowledge. Christians are urged to study the Bible and to become well-informed as to 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 attended by a clear conviction of Christian duty, an understanding of truth.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 24.

3. “Able . . . to admonish one another.” No one can thrive spiritually if isolated from fellow believers. We need to be able to encourage others and, at the same time, be encouraged by others.

**What about your local church? What kind of reputation does it have? Or, even more important, does it even have one at all? What does your answer tell you about your local church? More important, if need be, how can you help improve the situation?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Mysteries of the Bible,” p. 706, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Salvation to the Jews,” pp. 372–374, in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Read also *The SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 922; and *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 467, 468.

“While apparently cut off from active labor, Paul exerted a wider and more lasting influence than if he had been free to travel among the churches as in former years. As a prisoner of the Lord, he had a firmer hold upon the affections of his brethren; and his words, written by one under bonds for the sake of Christ, commanded greater attention and respect than they did when he was personally with them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 454.

“To see the Christian faith firmly established at the great center of the known world was one of his dearest hopes and most cherished plans. A church had already been established in Rome, and the apostle desired to secure the co-operation of the believers there in the work to be accomplished in Italy and in other countries. To prepare the way for his labors among these brethren, many of whom were as yet strangers to him, he sent them a letter announcing his purpose of visiting Rome and his hope of planting the standard of the cross in Spain.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 373.

“The eternal God has drawn the line of distinction between the saint and the sinner, between converted and unconverted. The two classes do not blend into each other imperceptibly, like the colors of a rainbow, but are as distinct as midday and midnight.”—Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 390.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell on the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. How could your class help improve your church’s reputation, if need be?
- 2 In class, share experiences about how a situation that at first seemed terrible was able to be turned to good. How can you use these experiences to help others who are struggling with unexpected calamities?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea that we were called to have salvation, even before the foundation of the world (see also *Titus 1:1, 2; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9*). Why should we find this so encouraging? What does this tell us about God’s love for all humans? Why, then, is it so tragic when people turn their backs on what has been so graciously offered them?

## Getting to Know God

Ariuntuya laughed at her older sister. “You are going to a Christian meeting?” she asked accusingly. “You used to mock people who didn’t recite traditional prayers!” Ariuntuya’s sister, Moogli, ignored her younger sister’s taunts.

Ariuntuya’s family lives in Mongolia. A school friend had invited Moogli to attend a Seventh-day Adventist worship service held in a rented hall, and Moogli went. She liked the program and invited her sister to go with her. Ariuntuya went, and she had to admit that she liked it. But she preferred to sleep late rather than attend a religious program.

Moogli continued attending the meetings. When some evangelists came to the city several months later, Moogli again invited Ariuntuya to attend. This time Ariuntuya attended with Moogli. Ariuntuya enjoyed the music and felt the love of the church members.

Slowly Ariuntuya realized that church was more than a social club; it was about having a personal relationship with God. Ariuntuya began to consider how God would fit into her life.

When the family moved to the capital city, the sisters found an Adventist church to attend. Ariuntuya’s mother had never approved of the girls attending a Christian church. But when the young Adventist pastor hired the girls’ mother to care for his children, she began attending church with her daughters. Ariuntuya had never really thought about praying for her mother, so she was surprised at her mother’s change of attitude.

“I realize now that God has been working in my life,” Ariuntuya admits. “I realize that He works in other people’s lives, even when we see no outward sign of it. I am learning to give God first place in my life. Now I pray for my parents to become Christians, and I invite others to consider giving their lives to God too. I’m glad that my sister kept inviting me, even when I made fun of her and refused to go.”

The Adventist Church in Mongolia is young, and members rely on the world church to help them grow. Your mission offerings to this frontline mission field are making a huge difference in the lives of people such as Ariuntuya and her family.



ARIUNTUYA (left) is a teenager living in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.