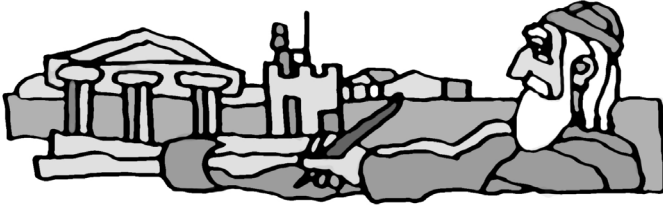


# The Apostle Paul *in* Rome



---

## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

**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*).

It is important for a student of the book of Romans to understand the book's historical background. Context is always crucial when seeking to understand the Word of God. We need to know and understand the issues that were being addressed. Paul was writing to a specific group of Christians at a specific time and for a specific reason; knowing that reason as much as possible will benefit us greatly in our study.

Thus, let's go back in time. Let's transport ourselves back to first-century Rome, become members of the congregation there, and then, as first-century church members, let us listen to Paul and the words that the Holy Spirit gave him to deliver to the believers in Rome.

And yet however localized the immediate issues that Paul was addressing, the principles behind them—in this case the question *how is a person saved?*—are universal. Yes, Paul was speaking to a specific group of people; and yes, he had a specific issue in mind when he wrote the letter. But as we know, many centuries later in a totally different time and context, the words he wrote were as relevant to Martin Luther as they were to Paul when he first wrote them. And they are relevant to us as well today.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 7.

## The Apostle Paul's Letter

Romans 16:1, 2 indicates that Paul probably wrote Romans in the Greek city of Cenchreae, which was near Corinth. 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 epistle is to ascertain the date of writing. Because Paul traveled a lot, knowing his location 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 received an offering for the saints in Jerusalem near the end of his journey (*Rom. 15:25, 26*). Therefore the Epistle to the Romans probably was written in the early months of A.D. 58.

**What** other important churches did Paul visit 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 from happening in Rome. It is believed that the Epistle to the Galatians also was written 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 which questions were agitating the Jewish and Gentile churches. Next week's lesson will address 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?**

## Paul's Desire to Visit Rome

There's no question that the personal touch is the best way to communicate in most cases. We can phone, e-mail, text, and even Skype, but face to face, flesh to flesh, is the best way to communicate. That's why Paul announced in his letter to the Romans 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 Romans 15:27 about Jews and Gentiles?

---

---

The great missionary to the Gentiles constantly felt impelled to take the gospel to new areas, leaving others to labor in places 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 regarding the whole question of mission from the fact that Paul sought help from an established church in order to evangelize a new area?

---

---

**Read again** Romans 15:20–27. Notice how much Paul's 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 in Rome

**“Now 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 about the unexpected and unwanted things that so often come our way?**

---

---

Yes, Paul eventually got to Rome, even if it was as a prisoner. How often our plans don't come out as we anticipated and hoped for, even the ones formulated with the best of intentions.

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

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

---

---

“Not by Paul's sermons, 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, you gain faith from those experiences to trust God for the things where no good seems to have arisen?**

---

## The “Saints” in Rome

**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, and of faith can we take away from these words?

---

*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 these two words can be left out, and the meaning will still be 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 is what 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 to 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 that which 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.

**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?**

## The Believers in Rome

**“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 was established. The tradition that Peter or Paul founded the church is without historical foundation. Perhaps laypersons 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 just 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 describe the church at Rome?

---

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

1. “Full of goodness.” Would people say this of us in their own experiences? 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 Thought:** 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.

“The salvation of humankind does not result from a divine afterthought or improvisation made necessary because of an unexpected turn of events after sin arose. Rather, it issues from a divine plan for man’s redemption formulated before the founding of this world (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3, 14; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14) and rooted in God’s everlasting love for humanity (Jer. 31:3).

“This plan encompasses eternity past, the historical present, and eternity future. It includes such realities and blessings as election and predestination to be God’s holy people and bear likeness to Christ, redemption and forgiveness, the unity of all things in Christ, sealing with the Holy Spirit, reception of the eternal inheritance, and glorification (Eph. 1:3–14). Central to the plan is the suffering and death of Jesus, which was not an accident of history nor the product of merely human decision, but was rooted in God’s redemptive purpose (Acts 4:27, 28). Jesus was in truth ‘the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world’ (Rev. 13:8, KJV).”—*The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), pp. 275, 276.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, talk about the meaning of the Protestant Reformation. Think about this question especially: How different would our world be today without it?
- 2 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 to them?
- 3 Dwell on the question at the end of Thursday’s study. How could your class help to improve your church’s reputation, if need be?

## Saved by the Sabbath

Andre grew up in the western Ukrainian city of Lutsk. While at school, he became acquainted with Pavel, a student who attended a Seventh-day Adventist church on Saturdays. Being a nonbeliever, Andre didn't think much about when or where people went to church, nor did he care.

After finishing their high school education, both Andre and Pavel planned to study at the Lviv National Academy of Arts, so they went to Lviv to take the academy's entrance exam. After finishing the exam, the two decided to walk around the campus.

Suddenly, a large notice on an announcement board caught their eye—there was going to be an air show commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Ukrainian Air Force's 14th Air Corps. The event would be held at the Sknyliv Airfield, just 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) from central Lviv.

Excitedly, Andre and Pavel scanned the notice for further details. Then Pavel noticed the date of the air show: July 27, 2002. Realizing that day was a Saturday, he decided that he would not be going to the air show after all.

"Andre, I'm going to church on July 27—would you like to come with me?" Pavel asked.

Now it was Andre's turn to carefully consider the situation. He really wanted to go to the air show, but there was something so sincere about Pavel's invitation that Andre decided to accept. He wondered what could be so special about this church that would make Pavel choose to go there rather than to the air show.

Reflecting on that first visit to a Seventh-day Adventist church, Andre later recalled, "We spent the whole day there, and I really liked the church."

What Pavel and Andre didn't know was that while they were at church, the worst air-show disaster in history was taking place at the Sknyliv Airfield. With over 10,000 spectators watching, at 12:52 P.M. a Su-27 aircraft, flown by two experienced pilots, crashed and exploded into the crowd of spectators. Seventy-seven spectators were killed, including 28 children. Another 543 spectators were injured, and 100 of those injured were hospitalized and suffered head injuries, burns, and bone fractures.

When Andre heard the news the next day, he was stunned. "That event made me realize that I could have died there or could have been severely injured. I became friends with the many young people at the Adventist church, and after attending regularly for one year, I decided to be baptized."

Later, Andre decided to change his career plans and studied at the Ukrainian Adventist Center of Higher Education in Bucha, to become a pastor. In 2004, part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to build a dormitory at Bucha. In 2014, the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to build or expand schools in Lviv, Cherkasy, and Vinnytsia, Ukraine, and establish an educational complex in Dnipropetrovsk. Thank you for supporting this important offering.

---

*Read more stories from the Euro-Asia Division in the Mission Quarterly online at [www.AdventistMission.com](http://www.AdventistMission.com).*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

---

▶ **Key Text:** *Romans 1:8*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Know Paul's history and background with the church at Rome.

**Feel:** Sense the great burden that Paul had for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles by grace and faith alone, and sense his or her own desires to work for the lost.

**Do:** Share Paul's missionary burden and methods to reach the world by brainstorming about methods to reach his or her immediate community.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Paul's Strategies to Reach Out to Spain With the Everlasting Gospel**

**A** How was Paul's mission strategy seen as not just theoretical but also as very concrete and practical?

**B** What are the missional "Spains" in our practical Christian witness?

**II. Feel: Paul's Burden for Mission and the Salvation of Both Jews and Gentiles (All Humanity)**

**A** How can I develop empathy for the unbelieving people in my life who might be the most receptive persons to my witness?

**B** What, if any, are the racial, cultural, or national prejudices that affect my feelings toward the persons in my community or workplace?

**III. Do: Live Out the Burdens That Paul Manifested for the Mission of Salvation for All Humanity.**

**A** What are some practical ways in which we can actually reach out in gospel witness through caring interaction?

**B** Why should our goal be to reach all people with a gospel witness?

▶ **Summary:** This lesson should inspire all to think more prayerfully and intentionally about our context for witnessing.

## *Learning Cycle*

---

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Romans 1:8*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Paul's praise for, and appreciation of, the faith of the Roman Christians should inspire and motivate all professed Christians to strive to make spiritual things the top priorities in their lives and in their witness.

**Opening Discussion:** Challenge students to probe genuinely their understanding of Bible truth (especially concerning personal salvation and its practical implications). Then lead them to assess their current efforts and means to share the gospel in their context, just as Paul affirmed and shared his mission-driven plan to evangelize every corner of the then-known world.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ What does Paul's gospel mean, and how does it relate to other key Christian doctrines?
- ❷ What spiritual gifts are manifest in our local church? How do these gifts further clarify the mission of the local church within our cultural context? How do the gifts also clarify the worldwide mission of the church, to fellow Christians and to non-Christians alike?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Larger Context of Paul's Mission Strategy

The history of Paul's missionary journeys and the goals he sets for the future help clarify our understanding of the practical counsels and theological contents of Romans. A knowledge of Paul's history is especially helpful in clarifying his teaching of personal salvation by faith alone in Christ. Keeping this larger context in mind, what follows is a brief overview of the four major themes of Romans, which are highlighted in this week's lesson.

**Activity:** First, to appreciate the scope and goals of Paul's missionary work better, imagine yourself in one of the ancient settings Paul journeyed to as a missionary. Use a Bible atlas, if one is handy, to spark your imagination. Then ask yourself: What sights, sounds, food, and peoples

would predominate in this place? How does imagining this setting help you better understand the cultural challenges Paul faced as a missionary? And what insights gleaned from this exercise might we apply to the challenges of evangelism and witnessing facing us today?

**II. The Context of Paul's Ministry** (*Review Romans 16:1, 2; Acts 18:1–18; 20:2, 3; 28:17–31; and Romans 15:25, 22 with your class.*)

The church at Corinth is established during Paul's second missionary journey (A.D. 49–52). During his third missionary journey (A.D. 53–58), he visits Corinth and receives an offering for the suffering saints in Jerusalem. But before he leaves Corinth to go to Jerusalem, he writes the Epistle to the Romans (probably in A.D. 58), seeking to clarify his teaching on the gospel of grace, or salvation by faith alone in Christ.

Paul makes his explanations and clarifications in the aftermath of the debates over whether Gentiles need to become Jews (ritually and legally) before they could become Christians. Paul visited the churches in Galatia, where these issues (which emerged in Israel and Antioch) became divisive (as Paul attests to in his Epistle to the Galatians and in the debates recorded in Acts). Thus, it seems that Paul's purpose in writing to the Romans is twofold: he writes in order to alert the Romans to his missionary goals and strategies, and he seeks to clarify what his gospel is—especially in relationship to Judaism, the Old Testament, and the conversion of the Gentiles.

**Consider This:** In light of the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament apostles, how does the gospel explain the theological and ethical teachings of the Old Testament law and prophets?

**III. The Providences of God in Christian Ministry and Mission** (*Review Romans 15:25, 22 with your class.*)

Paul intends to travel to Rome to minister to the Romans and lay the foundation for his mission to the Western Mediterranean basin (Spain). But before arriving in Rome, he must first deliver the collections for the needy people of God in Jerusalem. This visit is probably intended to knit the hearts of the Gentile and Jewish believers together in deeper unity. Not only would his visit attend to the physical needs of the Jews, but also it would serve as a balm for the wounds generated by the debates over the role of the law in salvation. But God's "providences" delay Paul's intention to travel to Rome, causing great grief for the apostle. Instead, he is taken captive and sent to Rome for trial.

**Consider This:** Naturally, the question in many minds must have been

over what the providences of God were in all of Paul's delay and suffering. How do we respond to that difficult question?

#### IV. The Definition of a Saint (Review Romans 1:7 with your class.)

A definition of a "saint" is "any of certain persons of exceptional holiness of life." The word *exceptional* might suggest that saints are endowed with a special gift of holiness that renders them spiritually superior to the average believer. But how does the Bible define the word *saint*?

The word *saint*, as used by Paul in Romans 1:7, derives from the Greek *hagios*, meaning that which is separated or dedicated for a specific calling or purpose. *Hagios* is used specifically to refer to members of the first Christian communities in order to denote those who are pure, righteous, and holy. Paul speaks "to all who are 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, NKJV*). Here, Paul's use of the word *saint* addresses the church at large instead of a few select or exceptional individuals. Modern translations of the verse help to clarify further our understanding of this inclusiveness and all whom it encompasses. What the King James Version translates as "saints," the New International Version renders as "[God's] holy people" (*NIV*), or as "those . . . who have been called, who have been set apart for him" (*CJB*) and as the ones "whom God loves and has called to be [H]is holy people" (*NCV*). What is evident in each of these translations is that the saints are chosen by God and set aside as holy for His special purpose.

Very clearly, then, a "saint" is any believer in Christ and His gospel who has accepted the merits of His salvific death, a death that embraces all believers, whether male or female, Jew or Gentile.

**Consider This:** How might the definition of "saint" be updated to move beyond the traditional understanding of the word, burdened as it may be, at times, by notions of spiritual exclusivity and elitism?

#### V. Who Were the Believers That Made Up the Church at Rome? (Review Romans 1:8 with the class.)

The church at Rome was composed of Jews and Gentiles, held in high esteem "throughout the whole world" (*NKJV*). In his subsequent mention of the Jewish and the Greek believers, Paul seems to suggest that all believers should be united in the gospel and its proclamation to all, "for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (*Rom. 1:16*).

**Consider This:** Reflect upon the larger missional, practical, and theological context in which the message of Romans unfolds. In light of this context,

how then can believers in your Sabbath School class reach a more perfect theological and practical unity, one that would be the best venue for proclaiming the three angels' messages?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** In light of the historical backgrounds regarding Martin Luther in the sixteenth century and the apostle Paul and his fellow Christians in the first century of the Christian Era, it would seem justifiable to reflect carefully on what each of these eras has in common. We especially need to think about how the cultural contexts and moral challenges of each era have been, or can be, “redeemed” by Paul’s gospel.

#### Application Questions:

- ❶ What other cultural contexts in Western history can you think of in which the revival of the biblical understanding of salvation by faith through grace alone has had a redeeming effect on a particular culture?
- ❷ How might the gospel’s offer of salvation (including its highlighting of salvation for all sinners—no matter their ethnic, social, or educational background) help to alleviate racial strife and economic inequality in our culture?
- ❸ How could Paul’s gospel and ethics relate to the very secularized modern cultures of the so-called West?
- ❹ Why is it that there seems to be a greater openness to the biblical gospel among less-industrialized cultures across the world?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Ask class members to reflect on different ways they can personally, in light of their own religious-cultural context, be more effective in approaching people with a gospel witness. How might their moral and ethical witness (perhaps just being kind, courteous, and thoughtful) create an atmosphere in which a discussion of the gospel blessings can be made more appealing to these people in their recreational settings, workplaces, or social/service clubs?

#### Activities:

- ❶ Brainstorm with your class about an individual or a uniquely collective, organized outreach in your community.
- ❷ Assess the skills and gifts that your class members possesses that could enhance such a witness.