

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we introduce the letter to the ROMANS. Today in part 1 we will learn about the writer and the recipients of the letter to the Romans and the date, place and purpose of writing the letter to the Romans.

POINT 1. THE WRITER OF ROMANS

The writer is a Jew (9:3-4), who is well acquainted with both the Hebrew and the Greek text of the Old Testament, with all the Jewish opinions and prejudices and with the Greek world. The authorship of the letter to the Romans is more surely established than any other book in the Bible or even in the ancient world. In the letter, Paul introduced himself as the writer of Romans (1:1) and several times speaks in the first person. All the early church fathers said that Paul wrote Romans.

POINT 2. THE RECIPIENTS OF ROMANS

How did the church in Rome originate?

First. The dispersion of the Jews to many countries.

The dispersion of Jews, which began with the exiles to Assyria and Babylon, caused Jews to live in many countries like Babylonia, Persia, Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and Italy. In the providence of God, this 'dispersion' became an important reason why the Christian message was spread so quickly throughout the Roman Empire. The Jews had received permission to exercise their religion according to their own customs everywhere in the Roman Empire. They built synagogues everywhere in the midst of the Gentile nations. The Gentiles were often attracted to the pure monotheism of the Old Testament and many converted to Judaism. 'Proselytes' (Act 13:43) were Gentiles who kept the whole law and who were circumcised. 'Worshippers of God' (Act 16:14) were Gentiles who accepted God and kept the Ten Commandments, but were not circumcised and did not keep the whole ceremonial law. Because the apostles were Jews, they always had access to these synagogues, where they could preach the gospel and meet people without causing suspicion to the authorities. These proselytes and worshippers of God were the best prepared to receive the gospel and formed the foundation of the new churches among the Gentiles (Act 13:43-49).

Second. The Jews in Rome.

There were many Jews and converts to Judaism in Rome. Originally they had come as prisoners, but after their freedom the Jewish community settled in a large district across the Tiber river. They had considerable influence on the Romans. The Roman writers ridiculed Romans who became Jews and they wrote about Roman proselytes who sent gifts to Jerusalem. They said that synagogues were popular places of meeting.

Third. The origin of the church in Rome. It is not known how the gospel came to Rome for the first time.

One. The ministry of Jesus. The earliest ministry to Romans was that of Jesus himself to non-Jews (Mt 8:5-11; Jn 4:7; 12:20-21). For example, in Matthew 8:5-12, he healed the servant of a Roman centurion.

Two. The ministry of Peter. According to Acts 2:10-11, at Pentecost in May A.D. 30 there were Jews and converts to Judaism from Rome. Some of them must have been among the three thousand converts to Christianity after the preaching of the apostle Peter and on their return to Rome must have preached the gospel in Rome.

The tradition that the church in Rome was founded by Peter is possible and is based on a statement of Dionysius of Corinth in the second half of the second century. The events described in Acts 1-12 occurred between A.D. 30-44. It is possible that during those years, the apostle Peter made one or more visits to Rome in order to establish the Jewish Christians there. In A.D. 36, Peter was in Jerusalem to meet the newly converted Paul (Act 9:26-28; Gal 1:18). In about A.D. 40, before the reign of Claudius and Herod, who received the control of Judea from him, Peter preached the gospel to the first Gentiles in Caesarea. From A.D. 41 onwards the attitude of the Jews in Jerusalem changed for the worse against the apostles. In A.D. 44 Peter was again in Jerusalem when he was arrested and imprisoned by Herod. The church prayed for him in the house of Mark's mother and after his release by divine intervention, Peter left for another place. Because many Christians gathered in their house, Mark was probably acquainted with the other apostles and several of the early other followers of Jesus.

Three. The ministry of Mark. According to the testimony of the early church fathers, Mark worked together with Peter in Rome. This probably happened in the period after A.D. 44 when the apostle Peter had left Jerusalem for another place. The church father Eusebius wrote in A.D. 300, "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter." The church father Clement of Alexandria, wrote in A.D. 190, "The occasion for writing the Gospel of Mark was the following: Peter had publicly preached the word in Rome ... Mark had followed him for a long time and remembered what he had spoken. Many people, who were present, urged Mark to write down what Peter had said. He did this and distributed the Gospel among those who had asked him for it. When Peter learned about this, he neither strongly forbade it nor promoted it." And the church father Papias, who was a disciple of the apostle John, wrote in A.D. 115, "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately ... whatever he remembered of what was said and done by the Lord. ... Mark gave careful attention to leave out nothing of what he had heard and also to falsify nothing." There is absolutely no justification to deny the unanimous testimony of the ancient historians that Mark wrote this Gospel and that it was mainly based on the preaching and teaching of the apostle Peter in Rome. Mark probably wrote his Gospel between A.D. 44-46 in Rome for the Romans.

Four. The ministry of other Christians. People travelled extensively in all parts of the Roman Empire by way of its network of roads and cargo ships, which sailed from beginning of March to the middle of November each year. The New Testament shows several great travellers: Priscilla and Aquila at different times of their lives travelled from Pontus to Rome, from Rome to Corinth (Acts 18:2), from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19; 1 Cor 16:19), from Ephesus to Rome (Rom 16:3), and again from Rome to Ephesus (2 Tim 4:19). Also Luke, Timothy, Titus and Paul himself travelled extensively (2 Cor 11:25-26). There existed constant traffic between Rome and all her provinces and people travelled a lot. The mission-minded church at Antioch certainly had travellers to and from Rome who could have spread the message and thus strengthen the existing church in Rome. In the same way, the churches of Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus may well have co-operated, because communications between these great cities and Rome was constant. Paul wrote in Romans 1:8 that the faith of the Romans was known all over the world. Therefore the church at Rome must have existed for quite some time. The Roman writer, Suetonius (in Vita Claudii xxv:4, A.D. 75-160) wrote, "Since the Jews were continually making disturbances at the instigation of 'Chrestus', Claudius expelled them from Rome." He was referring to the quarrels between Jews who became Christians and those who remained hostile to the new faith. This happened in A.D. 49, and thus Priscilla and Aquila probably became Christians before they came from Rome to Corinth in A.D. 49. The conclusion is that the church in Rome probably came into existence through the testimony of ordinary Christians.

Five. The ministry of Paul. During his first three missionary journeys between A.D. 47-57, Paul had become acquainted with several believers belonging to the church at Rome (Rom 16:3-15). However, he himself came to Rome for the first time in A.D. 60 as a prisoner. Nevertheless Paul was very effective in proclaiming the gospel from his prison in Rome so that throughout the whole palace guard it had become clear that Paul was imprisoned not for a crime but for being a Christian (Acts 28 and Phil 1:12-14). Between A.D. 60-61 Paul wrote the letters Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians from his prison in Rome. Finally, during his second imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, which was his last letter in about A.D. 64/65. Peter was not in Rome while Paul was there, otherwise Paul would have written about him.

Six. The tradition about the ministry of the apostles in Rome. While the apostle Paul travelled extensively between his two imprisonments in Rome between A.D. 61-64, the apostle Peter and Mark were in Rome (1 Pet 5:13). Peter wrote his two letters about A.D. 63 from Rome. A fourth century Latin church father, Ambrosiaster, wrote in his commentary on Romans that the church at Rome was not founded by the apostles, but by certain Jewish Christians who imposed a "Judaic form" on the church (compare Acts 15:1; 21:24). The tradition that ascribed to the apostle Peter a 25 year episcopacy between A.D. 42-67 over the church at Rome is very dubious, because the apostle Paul would not have omitted such an important fact from his letter to the Romans and Luke would not have omitted it from his book of Acts.

Fourth. The situation of the church in Rome.

The church at Rome consisted of a majority of Gentile converts and a minority of Jewish converts (1:5-6,13; 11:13; 15:9-18). This led to tensions within the church at Rome:

One. The apostle Paul combated certain views generally held by the Jews and converts to Judaism.

The Jews believed that physical descent from Abraham, circumcision and keeping the law were sufficient to gain the favour of God. Their teachers of the law taught that God had promised Abraham that he would save his descendants on the ground of Abraham's merits, no matter how godless and sinful his descendants were. They also taught that no circumcised person would ever go to hell and that all Israel would share in the eternal life. The Jews believed that the blessings of the Messianic kingdom would be limited to the Jews and Jewish converts. The Jews were so much elevated above all the other nations that the theocratic kingdom with all its blessings would belong only to Israel. Gentiles could secure a subordinate place in God's kingdom only by becoming Jews. The Jews believed that submission to the authority of Gentile nations was contrary to their duty to their Messiah King. They questioned the payment of taxes and

despised the Gentiles. This constantly led to rebellion in Rome, their banishment from Rome and finally to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

Two. The apostle Paul rebuked the Gentile Christians for not considering the scruples of the Jewish Christians (14:1 to 15:13). He taught the strong Christians not to look down upon the scruples of the weak Christians and he taught the weak Christians not to judge the convictions of the strong Christians.

Three. The apostle Paul taught that there is only one gospel, one message of salvation for both Gentiles and Jews. Both Gentiles and Jews have sinned and miss God's perfect standard and God's glorious goal for their lives (3:23). Both Gentiles and Jews are saved or justified in the same way, and that is by the atoning death of Jesus Christ and by faith in Jesus Christ (3:24-25). And both Gentiles and Jews who believe are the true ancestors of Abraham (4:11-12). In short, Romans 10:12-13 says, "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"!

POINT 3. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

First. The place of writing Romans.

According to Acts 20:2-3, at the end of his third missionary journey, Paul travelled through Macedonia to Corinth. This was Paul's third visit to Corinth. He arrived in Corinth before the winter A.D. 56 and spent three months in Corinth. Everything points to Corinth as the place where Paul wrote Romans. Paul had received the contributions made in Macedonia and Achaia for the collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem and thus he must have been in that area. (Rom 15:25-26). He conveyed the greetings of Gaius and Erastus (Rom 16:23), who were Corinthians (1 Cor 1:14; 2 Tim 4:20). Paul also mentioned Cenchrea, which was the eastern port of Corinth.

Second. The date of writing Romans.

Because Paul wanted to reach Jerusalem before Pentecost (Act 20:16), he wrote the letter to the Romans in Corinth towards the close of the winter or the beginning of the spring in A.D. 57. It is generally assumed that Phoebe carried Paul's letter from Corinth to Rome (Rom 16:1-2). His purpose was to teach that *justification is by grace through faith*. In Romans 15:23-24, Paul said that his missionary work in the eastern part of the Roman Empire was nearing its completion and that he was planning to begin missionary work in the western part of the Roman Empire, especially Rome itself and Spain. In Romans 1:10, Paul said that he felt that *that time had now come*. Therefore Paul wrote Romans towards the end of his third missionary journey.

Third. The dates of Paul's third missionary journey.

The dates for the third missionary journey are determined by the times Felix and Festus were governors of Judea. Felix was governor of Judea from A.D. 52-59 and Festus from A.D. 59-61. Acts 24:27 says that Paul had been imprisoned for two years before Festus became governor. Thus, Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea from A.D. 57-59 and the dates for the third missionary journey must have been A.D. 53-57.

POINT 4. THE PURPOSE OF ROMANS

First. Paul desired to have a personal ministry in Rome.

According to Romans 15:23, Paul was nearing the completion of his ministry in the eastern part of the Roman Empire and desired to begin his ministry in the western part of the Roman Empire, especially Rome and Spain. Paul had a humble view of his intended ministry in Rome and said that he expected not only to have a harvest among them, but also to receive personal encouragement from their faith. Nevertheless, he was eager to preach the gospel at Rome (1:8-15). Paul was however not certain if he would be able to make the trip to Rome, because he had been prevented from doing so before and he was very much aware of the opposition of the Jews, especially in Jerusalem (Act 20:3,22-23).

Second. Paul helped the Christians in Rome to defend themselves against the onslaught of the Jews.

The awareness that there was a possibility that he might never see his brothers in Rome caused Paul to write this type of a letter. The style of this letter reminds one of the way Paul argued with the unbelieving Jews during his missionary journeys (4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30). Paul knew that the church at Rome was surrounded by many unbelieving Jews and he wanted to help the church to defend the Christian faith against such opponents and even to win them for Christ. The letter to the Romans is not really a complete compendium of Christian doctrine. Paul knew exactly what the church in Rome needed. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he wrote in chapter 1-8 about the way in which sinners are saved. That was urgently needed by the church in Rome, but also by every church and every person throughout the ages. In chapter 9-11,

he wrote about the place of the Jews after the first coming of Jesus Christ and in chapter 14 about certain practical aspects of the Old Testament ceremonial law.

Third. Paul exhorted the Christians in Rome how to behave as Christians.

Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire and a very large city with many nationalities living in it. Paul exhorted the Christians how to behave themselves towards one another, towards their opponents and towards the Roman government. He also taught how the strong and weak Christians should relate to one another.

Fourth. Paul desired the co-operation of the Christians in Rome for his missionary journey to Spain.

In Romans 15:24 he wrote that he hoped that the church in Rome would assist him on his missionary journey to Spain.

Because Paul had several purposes for writing the letter to the Romans, one could summarise his purpose with his own words in 1 Corinthians 9:22 and 10:31, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" and "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read Romans 8-16. Next week we will introduce Romans - part 2.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".