

Appendix 1: “A Background Portrait”

By “Me”

Paul wrote "Romans" during his 3-month stay at Corinth at the end of his third preaching journey (16:1-2, 23; cf. 1 Co. 1:14). Paul has not visited the Roman brethren (1:10-11, 13; 15:22) but he has heard of their great faith (1:8, 12) and longs to be with them so that they may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (1:10-13, 15). Though he does not personally know the Roman church (collective), it is clear from his greetings at the end of the letter, he knows several individuals at Rome very well (16:3-16).

Paul himself was at a transition point in his work as he wrote this letter. He has preached the gospel throughout the eastern Roman Empire, from Jerusalem to Greece (15:19-23), and now "with no further place for him in these regions" (15:23) he plans to go to Spain to preach the gospel in the west (15:23-24, 28).

Paul plans to visit Rome on his way to Spain, and be helped by the Roman saints (15:23-24, 28-29). However, prior to his visit, Paul must first complete his work and deliver the Gentile "contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (15:25-27). I.e. he must deliver relief to the needy saints in Jerusalem.

One very basic, practical function of this letter then is to prepare the brethren for his anticipated visit with them and set the stage for the work he wanted to accomplish in Spain (1:11-15; 15:14-25).

Yet, though Paul longs to visit the brethren personally, he is well aware that he may not be able to come (1:10; 15:30-33; cf. Ac. 20:22-23; 21:4, 10-14). He recognizes that he will succeed in coming only if it is God's will (1:10; 15:32). Additionally, Paul anticipates false teachers on the horizon at Rome and warns the brethren of their activity (16:17-20).

Each of these factors contributes to the final outcome: a letter in which Paul sets forth the most thorough exposition of the gospel of God that is recorded in scripture. This is the gospel Paul has been preaching among the Gentiles for many years (15:19) and the same gospel Paul is eager to preach to "those who are in Rome" (1:15). Here Paul anticipates and answers objections and attacks from false teachers (no doubt objections and perversions he has dealt with over his many years preaching the gospel in Jewish synagogues and Gentile markets).

The result is an incredible spiritual gift that will strengthen us in our faith, and strengthen us in the face of false teachers.