

Romans Overview

Overview adapted in part from Talk Thru the New Testament by Bruce Wilkinson and Ken Boa, 1983 Thomas Nelson Publishers

Romans, Paul's magnum opus, is placed first among his thirteen epistles in the New Testament. While the four Gospels present the words and works of Jesus Christ, Romans explores the significance of His sacrificial death. Using a question-and-answer format, Paul records the most systematic presentation of doctrine in the Bible. But Romans is more than a book of theology; it is also a book of practical exhortations. The good news of Jesus Christ is more than facts to be believed; it is also a life to be lived—a life of righteousness befitting the person “justified freely by His [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:24).

TALK THRU ROMANS										
FOCUS	REVELATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD			VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD			APPLICATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD			
	1:1		8:39	9:1		11:36	12:1		16:27	
DIVISIONS	CONDEMNATION: NEED FOR GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS		JUSTIFICATION: INSPIRATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS	SANCTIFICATION: DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS		ISRAEL'S PAST: ELECTION	ISRAEL'S PRESENT: REJECTION	ISRAEL'S FUTURE: RESTORATION	CHRISTIAN DUTIES	CHRISTIAN LIBERTIES
	1:1	3:20	3:21 5:21	6:1	8:39	9:1 9:29	9:30 10:21	11:1 11:36	12:1 13:14	14:1 16:27
TOPICS	SIN		SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY			SERVICE		
	DOCTRINAL						BEHAVIORAL			
PLACE	PROBABLY WRITTEN IN CORINTH									
TIME	C. A.D. 57									

Introduction and Title— Romans, Paul’s greatest work, is placed first among his thirteen epistles in the New Testament. While the four Gospels present the words and works of Jesus Christ, Romans explores the significance of His sacrificial death. Using a question-and-answer format, Paul records the most systematic presentation of doctrine in the Bible. Romans is

more than a book of theology; it is also a book of practical exhortation. The good news of Jesus Christ is more than facts to be believed; it is also a life to be lived—a life of righteousness befitting the person “justified freely by His [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:24).

Although some manuscripts omit “in Rome” in chapter 1, verses 7, 15, the title *Pros Romaious*, “To the Romans,” has been associated with the epistle almost from the beginning.

Author— All critical schools agree on the Pauline authorship (1:1) of this foundational book. The vocabulary, style, logic, and theological development are consistent with Paul’s other epistles. Paul dictated this letter to a secretary named Tertius (16:22), who was allowed to add his own greeting.

The problem arises not with the authorship but with the disunity of the epistle. Some Latin (but no Greek) manuscripts omit a portion (15:1–16:24). The closing doxology (16:25–27) is placed at the end of chapter 14 in some manuscripts. These variations have led some scholars to conclude that the last two chapters were not originally part of the epistle, or that Paul issued it in two editions. However, most scholars believe that chapter 15 fits in logically with the rest of the epistle. There is more debate over chapter 16, because Paul greets by name twenty-six people in a church he has never visited. Some scholars contend that it was a separate letter, perhaps written to Ephesus, that was appended to this epistle. Such a letter would be surprising, to say the least (nothing but greetings), especially in the ancient world. It is simpler to understand the list of greetings as Paul’s effort as a stranger to the Roman church to list his mutual friends. Paul met these people in the cities of his missionary journeys. Significantly, the only other Pauline Epistle that lists individual greetings was addressed to the believers at Colossae, another church Paul had never visited. It may be that this portion was omitted from some copies of Romans because it did not seem relevant.

Date and Setting— Paul did not found the church at Rome, and the tradition that Peter was its founder is contrary to the evidence. It is possible that it began when some of the Jews and proselytes to Judaism who became followers of Christ on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:10) returned to Rome, but it is more likely that Christians from churches established by Paul in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece settled in Rome and led others to Christ. According to this epistle, Gentiles were predominant in the church at Rome (1:13; 11:13; 11:28–31; 15:15–16), but there were also Jewish believers (2:17–3:8; 3:21–4:1; 7:1–14; 14:1–15:12).

Rome was founded in 753 B.C., and by the time of Paul it was the greatest city in the world with over one million inhabitants (one inscription says over four million). It was full of magnificent buildings, but the majority of people were slaves: opulence and squalor coexisted in the Imperial City. The church in Rome was well known (1:8), and it had been established for several years by the time of this letter (14:14; 15:23). The believers there were probably numerous, and evidently they met in several places (16:1–16). The historian Tacitus referred to the Christians who were persecuted under Nero in A.D. 64 as “an immense multitude.” The gospel filled the gap left by the practically defunct polytheism of Roman religion.

Paul wrote Romans in A.D. 57, near the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:14; cf. Rom. 15:19). It was evidently written during his three-month stay in Greece (Acts

20:3–6), more specifically, in Corinth. Paul was staying with Gaius of Corinth (16:23; cf. 1 Cor. 1:14), and he also mentioned “Erastus, the treasurer of the city” (16:23). A first-century inscription in Corinth mentions him: “Erastus, the commissioner of public works, laid this pavement at his own expense.” Paul’s collection from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia for the needy Christians in Jerusalem was complete (15:26), and he was ready to deliver it (15:25). Instead of sailing directly to Jerusalem, Paul avoided a plot by the Jews by first going north to Philippi. He evidently gave this letter to Phoebe from the church at Cenchrea, near Corinth, and she carried it to Rome (16:1–2).

Theme and Purpose—The theme of Romans is found in chapter 1, verses 16–17: God offers the gift of His righteousness to everyone who comes to Christ by faith. Paul wrote Romans to reveal God’s sovereign plan of salvation (1–8), to show how Jews and Gentiles fit into that plan (9–11), and to exhort them to live righteous and harmonious lives (12–16). In his sweeping presentation of God’s plan of salvation, Paul moves from condemnation to glorification, and from positional truth to practical truth. Key words like *righteousness*, *faith*, *law*, *all*, and *sin* each appear at least sixty times in this epistle.

Paul did not write Romans to address specific problems in the church but to prepare the brethren for his long-awaited visit to that strategic church (15:22–24). He had laid the foundation for the gospel in the eastern provinces through his three missionary journeys, and now he desires to begin a significant work in the western provinces. Rome, the most influential city in the Empire, would be the logical base of operations for Paul’s future missionary endeavors, just as Antioch was during his first three journeys. Paul had tried to visit Rome a number of times in the past, but each time he had been hindered (1:13; 15:22). By writing this letter, Paul hoped to build up the believers there in their knowledge and faith and to encourage this mixed church of Jews and Gentiles to work together as one body. Paul also asked them for their prayer support because of the dangerous opposition that awaited him in Jerusalem.

Keys to Romans—

Key Word: The Righteous

Key Verses (1:16–17; 3:21–25)—“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written ‘*The just shall live by faith*’ ” (1:16–17).

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God *which is* through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *to be* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (3:21–25).

Key Chapters (6–8)—Foundational to all teaching on the spiritual life is the central passage of chapters 6–8. The answers to the questions of how to be delivered from sin, how to live a balanced life under grace, and how to live the victorious Christian life through the power of the Holy Spirit are all contained here. Many consider this to be the principal passage on conforming to the image of Jesus Christ.

Christ in Romans— Paul presents Jesus Christ as the Second Adam whose righteousness and substitutionary death have provided justification for all who place their faith in Him. He offers His righteousness as a gracious gift to sinful men, having borne God’s condemnation and wrath for their sinfulness. His death and resurrection are the basis for the believer’s redemption, justification, reconciliation, salvation, and glorification.

Contribution to the Bible— Romans was not the first of Paul’s epistles, but it was appropriately placed at the beginning of the Pauline corpus not only because it was Paul’s longest work, but because it provides the doctrinal foundation upon which the other epistles are built. It is the most systematic and detailed exposition of theological truth in the Scriptures. Romans concentrates on the doctrines of hamartiology (sin) and soteriology (salvation): just as all men (Jews and Gentiles) are sinners, so God has graciously extended His offer of salvation to all who will place their faith in Christ.

Romans is the most formal of Paul’s writings—it is more of a treatise than a letter. Paul was a stranger to most of the Roman believers (hence the long introduction), and he did not seek to refute any specific errors in their church. This is primarily a preventative, not a corrective epistle, and Paul made skillful use of a debate format to refute the kinds of objections he had encountered during two decades of reflecting upon and defending the gospel. The result is one of the most forceful, logical, and eloquent works ever penned. It is safe to say Romans has influenced the subsequent history of the church more than any other epistle.

Survey of Romans— The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge regarded Romans as “the most profound book in existence,” and the commentator Godet called it “the cathedral of the Christian faith.” Because of its majestic declaration of the divine plan of salvation, Martin Luther wrote: “This epistle is the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel....It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.” The four Gospels present the words and works of the Lord Jesus, but Romans, “the Gospel According to Paul,” delves more into the significance of His life. The theology of Romans is balanced by practical exhortation, because Paul sees the believer’s position as the basis for his practice.

The theme of righteousness that runs through the book is reflected in the following outline: The revelation of the righteousness of God (1–8); the vindication of the righteousness of God (9–11); and the application of the righteousness of God (12–16).

The Revelation of the Righteousness of God (1–8): The prologue (1:1–17) consists of a salutation (1:1–7), a statement of Paul’s desire to minister in Rome (1:8–15), and the theme of the book (1:16–17). This two-verse theme is the basic text of Romans because it combines the three crucial concepts of salvation, righteousness, and faith. *Salvation*: a believer is saved from the penalty of sin (past), the power of sin (present), and the presence of sin (future); and he is saved to a new position, a new life, and an entrance into God’s heavenly presence.

Righteousness: this speaks of perfect conformity to an unchanging standard; the sinner who trusts in Christ receives the righteousness of Christ in his position before God. *Faith*: as the instrumentality for salvation and a gracious gift of God, faith includes an acknowledgement of need and a trust in Christ alone for salvation.

In 1:18–3:20, Paul builds a solid case for the condemnation of all people under the holy God. Paul's perceptive diagnosis of the human condition shows that Gentiles and Jews seek to justify themselves by using relative standards, not realizing that God's required standard is nothing short of perfection. Paul knows that the bad news (condemnation) must be understood before the good news (justification) can be appreciated. The Gentiles are without excuse because they have suppressed the knowledge of God they received from nature and their conscience (1:18–32; their seven-step regression is traced in 1:21–31). The Jews are also under the condemnation of God, and Paul overcomes every objection they could raise to this conclusion (2:1–3:8). God judges according to truth (2:2–5), works (2:6–10), and impartially (2:11–16), and both the moral and religious Jews fail to meet His standard. Paul concludes his discussion of the reasons for the guilt of the Jews by reminding them they do not obey the Law (2:17–29) nor believe the Oracles of God (3:1–8). The divine verdict (3:9–20) is universal: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23).

The section on justification (3:21–5:21) centers on and develops the theme of God's provision for man's need. The first verses are the core of the book (3:21–31), revealing that in Christ, God is both Judge and Savior. Three crucial words are found in these verses: (1) *Justification*: this judicial term means that the believer in Christ is declared righteous by the holy God. The Lord is not unjust when He justifies sinners because He bases this pronouncement upon the death of Christ on their behalf. (2) *Redemption*: through His death, Christ has paid the ransom price of sin by purchasing believers out of slavery to sin and setting them free from the penalty of sin. (3) *Propitiation*: the blood of Christ has satisfied the demands of the righteous God who cannot overlook sin. God in Christ does not give the believer his due, because His holy wrath has been appeased by the sacrifice of His sinless Son. Justification is by grace (the source of salvation; 3:21–24), by blood (the basis of salvation; 3:25–26), and by faith (the condition of salvation; 3:27–31).

Chapter 4 illustrates the principle of justification by faith apart from works in the life of Abraham.

Justification issues in reconciliation between God and man (5:1–11). Reconciliation speaks of the change in a person's state of alienation from and hostility toward God because of the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ on his behalf. It is brought about by the love of God which is causeless (5:6), measureless (5:7–8), and ceaseless (5:9–11). In 5:12–21 Paul contrasts the two Adams and the opposite results of their two acts. The disobedience of the first Adam made him the head of all who are under sin, but the obedience of the Second Adam (Christ) made Him the head of the race of redeemed humanity. The sin of the first Adam was imputed to us (placed on our account), leading to alienation. But the righteousness of the Second Adam is imputed to all who trust in Him, leading to reconciliation.

Chapter 6 describes the believer's relationship to sin: in his position he is dead to the principle of sin (6:1–14) and the practice of sin (6:15–23). The reality of identification with Christ is the basis for the sanctified Christian life. The believer must know his position in Christ, reckon it as true, and present himself to God as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Paul views devotion as a response to spiritual truth, not as a condition of it. After describing the Christian's emancipation from the Law (7), Paul looks at the work of the Holy Spirit who indwells and empowers every believer (8:1–17). The next major topic after condemnation,

justification, and sanctification is glorification (8:18–39). All Christians can anticipate a time when they will be perfectly conformed to Jesus Christ not only in their position (present) but also in their practice (the future resurrection).

The Vindication of the Righteousness of God (9–11): It appears that God has rejected His people, Israel, but it is really Israel who has rejected her Messiah. Paul deals with the problem of Israel in the plan of God in three ways: (1) God is the sovereign Lord who is responsible to no one for His work of election and rejection (9). He elected Israel in the past, but because of her disbelief, the nation has been set aside in the present. (2) Although God is sovereign, humans are responsible for the consequences of their decisions (10), and this is true of their decision to accept or reject Jesus. (3) Israelites, the “natural branches” (11:21) of God’s olive tree, have been cut off and Gentiles have been added (11). But God’s rejection of Israel is only partial (there is a spiritual “remnant” that has trusted in Christ) and temporary (they will be grafted back; 11:23–27). Paul appropriately quotes frequently from the Old Testament in this section, and he emphasizes that God will be faithful to His covenant promises and restore Israel.

The Application of the Righteousness of God (12–16): Paul recognizes that behavior must be built upon belief, and this is why the practical exhortations of this epistle appear after his teaching on the believer’s position in Christ. The salvation described in the first eleven chapters should transform a Christian’s life in relation to God (12:1–2), society (12:3–21), higher powers (13:1–7), and one’s neighbors (13:8–14). In chapters 14–15 the apostle discusses the whole concept of Christian liberty, noting its principles (14) and its practice (15:1–13). A changed life is not a condition for salvation, but it should be the natural outcome of saving faith. The epistle closes with Paul’s statement of his plans (15:14–33), a long series of personal greetings (16:1–16), and an admonition followed by a doxology (16:17–27).

Outline of Romans

Part One: The Revelation of the Righteousness of God (1:1–8:39)

I Introduction 1:1–17

II Condemnation: The Need for God’s Righteousness 1:18–3:20

- A Guilt of the Gentile 1:18–32
 - 1 Reason for Gentile Guilt 1:18–23
 - 2 Results of Gentile Guilt 1:24–32
- B Guilt of the Jew 2:1–3:8
 - 1 Jews Are Judged According to Truth 2:1–5
 - 2 Jews Are Judged by Their Works 2:6–10
 - 3 Jews Are Judged with Impartiality 2:11–16
 - 4 Jews Do Not Obey the Law 2:17–29
 - 5 Jews Do Not Believe the Oracles 3:1–8
- C Conclusion: All Are Guilty before God 3:9–20

III Justification: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness 3:21–5:21

- A Description of Righteousness 3:21–31
- B Illustration of Righteousness 4:1–25

- 1 Abraham's Righteousness Apart from Works 4:1–8
- 2 Abraham's Righteousness Apart from Circumcision 4:9–12
- 3 Abraham's Righteousness Apart from the Law 4:13–15
- 4 Abraham's Righteousness Was by Faith 4:16–25
- C Benefits of Righteousness 5:1–11
 - 1 Peace with God 5:–2
 - 2 Joy in Tribulation 5:3–8
 - 3 Salvation from God's Wrath 5:9–11
- D Contrast of Righteousness and Condemnation 5:12–21

IV Sanctification: The Demonstration of God's Righteousness 6:1–8:39

- A Sanctification and Sin 6:1–23
 - 1 Believer's Death to Sin in Principle 6:1–14
 - 2 Believer's Death to Sin in Practice 6:15–23
- B Sanctification and the Law 7:1–25
 - 1 Dead to the Law but Alive to God 7:1–6
 - 2 Law Cannot Deliver from Sin 7:7–25
- C Sanctification and the Spirit 8:1–39
 - 1 The Spirit Delivers from the Power of the Flesh 8:1–11
 - 2 The Spirit Gives Sonship 8:12–17
 - 3 The Spirit Assures of Future Glory 8:18–30
 - 4 The Spirit Assures of Final Victory 8:31–39

Part Two: The Vindication of the Righteousness of God (9:1–11:36)

I Israel's Past: The Election of God 9:1–29

- A Paul's Sorrow 9:1–5
- B God's Sovereignty 9:6–29

II Israel's Present: The Rejection of God 9:30–10:21

- A Israel Seeks Righteousness by Works 9:30–33
- B Israel Rejects Christ 10:1–15
- C Israel Rejects the Prophets 10:16–21

III Israel's Future: The Restoration by God 11:1–36

- A Israel's Rejection Is Not Total 11:1–10
- B Israel's Rejection Is Not Final 11:11–32
 - 1 Purpose of Israel's Rejection 11:11–24
 - 2 Promise of Israel's Restoration 11:25–32
- C Israel's Restoration: The Occasion for Glorifying God 11:33–36

Part Three: The Application of the Righteousness of God (12:1–16:27)

I Righteousness of God Demonstrated in Christian Duties 12:1–13:14

- A Responsibilities Toward God 12:1–2
- B Responsibilities Toward Society 12:3–21
- C Responsibilities Toward Higher Powers 13:1–7

D Responsibilities Toward Neighbors 13:8–14

II Righteousness of God Demonstrated in Christian Liberties 14:1–15:13

A Principles of Christian Liberty 14:1–23

B Practices of Christian Liberty 15:1–13

III Conclusion 15:14–16:27

A Paul's Purposes for Writing 15:14–21

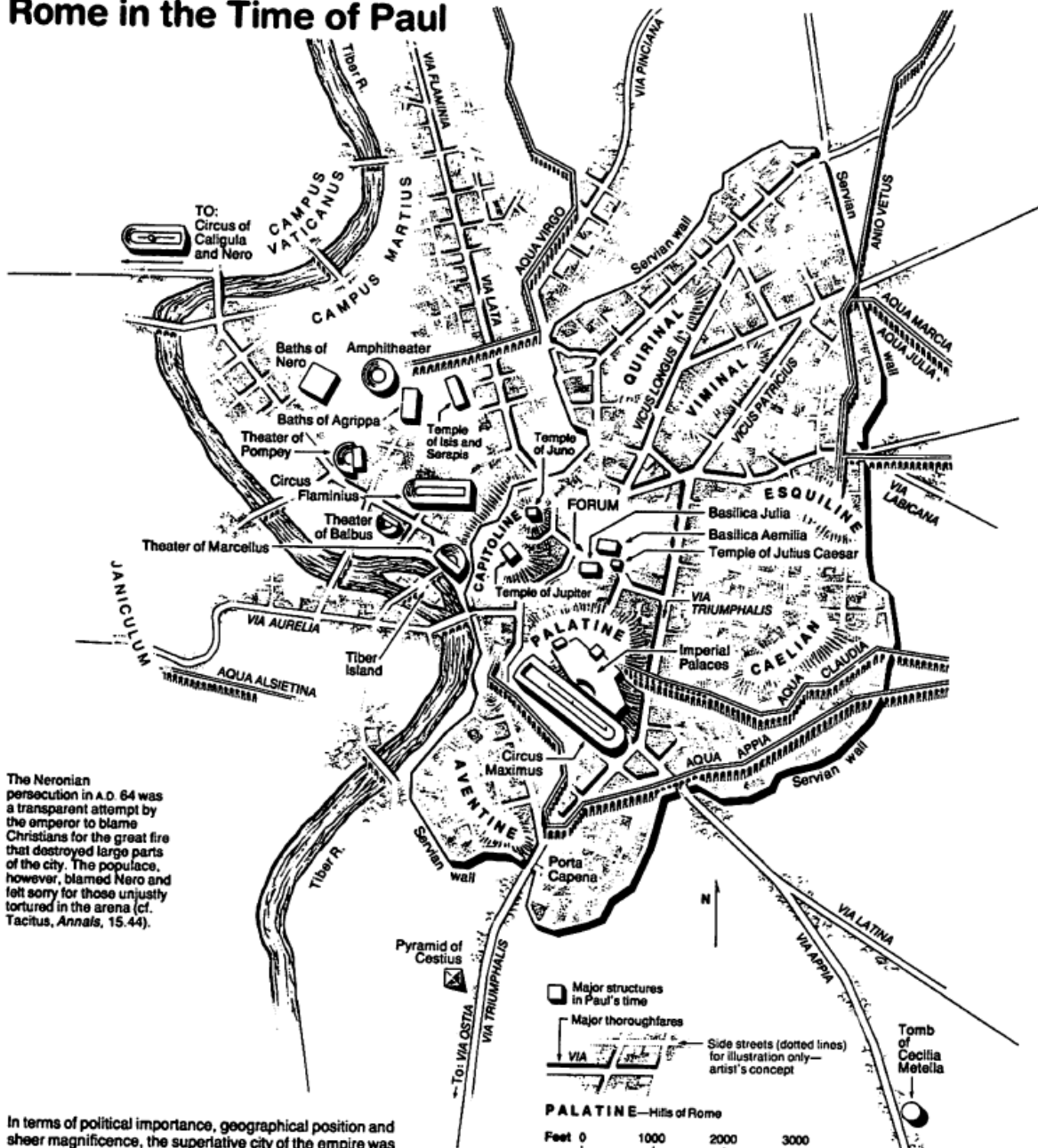
B Paul's Plans for Traveling 15:22–33

C Paul's Praise and Greetings 16:1–27

Romans was probably written in Corinth in A.D. 57.



Rome in the Time of Paul



The Neronian persecution in A.D. 64 was a transparent attempt by the emperor to blame Christians for the great fire that destroyed large parts of the city. The populace, however, blamed Nero and felt sorry for those unjustly tortured in the arena (cf. Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44).

In terms of political importance, geographical position and sheer magnificence, the superlative city of the empire was Rome, the capital.

Located on a series of jutting foothills and low-lying eminences (the "seven hills") east of a bend in the Tiber River some 18 miles from the Mediterranean, Rome was celebrated for its impressive public buildings, aqueducts, baths, theaters and thoroughfares, many of which led from distant provinces. The city of the first Christian century had spread far beyond its fourth-century B.C. "Servian" walls and lay unwall'd, secure in its greatness.

The most prominent features were the Capitoline hill, with temples to Jupiter and Juno, and the nearby Palatine, adorned with imperial palaces, including Nero's "Golden House." Both hills overlooked the Roman Forum, the hub of the entire empire.

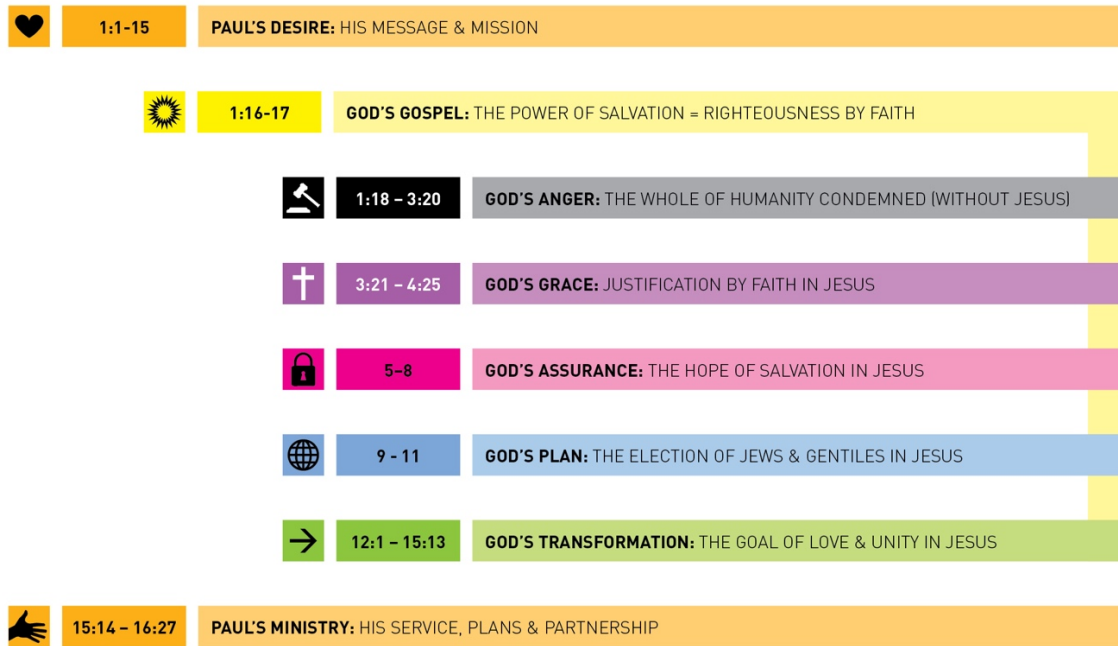
Alternatively described as the glorious crowning achievement of mankind and as the sewer of the universe where all the scum from every corner of the empire gathered, Rome had reasons for both civic pride in its architecture and shame for staggering urban social problems not unlike those of cities today.

The apostle Paul entered the city from the south on the Via Appia. He first lived under house arrest and then, after a period of freedom, as a condemned prisoner in the Mamertine dungeon near the Forum. Remarkably, Paul was able to proclaim the gospel among all classes of people, from the palace to the prison. According to tradition, he was executed at a spot on the Ostian Way outside Rome in A.D. 68.

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ROMANS OVERVIEW

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ROMANS TIMELINE

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