

Table of Contents

- I. [Background to Romans](#)
 - A. [The Introduction](#)
 - B. [The Roman Life](#)
 - C. [The Authorship](#)
 - D. [The Missionary Journeys](#)
 - E. [The Date and Location](#)
 - F. [The Church in Rome](#)
 - G. [The Amanuensis](#)
 - H. [The Audience](#)
 - I. [The Purpose](#)
 - J. [The Form](#)
 - K. [The Key Themes](#)
 - L. [The Invitation](#)
- II. [Approximate New Testament Timeline](#)
- III. [Outline of Romans](#)
- IV. [Analytical Outlines](#)

I. Background to Romans

A. The Introduction

C.E.B. Cranfield, the 20th century British scholar, famously compared Paul's argument of Romans 9-11 to ascending the North Wall of the Eiger, perhaps the steepest and deadliest technical climb in the Alps. Cranfield would later say of his commentary on Romans (his magnum opus) that it did not "come anywhere near" doing the letter justice.¹ Indeed, Romans is an impressive piece of literature. It is the longest letter in the New Testament with the most detailed presentation of the Gospel. Additionally, it deals with practical topics that can be found scattered throughout the headlines of 21st century newspapers. Lastly, as the letter is named, it is written to the church in Rome, made up of all kinds of ethnic groups, including "Greeks... barbarians... the wise... the foolish" (1:14). This book truly is a theological heavyweight, but relevant to everyday life, while applying to all people. What a privilege to be able to spend two years studying this majestic letter!



The 1st Century Roman World

B. The Roman Life

Sometimes our modern movies depict life in the Roman Empire as idyllic, even utopian. However, Rodney Stark in his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, explains that life in the Roman Empire was anything but peaceful and comfortable. For one thing, life was violent. The gladiator fights are legendary, but essentially all the different ethnic groups hated each other, resulting in a very violent culture. Crime was rampant. People simply would not walk the streets at night. Sexual promiscuity was out of control, which Paul will speak to in this letter. Graffiti was everywhere. The cities were simply covered in graffiti, but even more, the cities were altogether filthy. Dirt and grime covered everything. In addition, the cities were filled with homeless people. The bottom line is that the Roman Empire would not have been a fun place to live. And, in a world like that, hopelessness and despair reigned.

¹ Quoted in Thielman, Frank, *Romans, ZECNT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 13.

It was into that kind of a world that Romans was written. The letter to the Romans was written to Christians residing in the city of Rome in the middle of the first century (1:7, 15). Rome was the center of the Empire and was ethnically diverse. In the first century AD, it had a population of around one million people in an area less than ten square miles. Of this large population, it is estimated that there were between 40,000-50,000 Jews in the city, mostly living in a neighborhood across the Tiber River (The “Trastevere,” see picture below). The Jewish population dates to the second century BC.

Also, at the time of the letter, there were probably just as many slaves (or more) in Rome as Jews, many being war captives from foreign lands. Their living conditions were typically brutal, although it was dependent on the master. By the time Romans is written though, many people in Rome had worked their way out of slavery and into a dignified life. Status was *the* preeminent social value in the Roman culture. It cannot be overstated how important status was. And, as stated earlier, people did whatever they could to move up, then did whatever they could to protect their status.

But, survival in Rome was difficult. Life was generally stressful and short. “Only seven percent of people reached the age of sixty, about a third of children died before their first birthday, and half died before they reached the age of five.”² Exposure of children either for birth control or because of disability was common. The fight to survive was ruthless and would frequently involve harming a neighbor (physically or emotionally) in order to raise your chances.



Rome in the 1st Century

² Ibid., 25.

Most people in Rome in the first century lived in “high rises,” large apartment blocks of 3-4 stories high. Shops typically occupied the first story. Light was provided through windows. There were no kitchens, so food was either bought from shops or cooked over outdoor grills. There was also no heating. Bathrooms could be available for the entire apartment block but not always.

Because everyone was in close proximity, life was communal in nature. There were many opportunities for interaction outside of your family group. There were clubs and trade guilds, typically with religious associations, where members would meet to accomplish goals and help each other.

Religion and philosophy also characterized and permeated the Roman culture. Cicero famously said, “We have excelled neither Spain in population, nor Gaul in vigor, nor Carthage in versatility, nor Greece in art ... but in piety, in devotion to religion... we have excelled every race and every nation.” Indeed, religion was a part of everyday life and Romans took it very seriously. There were a variety of religions and philosophies to choose from, and mixing and matching of them was common. As polytheistic and inclusivist as the culture was though, Jews and Christians were usually considered atheists. Some of the mainstream religions were these:

- Greek gods: These are the classical Greek pantheon that was melded with the Roman deities (ie. Jupiter -> Zeus, Hermes -> Mercury, Venus -> Aphrodite, Ares -> Mars, etc). These deities were distant and generally uninterested. By the 1st century, the following of these gods was declining for various reasons, which allowed for the mystery religions to take hold.
- Emperor worship: Julius Caesar was the first to be worshiped. Caligula, Nero and Vespasian began to take it much more seriously, eventually leading to the imposition of emperor worship as the imperial religion by the 3rd century.
- Mystery religions: These were more individual, which offered more fellowship with the god rather than merely protection by the deity. Varieties included Dionysius, Isis/Osiris (from Egypt), Adonis and Mithraism. Typically these religions involved secrecy, sacrificial meals, spiritual ecstasy, and had reputations for immorality.
- Philosophical schools: The philosophies were the religions of the intellectuals. They concerned themselves with right and wrong, and teaching people how to live. (In this way, Christianity is probably closer to a philosophy than an ancient religion.) The three most common schools were:



Marcus Aurelius sacrificing at the Temple of Jupiter

- Stoics: This group believed the material world was governed by reason. They sought to renounce any dependence on anything beyond their control. Emotional detachment would allow them to be free of evil ways, enabling them to do good. The stoic is entirely self-centered and believes in self-sufficiency.
- Epicureans: This group was sometimes regarded as atheists. The entire aim of life was pleasure.
- Platonism: Originally from Plato (4th century BC), this group became the Gnostics (which is alive and well today). For them, the world was divided into two realms, the physical and the spiritual. And, the physical was transitory and irredeemably evil. The spiritual was unchanging and perfect. The goal, then, was to rid oneself of the body, so the eternal soul could enter eternal perfection.

C. The Authorship

Romans itself claims Pauline authorship (1:1), and there has not been much controversy about it. Early church tradition affirms Pauline authorship. According to Geisler and Nix, it was either cited or alluded to by Clement of Rome (ca. AD 95-97), Polycarp (ca. 110-150), the Didache (ca. 120-150), Justin Martyr (ca. 150-155), Tertullian (ca. 150-220), and Origen (ca. 185-254). It has been named as authentic by Irenaeus (ca. 130-202), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215), Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386), Eusebius (ca. 325-340), Jerome (ca. 340-420), and Augustine (ca. 400). And it was included in the canons of Marcion (ca. 140), Muratorian (ca. 170), Barococcio (ca. 206), Apostolic (ca. 300), Cheltenham (ca. 360), and Athanasius (ca. 367).



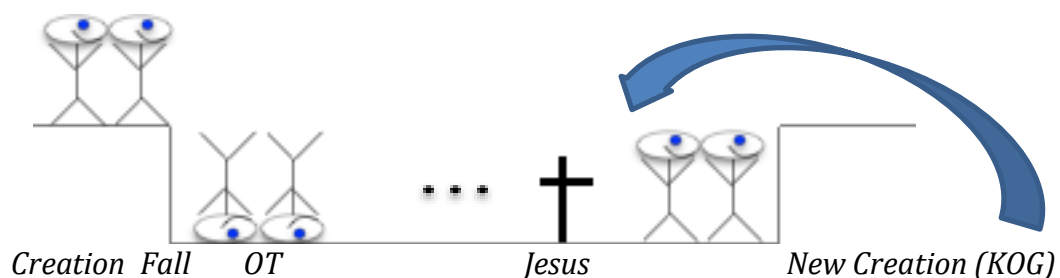
After Jesus, Paul is the most influential figure in Christianity. He is the author of thirteen New Testament Epistles, almost half of the New Testament documents, where he contextualizes, integrates and provides implications of the Gospel. Before meeting Jesus, Paul's life could be described as the preparation of the perfect instrument for God's work.

He grew up as Saul, a Hellenistic Jew in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3; Phil 3:5), the fourth largest city of the Roman empire. He is a Roman citizen, is very familiar with Greek customs and Greek philosophical schools and is very sensitive to the issues involved in living as God's people in the pagan world (ie. eating idol food; living peaceable lives, etc). But, he is also a "Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee of the Pharisees"

(Phil 3:5). He is therefore, thoroughly Jewish in his theological upbringing. His Old

Testament is the LXX, the Greek version of the Old Testament. Note all the Old Testament quotes and allusions in his writings. He studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3), probably making him more liberal in his views compared to other authorities of the time. He could also vote in the Sanhedrin (Acts 26:10), meaning he was of a very high status. He was also known to be passionate and zealous for God. God prepared Saul to be the perfect instrument for his purposes.

His conversion experience, becoming Paul, was not a vision but was a resurrection appearance (1 Cor 15:3-11), even if “untimely.” This experience had profound implications on Paul’s theology. First of all, Jesus as Lord. In the Old Testament, the only person claiming Lordship is God. Yet, Paul says, “Who are you Lord?” Secondly, because it is a resurrection appearance, Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones, is being fulfilled. The end times have come! What Paul and the Jews expected at the end of time had happened in the middle of time.



Thirdly, Jesus has been resurrected meaning he has been vindicated by God. In other words, he was really who he claimed to be and the end times had come. Fourthly, since Jesus was who he claimed to be, Paul’s entire understanding of the Torah must be changed. Torah was no longer the center of life, Jesus was. Therefore, all of the Torah must be read in light of Jesus. Fifthly, the view of the cross must be changed. If God had vindicated Jesus who had died on a cursed tree, who is cursed? The cross is not weak and foolish, but God’s power and wisdom (1 Cor 1:18-25). And, sixthly, grace must become a major theme of faith. If God had called him, an active enemy, he could call anyone! Paul knows that he deserves nothing because he is the foremost of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). Therefore, in Paul’s letters, the Gospel holds prominence. Like a Christian King Midas, everything Paul writes and touches turns not to gold, but to Gospel. He takes real world situations and imbues all of it with the Gospel. It is for this reason we can view all of Paul’s writings not as propositional theology, but pastoral theology. This is all about grace, the heart and relationships.

As far as life after conversion, Paul went from Damascus to Arabia for some three years before returning to Damascus (Gal 1:14, Acts 9:20). He is forced to leave Damascus undercover on his way to Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem for two weeks, he meets with Peter and James (Gal 1:18). He then returns to Tarsus for around eleven years (Acts 9:30; 11:25; Gal 1:21). In the face of large numbers of Gentiles becoming believers, he meets up with Barnabas and ministered with him in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). He then begins going on various missionary journeys to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.



D. The Missionary Journeys

His first missionary journey is around 46-48. He travels from Antioch to Cyprus to Parga to Pisidian Antioch to Iconium to Lystra to Derbe and back (Acts 13-14). In Acts 15, Paul is in Jerusalem at the Jerusalem council (47-48?). Around 50-52, Paul sets out on his second missionary journey. He visits Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Pisidian Antioch, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Caesarea and back to Antioch (Acts 15:35-18:22). While in Corinth, he writes two letters to the believers in Thessalonica. These are probably his first two letters.

Paul's third journey begins in Antioch in Acts 18:23 (54-57?). After traveling throughout the Mediterranean, he returns to Jerusalem only to be arrested by Roman soldiers (Acts 21:17-22:16).



Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Acts ends with Pauls' imprisonment in Rome for two years. He had finally made it to Rome! And, he was preaching the Gospel "with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30-31). It is during this time-frame that it is thought that Paul penned the prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. In the Timothy letters, some of Paul's last, it appears he was released from that initial confinement. At the end of 2 Timothy, it appears Paul is imprisoned again in Rome and awaiting execution (2 Tim 4:11).

How did he die? No one is sure, but most everyone agrees that he was martyred. According to historical probability, it is likely he was beheaded under Nero's reign (AD 54-68). About 7-8 years after this letter arrives in Rome, the great fire of Rome happened (AD 64). Nero, emperor at the time, shifted the blame from himself to the Christians who he viewed as "a distinct human being (genus hominum) with a particular name (Christiani), and their numbers were large."³ Nero then began a great persecution against the Christians. And, it is generally assumed that Paul and Peter are martyred under this persecution.

E. The Date and Location

It is thought that Paul wrote this letter in the mid-50s from the city of Corinth, while on his third missionary journey (54-57?). At the time, he was gathering an offering from the Gentile Christians for the church in Jerusalem (15:25; Acts 24:17).



Remains of the Forum in Rome

³ Ibid., 30.



Corinthian Erastus Inscription

In chapter 16, Paul mentions three people that help to identify the letter's composition with Corinth: Phoebe (16:1), Gaius (16:23), and Erastus (16:23). Phoebe was sent by Paul to the church in Rome as the bearer of the epistle. With her being from Cenchreae, she would have had ties to Corinth because Cenchreae is the port city for Corinth. In 1 Cor 1:14, Gaius is referenced as one who lived in

Corinth. Many have identified him as the Titius Justus in Acts 18:7. Erastus

was the city's treasurer (or director of public works). In Corinth in 1929, an inscription dated to the first century was discovered that refers to an Erastus as the city aedile (i.e., an official in charge of public works, etc.). There is debate over whether this is the same Erastus, but it could be.

F. The Church in Rome

It is unclear how the church in Rome originally began. The best explanation is that the Romans who were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10-11) eventually made their way back to Rome and started a church in one of the synagogues. However, there are also other explanations. "All roads lead to Rome" was the popular saying that demonstrated the city's importance and accessibility. It should not be surprising that there was already an established church before Paul's arrival. People who may have heard the gospel in Asia, Greece, or elsewhere could have traveled to Rome. In Romans 16, Paul greets several people, with the most notable of these being Priscilla and Aquila. Both Aquila and Priscilla were in Rome until about AD 49 when Claudius expelled all the Jews from the city (Acts 18:2) on account of the "Chrestos disturbance." This phrase comes from a letter of Suetonius who says that "the Jews are constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestos."⁴ Although the word is "Chrestos" and not "Christos" (ie. Christ), it is assumed that this is a garbled reference to Christ, and the fact that the Jewish community is in discord over the preaching of Jesus. Paul met the couple when he came to Corinth (ca. AD 51). They did further ministry in Ephesus (Acts 18:19). They would have been permitted back in Rome after Claudius died in AD 54. But, it is highly likely that while they are not in Rome, the church there became predominantly Gentile. And, it is possible that after the Jews return, rifts begin happening between the different groups. But, Paul addresses both Jewish and Gentile believers in this letter (cf. 1:6, 7:1).

⁴ Ibid., 29.

G. The Amanuensis

In 2 Cor 12:7, Paul refers to a "thorn in the flesh" which seems to be a reference to a physical ailment of some kind. The direct or indirect result of this ailment appears to have affected Paul's eyesight. Gal 4:15 states that the Galatian Christians would have given their own eyes to Paul if it were possible. Paul even had trouble recognizing the high priest in Acts 23. Because of these vision problems, Paul needed assistance in composing his letters, which necessitated the need for an amanuensis (i.e., a scribe). It appears that Paul had multiple amanuenses who wrote for him. The one he utilized for this letter was Tertius (16:22).

H. The Audience

The apostle identifies his recipients in 1:7 by saying: *"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints."* His intent was for the Christians in all of Rome to read the epistle. Additionally, it appears that there were multiple churches in Rome because there is made mention of an additional church in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:5).

I. The Purpose



Oldest Surviving Papyrus Fragment of Romans
P⁴⁶, Dates to 200 AD

There are several views of the main purpose of Romans. Some think the main reason for the letter is to exhort unity within the church, especially between Jews and Gentiles. Paul's "law-free" Gospel had achieved a certain degree of notoriety which created issues with the Jewish Christians. Others think that the letter is written to address the need for an apostolic foundation. Romans is the only letter we have where Paul is writing to a church he didn't begin. Still others see Romans as a "carefully planned, doctrinal presentation of the Christian faith." Yet the epistle is lacking in such key elements of Pauline doctrine like eschatology, Christology, the Lord's Supper and church order. Others see a key reason being that Paul is seeking support from the Romans for his planned mission to Spain (Rom 15:23).

All of these probably are purposes for Paul's writing the letter. They certainly are themes in the letter (see below). But, which one is primary? We don't really know. Regardless of primary reason, it is clear that Paul has written a detailed letter explaining how God, in faithfulness to his covenant promises, has provided a way for both Jew and Gentile as the one people of God, through the obedient and trusting work of Christ, to enter life in the Spirit. **Here is the new humanity that will change the world.** As Raymond Brown says, "Longer than any other New Testament letter, more reflective in its outlook than any other undisputed Pauline letter, more calmly reasoned than Galatians in treating the key question of justification and the law, Romans has been the most studied of the apostle's writings... it is undisputedly Paul's theological masterpiece."

J. The Form

Recent scholarship sees some similarity between Romans and a diatribe (but there is debate). A diatribe is not a rant or a public speech. It is a pattern of formal teaching fit for a classroom. Fundamentally, it is a diplomatically presented discussion. The writer guesses to know some of the objections the readers will raise, so he/she sets up an interlocutor. This is an artificial person who raises questions to Paul's points. This style is not confrontational and comes across as very caring (ie. pastoral theology). With the Corinthian church which Paul has a relationship with, he can be very blunt. But, with the Roman church who he does not know, he has to be more careful.

K. The Key Themes

The Gospel: The greatest and most evident theme in the epistle, as in all of Paul's letters, is the subject of the gospel. Paul begins his letter by stating that he was called to be an apostle for the gospel's sake (1:1). Paul's dedication belonged to Christ and his gospel as he preached it with his whole heart (1:9). The gospel is also portrayed as the power of God unto salvation, able to save those who believe (1:16). This same gospel was not accepted by all the Israelites (10:16), yet graciously (and fortunately) includes the gentiles as well (15:16). God's righteousness is being revealed in this gospel from faith to faith (1:17). The only way this righteousness may be accessed is through faith, Sola Fide, by faith alone. Man can never make himself righteous, nor will a single ounce of merit do anything regarding salvation (Eph 2:8, 9). Paul adds to this and says that the one who is righteous by faith shall live (1:17). And this is his gospel which he develops throughout Romans.



Unity: And, this Gospel is for all people, Jew and Gentile alike. Unity seems to be quite an important theme. Theologically, it is quite possible that some Jews might view Paul as antinomian. On the other side, it appears that some Gentiles might want to use Paul's arguments against the Law to bash the Jews. Therefore, throughout the letter,

Paul walks a tightrope between affirming the goodness of the Law while showing that it is no longer binding on the believer due to the Gospel of Jesus. In a theme which is quite relevant today, how will Paul bind this multi-ethnic church together under the Gospel of Christ?

Future plans: Paul also wanted to inform the church regarding his future plans, because those plans would involve them. At the time of writing the epistle, Paul was about to take the offering that he had collected from various churches to the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem. After that, he intended to visit the church in Rome for a time to preach the Gospel to them, then go westward to preach the gospel in Spain. In some ways, this sort of theme could be considered missional theology. Evangelism is driving his thoughts behind the words.

L. The Invitation

Therefore, I invite you, each week, as part of your Bible study, to imagine meeting

... in a cramped apartment,
... in the middle of the bustling city of Rome,
... in the midst of a pluralistic culture,
... surrounded by hopelessness and despair,

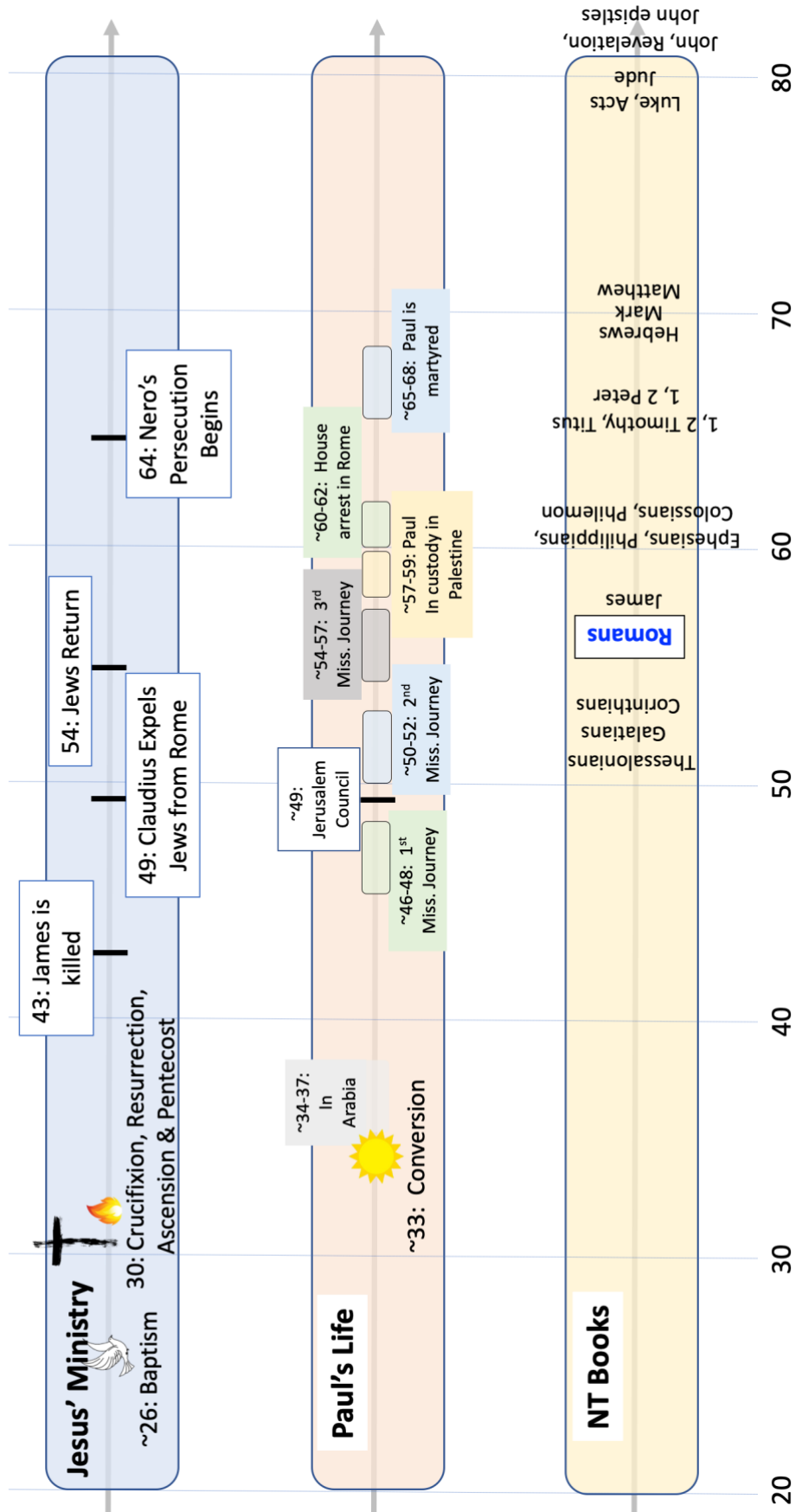
... and hearing Romans read,
... and discovering for the first time,
... the love of God,
... through Jesus Christ – which is –

THE GOOD NEWS FOR ALL PEOPLE.



*Remains of an ancient Roman
apartment building*

II. Approximate New Testament Timeline



III. Outline of Romans (high level)

Good News (Chapters 1-11)

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| I. | Introduction: God's Good News & Paul's Eagerness to Share It | 1:1-17 |
| II. | Sin: The Need for God's Righteousness | 1:18-3:20 |
| III. | Salvation: The Gift of God's Righteousness | 3:21-5:21 |
| IV. | Sanctification: The Demonstration of God's Righteousness | 6:1-8:39 |
| V. | Sovereignty: The Plan of God's Righteousness | 9:1-11:36 |

Good Advice (Chapters 12-16)

- | | | |
|------|--|-------------|
| VI. | Service: The Application of God's Righteousness in Relationships | 12:1-16:27 |
| VII. | Salutations: The Providence of God in Paul's Ministry | 15:14-16:27 |

The Bible is a structured book and finding the structure of any passage can sometimes yield fruitful results. When studying a letter from the New Testament, developing an Analytical Outline (AO) can especially be helpful. An AO is a private aid to help read the text carefully and ask the right questions of the text. Essentially, it is a grammatical outline of the passage that shows how the text fits together. The goal is to more easily see the grammatical relationships between words and phrases which helps to see the progression of the text.

- 1. Divide the text into paragraphs (you've already done this).**
 - + Work on one paragraph at a time and try to discover the thought flow.
- 2. Place the main clause and any direct commands at the left margin.**
 - + Do this even when the main clause isn't until several verses into the passage. In this case, the sub-clauses are indented above the main clause.
- 3. Put dependent words under words they modify.**
 - + Clauses and phrases often begin with conjunctions (for, but, because, that), pronouns (who, which), with prepositions (with, by) etc.
 - + Usually it is more difficult to identify the word these phrases modify.
- 4. Arrange parallel phrases in parallel.**
 - + Although the NT is in Greek, the Hebrew heritage is there. A distinctive trademark of Hebrew literature is the use of parallelism.

15