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<i>Luke</i> .....	R. T. France	<i>Hebrews</i> .....	Jon C. Laansma
<i>John and 1–3 John</i> .....	David L. Turner	<i>James, 1&amp;2 Peter, and Jude</i> .....	Jim Samra
<i>Acts</i> .....	David E. Garland	<i>1–3 John</i> .....	(see <i>John</i> )
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TEACH THE TEXT  
COMMENTARY SERIES

# Romans

C. Marvin Pate

Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton

GENERAL EDITORS

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# Welcome to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

Why another commentary series? That was the question the general editors posed when Baker Books asked us to produce this series. Is there something that we can offer to pastors and teachers that is not currently being offered by other commentary series, or that can be offered in a more helpful way? After carefully researching the needs of pastors who teach the text on a weekly basis, we concluded that yes, more can be done; this commentary is carefully designed to fill an important gap.

The technicality of modern commentaries often overwhelms readers with details that are tangential to the main purpose of the text. Discussions of source and redaction criticism, as well as detailed surveys of secondary literature, seem far removed from preaching and teaching the Word. Rather than wade through technical discussions, pastors often turn to devotional commentaries, which may contain exegetical weaknesses, misuse the Greek and Hebrew languages, and lack hermeneutical sophistication. There is a need for a commentary that utilizes the best of biblical scholarship

but also presents the material in a clear, concise, attractive, and user-friendly format.

This commentary is designed for that purpose—to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text, giving easy access to information that a pastor needs to communicate the text effectively. To that end, the commentary is divided into carefully selected preaching units, each covered in six pages (with carefully regulated word counts both in the passage as a whole and in each subsection). Pastors and teachers engaged in weekly preparation thus know that they will be reading approximately the same amount of material on a week-by-week basis.

Each passage begins with a concise summary of the central message, or “Big Idea,” of the passage and a list of its main themes. This is followed by a more detailed interpretation of the text, including the literary context of the passage, historical background material, and interpretive insights. While drawing on the best of biblical scholarship, this material is clear, concise, and to the point. Technical material is kept

to a minimum, with endnotes pointing the reader to more detailed discussion and additional resources.

A second major focus of this commentary is on the preaching and teaching process itself. Few commentaries today help the pastor/teacher move from the meaning of the text to its effective communication. Our goal is to bridge this gap. In addition to interpreting the text in the “Understanding the Text” section, each six-page unit contains a “Teaching the Text” section and an “Illustrating the Text” section. The teaching section points to the key theological

themes of the passage and ways to communicate these themes to today’s audiences. The illustration section provides ideas and examples for retaining the interest of hearers and connecting the message to daily life.

The creative format of this commentary arises from our belief that the Bible is not just a record of God’s dealings in the past but is the living Word of God, “alive and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Our prayer is that this commentary will help to unleash that transforming power for the glory of God.

The General Editors

# Introduction to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

This series is designed to provide a ready reference for teaching the biblical text, giving easy access to information that is needed to communicate a passage effectively. To that end, the commentary is carefully divided into units that are faithful to the biblical authors' ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching or preaching.

The following standard sections are offered in each unit.

1. *Big Idea*. For each unit the commentary identifies the primary theme, or “Big Idea,” that drives both the passage and the commentary.
2. *Key Themes*. Together with the Big Idea, the commentary addresses in bullet-point fashion the key ideas presented in the passage.
3. *Understanding the Text*. This section focuses on the exegesis of the text and includes several sections.
  - a. *The Text in Context*. Here the author gives a brief explanation of how the unit fits into the flow of the text around it, including reference to the rhetorical strategy of the book and the unit's contribution to the purpose of the book.
  - b. *Outline/Structure*. For some literary genres (e.g., epistles), a brief exegetical outline may be provided to guide the reader through the structure and flow of the passage.
  - c. *Historical and Cultural Background*. This section addresses historical and cultural background information that may illuminate a verse or passage.
  - d. *Interpretive Insights*. This section provides information needed for a clear understanding of the passage. The intention of the author is to be highly selective and concise rather than exhaustive and expansive.
  - e. *Theological Insights*. In this very brief section the commentary identifies a few carefully selected theological insights about the passage.

4. *Teaching the Text.* Under this second main heading the commentary offers guidance for teaching the text. In this section the author lays out the main themes and applications of the passage. These are linked carefully to the Big Idea and are represented in the Key Themes.
5. *Illustrating the Text.* Here the commentary provides suggestions of where useful illustrations may be found in fields such as literature, entertainment, history, or biography. They are intended to provide general ideas for illustrating the passage's key themes and so serve as a catalyst for effectively illustrating the text.

# Preface

It is a joy to be included in Baker’s Teach the Text series. I can think of no other biblical book that I would rather write a commentary on than Paul’s letter to the Romans, and it is a privilege to be asked to do so. I pray that the reader will thrill to the message of this most important of Paul’s writings.

No book is an independent endeavor; certainly not this one. There are numerous people that have helped make my dream of this manuscript become a reality. Here I mention only a few. First, I wish to thank Mark Strauss for extending to me the invitation to participate in this series. Mark is an editor “in whom I am well pleased” (to quote the biblical text)! His expertise, insight, and patience helped me stay the course in this project, and I am deeply grateful to him for it. Next, I am so pleased to have done this work in collaboration with a former colleague of mine, one highly esteemed—Rosalie de Rosset. Dr. de Rosset is an astute professor who has a wonderful

grasp of both literature and theology. It is, therefore, an honor for me that she, along with Mark Eckel, has done the sections of each chapter that were illustrative and practical in nature. And, then, as usual it was a pleasure to work with the fine team at Baker, and to once again be impressed by their commitment to the sacred text.

Also, I wish to express my appreciation to my work-study student—Mrs. Jennifer Hill. Jennifer typed much of this manuscript, thereby accomplishing the near-impossible task of reading my handwriting! I am also happy to say that Jennifer and her husband Jason are preparing even now to serve the Lord as international missionaries. Finally, it is a continual blessing to work at such a fine institution as Ouachita Baptist University. The administration, faculty, and especially students deserve many thanks for creating an environment that fosters the love of God and the love of learning. My hope is that this commentary on Romans will reflect those passions.

C. Marvin Pate  
Chair of Christian Theology  
Pruet School of Christian Studies  
Ouachita Baptist University  
March 30, 2012

# Abbreviations

## General

b.	born
ca.	circa
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
d.	died
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
esp.	especially
ET	English translation
mg.	margin
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> , under the word
v(v).	verse(s)

## Ancient Text Types and Versions

LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text

## Modern Versions

ESV	English Standard Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version

## Apocrypha and Septuagint

Add. Esth.	Additions to Esther
Bar.	Baruch
Jdt.	Judith
1 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees
4 Macc.	4 Maccabees

Sir.	Sirach
Tob.	Tobit
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

## Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

<i>Apoc. Ab.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
<i>Apoc. Mos.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Moses</i>
<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)</i>
<i>3 Bar.</i>	<i>3 Baruch (Greek Apocalypse)</i>
<i>4 Bar.</i>	<i>4 Baruch (Paraleipomena Jeremiou)</i>
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>2 En.</i>	<i>2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>Jos. Asen.</i>	<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>L.A.B.</i>	<i>Liber antiquitatum biblicarum</i> (Pseudo-Philo)
<i>L.A.E.</i>	<i>Life of Adam and Eve</i>
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>T. Benj.</i>	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>
<i>T. Jud.</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
<i>T. Levi.</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>T. Reub.</i>	<i>Testament of Reuben</i>
<i>T. Zeb.</i>	<i>Testament of Zebulun</i>

## Dead Sea Scrolls

CD	<i>Damascus Document</i>
1QH <sup>a</sup>	<i>Hodayot<sup>a</sup></i>
1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>

1QpHab	<i>Pesher Habakkuk</i>
1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>
1QSa	<i>Rule of the Congregation</i>
4QMMT	<i>Halakhic Letter</i>
4Q171 (4QpPs <sup>a</sup> )	<i>Psalms Pesher<sup>a</sup></i>
4Q174 (4QFlor)	<i>Florilegium</i>

### Mishnah and Talmud

<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
<i>t.</i>	Tosefta
<i>y.</i>	Jerusalem Talmud

<i>Abod. Zar.</i>	<i>Abodah Zarah</i>
<i>'Abot</i>	<i>'Abot</i>
<i>Hag.</i>	<i>Hagigah</i>
<i>Ker.</i>	<i>Kerithot</i>
<i>Ned.</i>	<i>Nedarim</i>
<i>Shabb.</i>	<i>Shabbat</i>
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>Yad.</i>	<i>Yadayim</i>

### Targumic Texts

<i>Tg. Neof.</i>	<i>Targum Neofiti</i>
<i>Tg. Yer.</i>	<i>Targum Yerushalmi</i>

### Other Rabbinic Works

<i>Mek.</i>	<i>Mekilta</i>
<i>Pesiq. Rab.</i>	<i>Pesiqta Rabbati</i>
<i>Rab.</i>	<i>Rabbah</i>

### Apostolic Fathers

<i>1 Clem.</i>	<i>1 Clement</i>
<i>Ign. Eph.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Ign. Magn.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Magnesians</i>
<i>Mart. Pol.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i>

### Greek and Latin Works

#### Aristotle

<i>Eth. nic.</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics (Ethica nicomachea)</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politics (Politica)</i>

### Augustine

<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessions (Confessionum libri XIII)</i>
<i>Julian</i>	<i>Against Julian (Contra Julianum)</i>
<i>Spir. Let.</i>	<i>The Spirit and the Letter (De spiritu et littera)</i>

### Columella

<i>Rust.</i>	<i>On Agriculture (De re rustica)</i>
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### Epictetus

<i>Disc.</i>	<i>Discourses (Dissertationes)</i>
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### Euripides

<i>Andr.</i>	<i>Andromache</i>
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### Eusebius

<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History (Historia ecclesiastica)</i>
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### Horace

<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satires (Satirae)</i>
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### Irenaeus

<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Against Heresies (Adversus haereses)</i>
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### John Chrysostom

<i>Hom. Rom.</i>	<i>Homilies on Paul's Epistle to the Romans</i>
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### Josephus

<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion (Contra Apionem)</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities (Antiquitates judaicae)</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War (Bellum judaicum)</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>The Life (Vita)</i>

### Juvenal

<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satires (Satirae)</i>
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**Livy**  
Hist. *History of Rome (Ab urbe condita libri)*

**Marcus Aurelius**  
Medit. *Meditations*

**Ovid**  
Cure *The Cure for Love (Remedia amoris)*  
Metam. *Metamorphoses*

**Palladius**  
Insit. *On the Grafting of Trees (De insitione)*

**Philo**  
Abraham *On the Life of Abraham (De Abrahamo)*  
Cherubim *On the Cherubim (De cherubim)*  
Creation *On the Creation of the World (De opificio mundi)*  
Decalogue *On the Decalogue (De decalogo)*  
Embassy *On the Embassy to Gaius (Legatio ad Gaium)*  
Moses *On the Life of Moses (De vita Mosis)*  
Posterity *On the Posterity of Cain (De posteritate Caini)*  
Spec. Laws *On the Special Laws (De specialibus legibus)*  
Virtues *On the Virtues (De virtutibus)*

**Plutarch**  
Mor. *Moralia*

**Pseudo-Aristotle**  
Cosmos *On the Cosmos (De mundo)*

**Pseudo-Lucian**  
Asin. *Asinus (Lucius, or The Ass)*

**Seneca**  
Anger *On Anger (De ira)*  
Mor. Ep. *Moral Epistles (Epistulae morales)*

**Suetonius**  
Claudius *Life of Claudius (Divus Claudius)*

**Tacitus**  
Ann. *Annals (Annales)*  
Hist. *Histories (Historiae)*

**Xenophon**  
Cyr. *Cyropaedia*

### Secondary Sources

ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers*  
BDAG Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago, 1999  
NPNF<sup>1</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1  
PL *Patrologia latina* [= *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina*]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–64  
Str-B Strack, H. L., and P. Billerbeck. *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*. 6 vols. Munich, 1922–61  
TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–76

# Introduction to Romans

Next to Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul is arguably the most important figure in the Christian faith. His life, letters, and theology have indelibly shaped Christianity in the last two millennia. Some of the greatest church leaders have accorded an exalted place to the apostle to the Gentiles: Peter honored him (2 Pet. 3:15–16); Augustine appealed to him; Luther revered him; Wesley found assurance in him; Barth thundered forth because of him; and proponents of the “Old Perspective” and of the “New Perspective” toward Paul alike extol him as their own.<sup>1</sup> And it is no surprise that these people and movements sooner or later based their understanding of Paul on his magnum opus—Romans. Paul and Romans: an unbeatable combination that delivers the knockout punch to any works-oriented righteousness before God; a soothing remedy for the soul that longs for peace with God; and a hopeful proclamation that God has begun to put the world to rights with himself. A commentary on Romans is therefore most fitting. Of course, there are already myriads of works on Romans

going back to the early church fathers, but still, each new generation deserves a fresh hearing of this ancient masterpiece that Paul wrote somewhere between AD 55 and 58. Though daunting, that is the joyous task that this present study attempts to accomplish. Before an introduction to Paul’s letter to the Christians at Rome, however, some comments are needed about Paul the man: the contours of his world, the extent of his letters, and the center of his thought.

## **Paul the Man: His World(s), His Letters, and His Theology**

### *Paul’s World(s)*

Paul was a product of three worlds: Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian. These influences impacted Paul in increasing significance, like concentric circles. At the periphery of Paul’s world was the Greco-Roman sphere of influence. Like most travelers in the Roman Empire in the middle of the first century AD, Paul spoke the trade language bequeathed to the masses of his day—Koine (common) Greek. Koine Greek



An icon of Paul from a larger piece entitled *Christ and Twelve Apostles* taken from a nineteenth-century AD Orthodox church in the Antalya region of Turkey.

was a mixture of classical Greek dialects and native languages of the conquered peoples in the domain of Alexander the Great (ca. 330 BC). Koine Greek was a standard language used for culture and commerce, much as English is in our day. The influence of Greek

culture on Paul is evident also in the way he drew upon ancient classical Greek philo-

sophical traditions such as Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism. Paul also utilized the tools of Greek rhetoric, such as the diatribe, the fool's speech, and the *peristasis* catalogue (a list of afflictions). And, of course, the concept of the *polis* (city) and even democracy had a constant bearing on Paul's daily experiences. Mighty Rome obviously cast its long shadow across the Roman provinces, and Paul made much use of its contributions: *pax Romana* (peace of Rome), brought about by the reign of Caesar Augustus (ca. 31 BC–AD 14) in a world torn by civil war and terrorized by pirates on the sea and bandits on the land; a pervasive and sturdy infrastructure; and a fair-minded jurisprudence system that transcended the petty politics of local towns. Indeed, the last-mentioned amenity ensured Paul an audience with the court of

Rome, where the apostle was bound and determined to visit.

But Paul was born Saul—a Jew by birth and upbringing. Though reared in the Gentile city of Tarsus, Paul probably was taken by his parents as a young person to Jerusalem to be trained as a rabbi (Acts 22:2–3). There he excelled his peers in his grasp of the Torah and the oral tradition of the Pharisees, and in his love for the land of Israel. Indeed, Paul was so zealously Jewish that he devoted himself to stamping out Judaism's newest fringe group, the followers of Jesus. Paul's zeal for Moses, loathing of Gentile influence on Judaism, and hatred of Jesus drove him to the point of violence against the church. He relates his passion for Judaism and contempt for the church especially in Galatians 1:13–14; Philippians 3:4–6; and 1 Timothy 1:13 (cf. Acts 9:1–2).

However, a “funny” thing happened to Paul the Pharisee on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians: he was saved through an encounter with the risen Jesus (Gal. 1:15–16; Phil. 3:7–11; cf. Acts 9:3–18; 22:2–21; 26:4–23). There Paul surrendered to the crucified Jesus, who was none other than the glorious Christ, and, in a divine touché, Paul the Gentile-basher was there and then called to be an apostle to the nations. In a flash, Paul exchanged the law of Moses for faith in Christ, hatred of non-Jews for love of the church, the land of Israel for the kingdom of God, and circumcision and the old covenant for the cross of Calvary. Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus was nothing short of both a conversion and a calling.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, God's setting apart of Paul to preach to the Gentiles the gospel of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the end-time conversion of the nations

predicted by Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah and Micah.<sup>3</sup>

### *Paul's Letters*

Thirteen New Testament letters are attributed to Paul, and traditionally they are grouped into four categories: early epistles (1–2 Thessalonians); major epistles (Galatians [which some think was Paul's first letter], Romans, 1–2 Corinthians); prison epistles (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon); the Pastoral Epistles (1–2 Timothy, Titus).

The traditional approach to Paul's letters, however, has for the last century or so been vigorously challenged by less conservatively inclined scholars. These scholars attribute only seven of the so-called Pauline Epistles to the apostle himself: Galatians, Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon; the rest, they think, were written by Paul's students after the apostle's death in about AD 64. Therefore, it is argued, the latter "pseudonymous" writings are not to be given serious attention in discerning Paul's theology. This wing of Pauline scholarship bases its claim essentially on three arguments. First, the vocabulary of the disputable letters differs from that of the indisputable Pauline Epistles. Second, the history presumed by the Pastoral Epistles matches neither the events of Paul's letters nor the accounts of Paul's travels as recorded in Acts. Third, the theology of the pseudonymous letters is at odds with the undisputed Pauline Epistles.

Since Paul's authorship of Romans is undisputed, a commentary on Romans need not include a full-

scale discussion of the issue of how many letters Paul actually wrote, but we should at least note in passing the traditional responses to the foregoing arguments. First, the differences in vocabulary between the disputed and the undisputed letters of Paul can be accounted for by his use of different secretaries for his letters (Rom. 16:22 names Tertius as one of them) and by the differing vocabulary required to address the various circumstances of each church to which he wrote. Second, there is good reason for postulating the theory that Paul was released from his Roman captivity recorded in Acts 28 (ca. AD 62), after which he conducted a mission trip to Spain (see Rom. 15) and perhaps elsewhere, but then was rounded up with Peter and other Christians to be tried by the emperor Nero in Rome. There, reliable tradition tells us, Paul and Peter were martyred for their faith in Christ (ca. AD 64). Indeed, the fact that Luke, Paul's sometime missionary companion and the author

At the foot of the Capitoline Hill, which overlooks the Roman Forum, is a prison built in the seventh to sixth century BC and used until the fourth century AD. Currently located in the lower levels of the church of San Giuseppe dei Falegnami, it is known as the Mamertine Prison. Legend maintains that Paul and Peter were held here while awaiting execution.



of Acts, does not record Paul's death in Acts 28 decidedly points toward this theory. Third, the overall theology of the disputed letters of Paul—the overlapping of the two ages (see below)—is also the driving engine of the undisputed Pauline Epistles, as more than one scholar has noted. And if that is the case for the major theme of Paul's thought, then why should one doubt that it is the same or similar for Paul's minor themes?<sup>4</sup>

### *Paul's Theology*

Four major options have competed as the proposed center of Paul's thought: justification by faith; the Tübingen theory; the history-of-religions approach; and Jewish eschatology. My discussion of these themes proceeds from the assumption that if the key to the apostle Paul's thought can be identified, then therein we find a frame of reference for interpreting his letters.

With the Protestant Reformation, justification by faith became the leading contender to be the center of Paul's theology (at least among non-Catholics), especially when one takes into consideration Galatians, Romans, and Philippians (chap. 3). The thesis of those letters is that the sinner is declared righteous before God through simple faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works of the law of Moses, the Torah. Certainly, justification by faith is a major player in Paul's theology, as we will repeatedly see in the letter to the Romans. However, Pauline scholars of the last century rightly observed that although justification is important to Paul, it is not pervasive in the rest of his writings. Rather, the doctrine of justification by faith seems to have been a teaching that Paul explained and defended

in response to the Judaizers' influence on some, but not all, of the churches to which he wrote. In other words, Paul's apologetic for justification by faith was a polemic against the false teaching of the Judaizers that salvation comes by faith in Christ plus obedience to the Torah. Justification by faith most probably is not, then, the overarching theme driving the Pauline corpus.

The Tübingen theory is named after the university in that German town and was associated with one of that institution's leading theology professors, F. C. Baur.<sup>5</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, Baur claimed that the key to understanding Paul, and indeed the entire New Testament, is to see that a theological civil war runs throughout its pages: Paul and the message of justification by faith versus Peter and the message of justification by faith plus works of the Torah (the Judaizers). It was left to the anonymous work of Acts in the second century to paint an idyllic portrait of the early church in which Paul and Peter come across as the best of buddies. Although the Tübingen theory enjoyed enormous popularity among New Testament interpreters in Europe during the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century, its influence all but vanished in the second half of the twentieth century thanks to two considerations. First, scholars recognized Baur's theory for what it really was, a foisting upon the New Testament of the dialectic philosophy of Hegel: thesis (Paul's message) versus antithesis (Peter's message) resulting in a synthesis (Acts' reconciliation of the two). In other words, the theology of Paul and the New Testament was distorted by an imposition of philosophical categories upon it. Second, fewer scholars

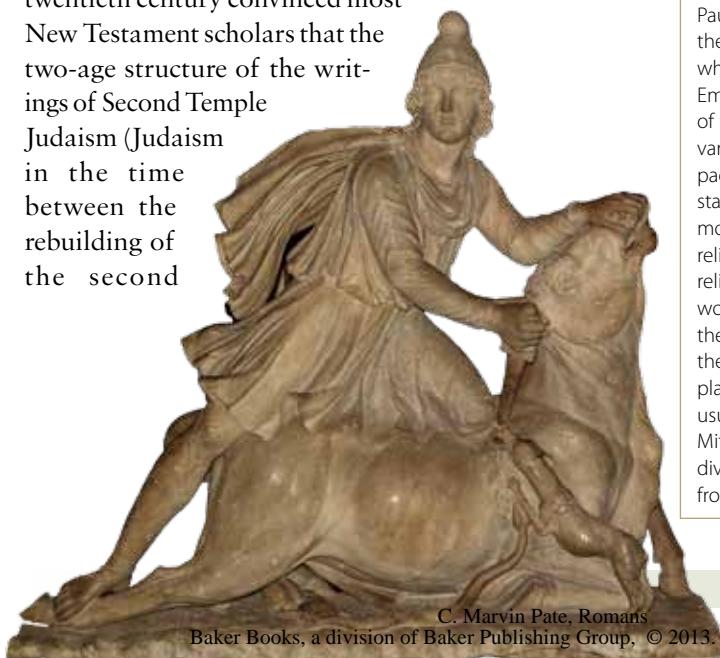
today doubt that Luke wrote Acts and that he did so in the late first century, not the mid- to late second century.

In the first half of the twentieth century another hypothesis concerning the center of Paul's theology arose from the history-of-religions school. Although there were various constructs under the umbrella of this approach, they shared the common idea that Paul gave up his Jewish faith for Hellenistic (Greek) religion, whether Greek mystery religions (so Richard Reitzenstein), Hellenistic mysticism (so Adolf Deissmann), or Platonic gnosticism (so Rudolf Bultmann).<sup>6</sup> Today, the history-of-religions approach is still championed by a few high-profile scholars (e.g., the Jesus Seminar, Elaine Pagels, Bart Ehrman), but most scholars maintain that Paul was true to his Jewish heritage, and that Hellenistic influence was at the periphery, not the center, of his theology. This is so even after we duly note the interpenetration of Hellenism and Judaism in the first century.<sup>7</sup>

The fourth contender for the center of Paul's thought is Jewish eschatology, but in revised form. Albert Schweitzer in the early twentieth century convinced most New Testament scholars that the two-age structure of the writings of Second Temple Judaism (Judaism in the time between the rebuilding of the second

temple in Jerusalem in 519 BC and its destruction by the Romans in AD 70) was the key not only to Jesus' message but also to Paul's theology. Apocalyptic Judaism was a dominant strand of Jewish theology by the time of Jesus, teaching that history divides into two ages: the present age of sin and sorrow caused by Adam's fall, and the coming age of the kingdom of God, a period of unprecedented righteousness and peace; and it would be the Messiah who would establish the latter.<sup>8</sup> Most Pauline scholars today see this as the key to the thought of Jesus, Paul, and indeed the whole of the New Testament.<sup>9</sup> And with this I agree. But there is a significant difference between the ancient Jewish two-age scenario and the New Testament: whereas the former expected that the two ages would be consecutive (when the Messiah comes, he will completely replace this age with the age to come), the latter claims that the two ages are now simultaneous; that is, they overlap. Thus, with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the age to come (kingdom of God) broke into

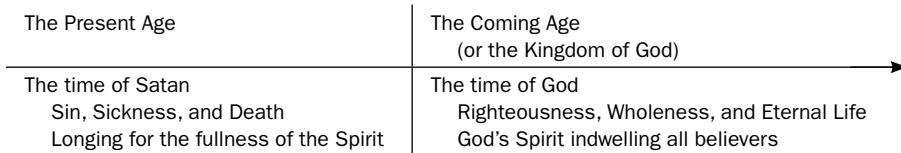
Paul developed his theology under the guidance of the Holy Spirit while living in a polytheistic Roman Empire that was rather tolerant of religion and tended to absorb various belief systems into its own pagan system. As the worship of state gods and goddesses became more ritual observance than religious conviction, several mystery religions sprang up. The one that would rise to prominence toward the end of the first century AD was the cult of Mithras. The meeting places of the followers of Mithraism usually contained an image of Mithras preparing to sacrifice the divine bull, like the one shown here from the second century AD.



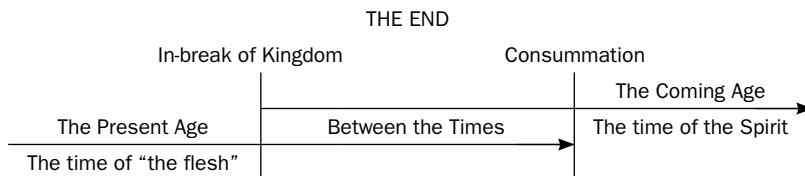
this present age but did not end it. This is often labeled “inaugurated eschatology,” which holds that with the first coming of Christ the age to come has already dawned,

but its completion still awaits the second coming of Christ. The following two charts illustrate the Jewish two-age structure and Jesus’ modification of it:

#### Old Jewish View



#### The Christian View



For our purposes, the book of Romans attests to the importance of the overlapping of the two ages for understanding Paul’s concept of justification by faith: faith in Jesus Christ apart from the works of the Torah projects end-time justification of the sinner by God into the present age. I will have much more to say on this in the commentary itself; for now, I simply note that inaugurated eschatology (the key to Paul’s theology) and justification by faith are kindred spirits in the book of Romans.

With the preceding background in mind, we may now turn to an introduction of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

#### The Letter to the Romans

This introduction to the book of Romans will follow the usual procedure by discussing its importance in church history,

composition, date and place of writing, recipients, theme, purpose, and genre/outline. These opening comments, however, will yield some surprising results, especially regarding the last three items mentioned. Hopefully, these new observations will shed considerable light on the letter as a whole.

#### *The Importance of Romans in Church History*

The book of Romans, more than almost any other biblical book, has dramatically shaped church history. This is not surprising, since Romans is the most systematic explanation of the gospel of Jesus Christ that the New Testament contains. We may recall here some of the individuals mentioned earlier in this regard whose lives were forever changed by the message of Romans. Augustine (fifth-century church

father) at long last found peace with God after reading Romans 13:14: “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” Such a challenge was just what the young and restless Augustine needed, and he went on to become perhaps the most important theologian of the church since Paul himself.

Martin Luther in 1517 came to a whole new understanding of the righteousness of God when he meditated on Romans 1:17: “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” Listen to Luther’s testimony about his conversion based on this new understanding of divine righteousness as illuminated by this verse:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. . . . At last, by the mercy of God, . . . I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. . . . Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. . . . And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word ‘righteousness of God.’<sup>10</sup>

So too did Romans 1:17 change John Wesley, for the mere reading of Luther’s commentary on that verse in Aldersgate Chapel on a night in 1738 brought to Wesley an assurance of salvation that had long eluded him. Wesley wrote of that moment,

“My heart was strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ; Christ alone for salvation.”<sup>11</sup>

Karl Barth’s conversion from liberal theology to a more conservative brand of Christianity (known as neoorthodoxy) stemmed from his sermons on the book of Romans. His 1919 commentary on Romans, which declared that change in perspective, was epochmaking. Barth, armed with the message of Romans, singlehandedly brought about the demise of old-line liberal theology.

Besides the spiritual luminaries just mentioned, we can only imagine how large a number of persons have become believers in Jesus Christ by traveling the “Romans road” (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 10:9–10, 13), the present author included.

Yes, the book of Romans has changed the lives of millions of individuals and governed the very course of church history. It deserves, therefore, our respect and even reverence.

### *The Composition of Romans*

What did Romans look like originally? That is, what did it look like when it left the hands of Paul and his professional scribe, Tertius? Four answers have been given to this question throughout the years.

First, the second-century heretic Marcion said that Romans originally consisted of chapters 1–14. But it is obvious that Marcion had a vested interest in propounding this particular theory. It was the church at Rome that branded Marcion a heretic around AD 150, and Romans 15–16 compliments the Christians there at Rome. Moreover, Marcion was declared a heretic because he argued in favor of the recognition of Paul’s letters and a few other

portions of the New Testament as Christian Scripture, but not the Old Testament. Romans 15–16 draws heavily in a positive way on the Old Testament.

A second view is that Romans ended originally at chapter 15, but after Paul's death an editor added chapter 16, thereby redirecting the letter from Rome to Ephesus. Why Ephesus? Because chapter 16 contains greetings to numerous individuals whom Paul knew, but how could Paul know them if he had never been to Rome? It is more likely, so this theory goes, that these are people whom the apostle befriended at Ephesus, a city where he spent three years ministering (Acts 19). But this hypothesis overlooks a key consideration: Paul probably met the folks greeted in Romans 16 during his various missionary travels, and he mentions them here to prepare the way for his imminent arrival at the capital city. In other words, the greetings in chapter 16 point to Rome as the destination of the letter, the composition of which runs from chapter 1 through 16.

Third, the majority opinion today is that Romans originally went from 1:1 to 16:23, thus excluding the doxology in 16:25–27. The many scholars taking this view do so for two reasons: (1) the doxology occurs

at different places in the Greek manuscripts of Romans (e.g., after 14:23 or 15:33 or 16:23); (2) the language is liturgical, similar to

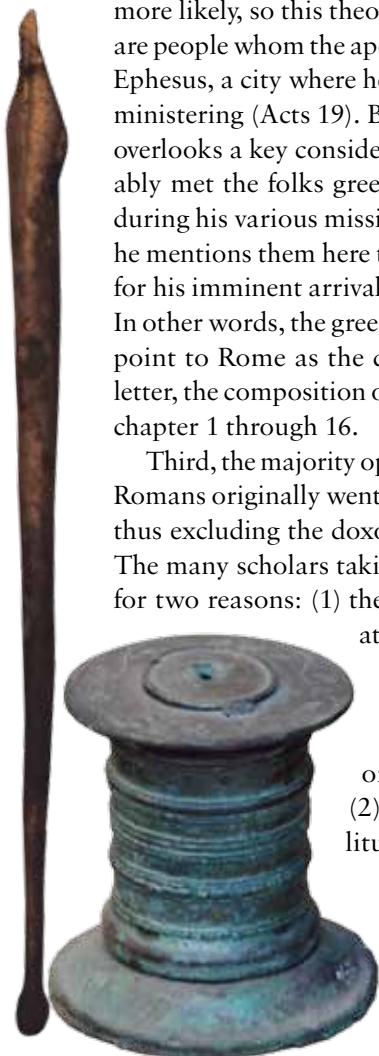
Ephesians 1:1–14, and many Pauline scholars do not believe that Paul wrote Ephesians. But there are weighty reasons for maintaining that the doxology is original to Romans and occurred at the very end of the letter, where it is found in English translations today. (1) Even though the doxology occurs at different places in some Greek manuscripts, it is found after Romans 16:23 in the majority of the best Greek texts. (2) The theological theme of the doxology—the obedience of the Gentiles—matches the theme of Romans 1:1–7, thus forming an *inclusio* for the letter as a whole and signaling one of the key purposes of the letter (see the discussion to follow and also in the commentary sections on Rom. 1:1–7; 16:25–27). (3) For those like myself who accept the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, it poses no problem that the liturgical style of the doxology in Romans 16:25–27 matches Ephesians 1:1–14 and elsewhere.

Fourth, although it is a minority view, I side with those who argue that Romans looked in the beginning like it looks today in the English text: it started at 1:1 and ended at 16:27.

#### ***The Date and Place of the Writing of Romans***

There is little debate today concerning the date and the place of the writing of Romans. Most scholars agree that Paul wrote the letter somewhere between AD 55 and 58, on his third missionary trip. This conclusion is based on two considerations: the intersection of two events on Paul's

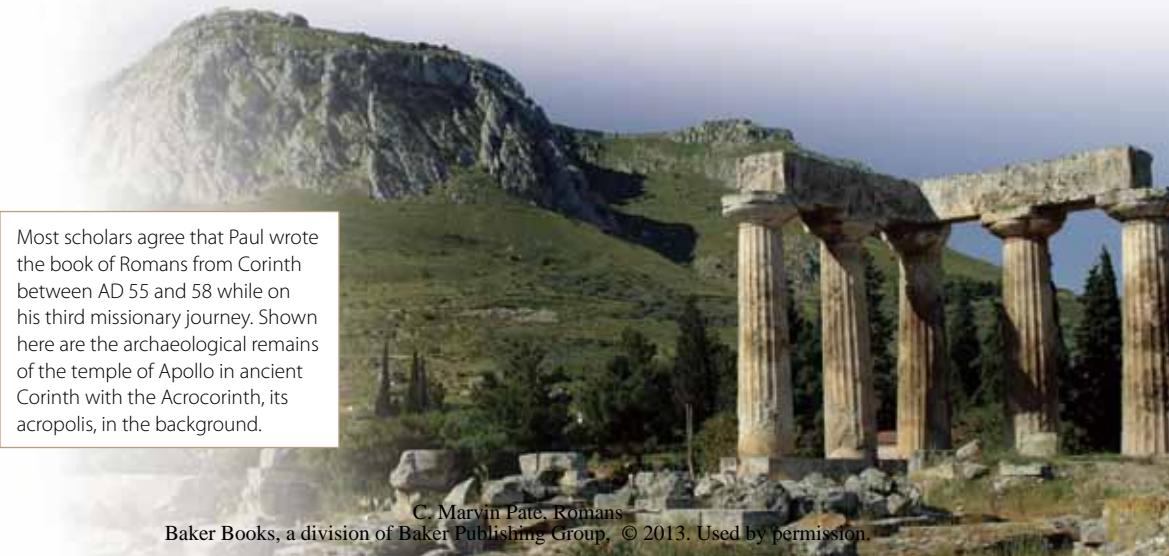
Romans was written by Paul and his professional scribe, Tertius (Rom. 16:22). Writing materials during this time period included a stylus for writing on wax tablets, and pen and ink for writing on surfaces such as papyrus, vellum, boards, or pottery. Pictured is a Roman bronze pen and inkpot (first century AD).



second missionary journey with Roman chronology, and the intersection of Paul's comments in Romans with the book of Acts. First, according to Acts 18, which records events from Paul's second missionary trip (which occurred before Paul wrote Romans), Paul appeared before Gallio, Roman proconsul of Corinth (Acts 18:12–17). According to Roman records (the Gallio Inscription in particular), Gallio was proconsul of Corinth in AD 51–52. Note that the Roman emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome in AD 49 (see Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; Acts 18:2), but upon the emperor's death in AD 54, Jews were allowed to return to Rome. Indeed, in Romans 16:3 Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish couple who had been expelled from Rome in AD 49, but who now have relocated back in the city, presumably after AD 54. All this is to say that Paul could not have written Romans before AD 52 or before AD 54. Second, Acts 18:23–21:16 records Paul's third missionary journey, including a three-year stay in Ephesus. Most Pauline scholars believe that Paul wrote 1–2 Corinthians from Ephesus, sometime around AD 55. Those two letters speak about Paul's plan

to collect from the church at Corinth and others an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9). By the time Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, the churches of the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia (in which Corinth was located) had delivered on their promise to make such a collection (so Rom. 15:25–27). Thus, Romans must have been written after AD 55, the date of the Corinthian letters. From the preceding considerations one arrives at a date for the writing of Romans no sooner than AD 55. But from where do we get the outer date of AD 58 for Romans? The next point provides the answer.

It is commonly agreed that after his stay in Ephesus of approximately two and a half years (see Acts 19:8–10), Paul traveled to Corinth for a three-month stay (Acts 20:1–3), and from there he wrote Romans. Romans 16:1 indicates that Paul was writing from Corinth, since he commends Phoebe, a resident of Cenchreae, which was near Corinth, to the congregations of Rome. Moreover, Paul mentions Erastus in Romans 16:23, the same Erastus who was the director of Corinth's public works. Gaius, who provided lodging for Paul, probably also hailed from Corinth



Most scholars agree that Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth between AD 55 and 58 while on his third missionary journey. Shown here are the archaeological remains of the temple of Apollo in ancient Corinth with the Acrocorinth, its acropolis, in the background.

(Rom. 16:23). If indeed Paul was writing the letter of Romans from Corinth, then AD 58 seems established as the outer date for its composition.

### ***The Recipients of Romans***

It is clear from Romans itself that the recipients of the letter include both Jewish and Gentile Christians, for both groups are addressed throughout the document (1:1–16; 2:1–3:20; 9–11; 14:1–15:13). The fourth-century church father later called Ambrosiaster no doubt was accurate in saying that the church at Rome was not founded by any apostle (it is obvious that Paul had not visited Rome yet, nor had Peter or any other apostle, for Paul’s practice was not to build on any other apostle’s foundation [see Rom. 15:20–21]).<sup>12</sup> Most likely, it was founded by Roman Jews who were converted in Jerusalem on the day

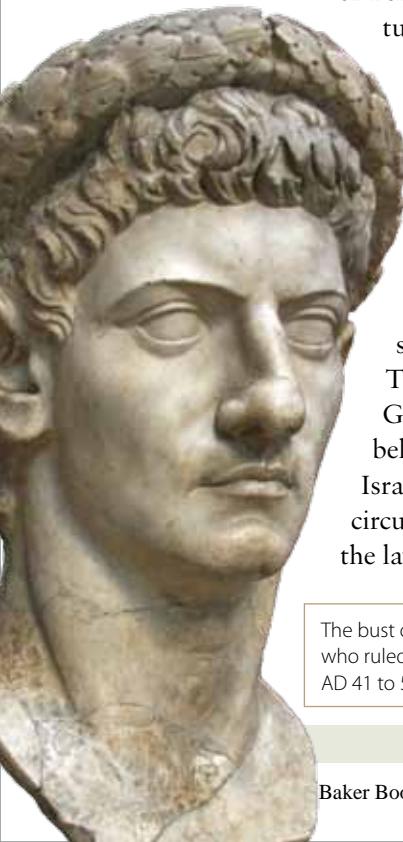
of Pentecost (Acts 2) and returned home to the synagogues in Rome with their newfound faith in Jesus the Messiah.

It is also likely that these Jewish Christians led the Gentile God-fearers who worshiped in their synagogues to Christ. The God-fearers were Gentiles who came to believe in the one God of Israel but did not submit to circumcision or the whole of the law of Moses.<sup>13</sup>

So somewhere between AD 30 and 55 Christianity became established in Rome, with believers probably meeting in as many as five house and tenement churches (see Rom. 16:5, 10–11, 14–15) and with an attendance of perhaps a few hundred (a large house church could accommodate fifty people for worship). From this we can see how the Roman believers could have become polarized into “weak” (possibly Jewish Christians) and “strong” (possibly Gentile Christians) factions (see Rom. 14:1–15:13), since they met in various locations. Moreover, most scholars today think that the Gentile Christian element in the house churches became dominant when Jews (Jewish Christians included) were expelled from Rome in AD 49 by Claudius. Suetonius (*Claudius* 25.4) reports that the Roman emperor expelled Jews from Rome at that time because they were squabbling over the man Chrestus, whose name probably was a corruption of the Greek *Christos*, meaning “Christ.” The early second-century Roman historian no doubt was referring to the controversy between Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews over whether or not Jesus was the Christ. Since Rome did not distinguish between Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews, but considered them all Jews, Claudius kicked out the whole lot of them. As noted above, Jews were not allowed to return to Rome until after Claudius’s death in AD 54. At that time, Jewish Christians came home to house or tenement churches now dominated by Gentile Christians, making for a tense relationship between the two groups (see Rom. 9–11).

### ***The Theme of Romans***

Almost all commentators on Romans look to 1:16–17 as the theme of the letter:



The bust of Emperor Claudius, who ruled the Roman Empire from AD 41 to 54

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” [Hab. 2:4].

Beyond that, however, there is much debate regarding what these verses actually mean. Three questions perplex scholars: What does Paul mean by “righteousness of God”? What does the phrase “from faith to faith” (NIV: “by faith from first to last”) mean? What is Paul’s understanding of Habakkuk 2:4? I will deal more at length with Romans 1:16–17 later in the commentary section, but here I tip my hand as to what I think Paul means in these critical verses. Paul is drawing on the theme of the story of Israel.

Very simply put, the story of Israel is fourfold in the Old Testament narrative: (1) God’s promised blessing upon Israel if the nation obeyed him; (2) Israel’s repeated sins against God; (3) God’s response of sending Israel into exile, to Assyria in 722 BC and then to Babylonia in 587/586 BC; (4) God’s unwavering promise that Israel will be restored to their land if they repent. In my view, every key word in Romans 1:16–17 is rooted in the fourth point of this story: Israel’s promised restoration. Thus, the words “gospel,” “power,” and “salvation” would have immediately brought to mind Isaiah 40–66 and the promise of the good news that God will restore Israel to their land; this is nothing less than the power of God to save his people, and it will be a demonstration of God’s righteousness (e.g., Isa. 46:13; 51:5–8). And when Israel is restored to God and the land, then the

nations of the world will come to believe in Israel’s God and stream into Jerusalem to worship him (e.g., Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–3). In other words, “first to the Jew” would come restoration/salvation, and “then to the Gentile.” In the meantime, however, according to Habakkuk 2:4, the faithful Jew is to wait in faith on the Lord for the day of Israel’s restoration by obeying the Torah.

In Romans 1:16–17, however, Paul tweaks or qualifies the way Israel understood this Old Testament story. For the apostle to the Gentiles, the good news of the power of God’s salvation and righteousness is not the physical and geographical restoration of Jews to their homeland, but rather the spiritual conversion of sinners precisely because they stop trusting in the works of the law of Moses and place their faith in Jesus Christ alone. Moreover, Paul reverses the order of the restoration of Israel and the conversion of the Gentiles: first comes the conversion of the Gentiles, and then the restoration of Israel (see my comments on, e.g., Rom. 1:1–15; 11:25–27).<sup>14</sup>

### *The Purpose of Romans*

Although the debate continues as to why Paul penned his magnificent letter to the Romans, the apostle himself leaves the reader in no doubt as to his purpose: Paul was divinely called to lead the way in bringing about the end-time conversion of the nations, a mission in which the church at Rome was to play a critical role (see Rom. 1:1–15; 15:14–33; 16:25–27). Thus, Rome was to be the last major stopping point before the apostle launched the final leg of his eschatological mission to Spain, the end of the then-known world (see again Rom. 15:14–33).<sup>15</sup> But to garner the support of the



During the first century AD, the Roman Empire controlled a vast area. It achieved its maximum size around AD 117 under Emperor Trajan. It extended as far north as modern-day Great Britain and as far west as Spain, stretched into parts of North Africa and Egypt to the south, and reached the border of the Parthian Empire and Arabia on the east. Paul desired to preach the gospel to the western end of the then-known world, Spain.

Christians in Rome, the capital city of the Roman Empire, Paul had to accomplish two tasks. First, he had to motivate the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome to start getting along again (see esp. Rom. 9–11; 14–15); otherwise the church would not be sufficiently unified to support him financially and spiritually in his Spanish mission. Second, even before that, he had to convince the Roman Christians that he was a legitimate apostle and therefore worthy of their support. Douglas Moo pinpoints this aspect of Romans very well:

Paul’s ultimate destination is Spain. As he clearly hints in 15:24, he is coming to Rome, among other things, to get the Ro-

mans to help him with that mission. But Paul has never been to Rome. Moreover, he is a controversial figure in the early church. As both a faithful Jew and God’s “point man” in opening the Gentile mission, he has been constantly under suspicion. Jewish Christians thought he was giving too much of the old tradition away, whereas Gentile Christians thought he was still too Jewish. A lot of false rumors about what he teaches and does swirl around him (cf. 3:8). Paul therefore probably knows he is going to have to clear the air if he expects the Romans to support him. Thus, . . . he writes Romans to clarify just what he believes.<sup>16</sup>

Paul therefore writes Romans to defend his gospel of the grace of God through

Christ by arguing that it is rooted in the Old Testament (Rom. 2–5), providing the disclaimer that it is not antinomian in ethic (God’s grace is not a license to sin [so Rom. 6–8]), and holding out a future for Israel (Rom. 9–11). All of these concerns would have helped to allay the fears of Jewish Christians in Rome that Paul was anti-Jewish. But, from the same chapters, the Gentile Christians in Rome would have welcomed Paul’s teaching that Gentiles are saved by faith in Christ apart from the law, and that the conversion of the nations is a significant part of God’s plan.

In other words, viewing Romans as Paul’s official doctrinal statement designed to introduce him to the congregations at Rome for the purpose of gathering their support for the end-time conversion of the nations seems to explain well the contents of the letter. I will keep coming back to this purpose as we move through the commentary.

### *The Genre/Outline of Romans*

The genre or type of literature to which Romans belongs is a hotly contested topic. Is it a letter (as, for convenience, I have repeatedly labeled it so far in this introduction), since it has an epistolary framework (1:1–15; 15:14–16:23)? But if so, why does the bulk of Romans (1:16–15:13) not deal with the specifics of the local congregation in Rome? After all, Paul’s other letters do so with their respective churches, and indeed, ancient letters as a whole likewise dealt with the specific situations of their recipients. Is Romans therefore a treatise, since it is a public declaration of Paul’s theology of the gospel? This would make it more like ancient public speeches, which presented their sub-

## Example of a Hittite Suzerain-Vassal Treaty

**Preamble:**<sup>a</sup> These are the words of the Sun Mursilis, the great king, the king of Hatti land, the valiant, the favorite of the storm god, the son of Suppiluliumas, the great king, the king of Hatti land.

**Historical Prologue:** Aziras, your grandfather, Duppi-Tessub, rebelled against my father, but submitted again to my father. . . . When my father became a god (i.e., died), and I seated myself on the throne of my father, Aziras behaved toward me just as he had toward my father. . . . When your father died, in accordance with your father’s word I did not drop you. . . .

**Stipulations:** With my friend you shall be a friend, and with my enemy you shall be an enemy. . . . If you send a man to that enemy and inform him as follows: “An army and charioteers of the Hatti land are on their way, be on your guard!” you act in disregard of your oath. . . . If anyone utters words unfriendly to the king of Hatti land before you, Duppi-Tessub, you shall not withhold his name from the king. . . . If anyone of the deportees from the Nuhasi land or of the deportees from the country of Kinza whom my father removed and myself removed, escapes and comes to you, if you do not seize him and turn him back to the king of the Hatti land . . . you act in disregard of your oath.

**Document Clause:** (To be placed in the temple)

**Appeal to Witnesses:** The sun-god of heaven, the sun-goddess of Arinna, the storm-god of Heaven . . . Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Hattarina. . . . Ninlil, the mountains, the rivers, the springs, the clouds—let these be witnesses to this treaty and to the oath.

**Curses and Blessings:** The words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet—should Duppi-Tessub not honor them, may these gods of the oath destroy Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, his land and together with everything that he owns. But if Duppi-Tessub honors the words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet, may the gods of the oath protect him together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, his country.

<sup>a</sup> Treaty can be found in Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 179.

ject matter for a broader audience. But why, then, use the private/epistolary framework of Romans relating it to the congregations in Rome? Perhaps Romans is a rhetorical speech patterned after the ancient rhetorical handbooks. But if so, which rhetorical pattern is it: demonstrative, or deliberative, or

persuasive? The fact that no consensus has emerged among those categorizing Romans as rhetorical speech does not bode well, it seems, for that approach to identifying the genre of Romans.

I suggest that there is a genre closer to hand for understanding the type of literature to which Romans belongs: the covenant structure/format that is pervasive in the Old Testament and is especially clear in the book of Deuteronomy (upon which Paul draws some ten times in Romans). It has long been recognized that the book of Deuteronomy matches perfectly the ancient Hittite

suzerain-vassal treaty, and a close look at that background can help illumine the covenant structure built into Deuteronomy and drawn on by Paul in Romans. The Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty takes us back in history to the second millennium BC. At that time, in what is modern-day eastern Turkey, the Hittite Empire ruled the Levant (ancient Syria and Israel) in the years 1400–1200 BC. That civilization was uncovered in 1906 by archaeologists who discovered, among other things, numerous examples of a contract between the Hittite king and his people, now known as the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty. In these contract documents between the king and his empire, six components can be identified. The first was the “preamble,”



Most Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties share the same basic components. Pictured is the treaty between Suppiluliuma and Hukkana from the thirteenth century BC. It contains a preamble, stipulations, divine witnesses, and curses and blessings.

a statement identifying the name of the Hittite king. Second came the “historical prologue,” which contained a summary description of the king’s relationship to his people, usually his past protection of them. Third, there followed the “stipulations” of the covenant, especially what the king expected of his people if they were to continue to

enjoy his provision and protection. Fourth, a fascinating component, the “blessings and curses,” followed, whereby the contract or treaty pronounced blessings on the people if they obeyed the king’s stipulations but curses upon them if they did not. Fifth, the “document

clause” was a statement notifying the interested parties that a copy of the document would be placed in a public setting for all to see, usually a temple. Sixth, the king of the Hittite treaty appealed to his gods to ratify, or testify to, the treaty; in other words, the gods were “witnesses” of the treaty. Though their order might vary, these components were fairly fixed (see sidebar for an example).<sup>17</sup>

From the 1950s onward, scholars have demonstrated that the six components of the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty match the book of Deuteronomy (see table 1):

1. *Preamble* (Deut. 1:1–5), which accentuates the most intimate name of God: Yahweh.

2. *Historical Prologue* (Deut. 1:6–3:29), which provides a wonderful description of Yahweh’s saving acts on behalf of Israel.
3. *Stipulations* (Deut. 4–26), which are divided into two classifications: the Ten Commandments (Deut. 4–11) and those general commandments specified in terms of Israel’s relationship with God and others (chaps. 12–26).
4. *Curses and Blessings* (Deut. 27–30), the former pronounced by the Levites on Mount Ebal should Israel prove to be disobedient to Yahweh’s stipulations, and the latter pronounced by priests on Mount Gerizim should Israel prove to be obedient. The blessings and curses alternate like an antiphonal chorus, culminating in Deuteronomy 30:15–20, which presents the “two ways” tradition: the way of obedience and covenantal blessings, and the way of disobedience and covenantal curses.
5. *Document Clause* (Deut. 31:9, 24–26), which specifies that the law on the tablets of stone be placed inside the ark of the covenant for safekeeping. Indeed, Joshua 24 reminds Israelites in the days of Joshua that the law of Moses, now in a book, is to be remembered by setting up a stone of public witness.
6. *Appeal to Witnesses* (Deut. 31:26–32:47), where Yahweh appeals not to pagan deities, since he alone is God, but rather to history, which is a witness to God’s faithfulness to his covenant with Israel.

My contention in this commentary is that the book of Romans amazingly follows the covenant form of Deuteronomy (which in turn is based closely on the Hittite

**Table 1: The Hittite-Treaty Structure of Deuteronomy**

Hittite Treaty	Deuteronomy
1. Preamble	1:1–5
2. Historical Prologue	1:6–3:29
3. Stipulations	4:1–26:19
4. Curses/Blessings	27:1–30:20
5. Document Clause	31:9, 24–26
6. Appeal to Witnesses	31:26–32:47

suzerain-vassal treaty/covenant format), except that Paul qualifies the old covenant of Moses and replaces it with the new covenant in Christ. Table 2, showing the covenant-treaty structure in Romans as the old covenant is replaced by the new, will serve as our basic outline of Romans, which will be unpacked in more detail as we move through the text itself.

**Table 2: Old Covenant Replaced by the New Covenant in Romans**

Old Covenant of Israel	New Covenant in Romans
1. Preamble	Romans 1:1–15 (Christ the Son of God and the conversion of Gentiles before the restoration of Israel)
2. Historical Prologue	Romans 1:16–17 (spiritual, not physical or geographical, restoration in Christ)
3. Stipulations	Romans 1:18–4:25 (by faith in Christ, not the law of Moses)
4. Blessings	Romans 5–8 (blessings on believing Gentiles)
5. Curses	Romans 9–11 (curses on unbelieving Israel)
6. Appeal to Witnesses	Romans 12:1–15:13 (renewal of the covenant ceremony)
7. Document Clause	Romans 15:14–16:27 (on a letter, not on stone)

# The Gospel of God in Christ through Paul

**Big Idea** *Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was divinely chosen to preach the gospel of God in Christ, the end-time fulfillment of the twofold Old Testament promise of the restoration of Israel and the conversion of the Gentiles.*

## Understanding the Text

### The Text in Context

Romans 1:1–7 forms the first half of Paul’s introduction to Romans (1:8–15 is the second half). The introduction, or pre-script, to ancient letters consisted of three parts: identification of the author, identification of the recipients, and a salutation or greeting to the recipients. Thus, these are the three parts for Romans 1:1–7:

1. Sender: Paul (1:1–6)
2. Recipient: To those in Rome (1:7a)
3. Greeting: Grace and peace (1:7b)

The sender/author component in 1:1–6 is probably so extensive because Paul is introducing himself to the Christians at Rome for the first time.

There is an *inclusio*—an opening idea of a text that is stated, developed, and then returned to at the conclusion—for the whole book of Romans centering on the “gospel” (compare 1:1, 2, 9, 15 with 15:16, 19;

16:25–27). Indeed, “gospel” receives pride of place, occurring in the letter’s thematic statement in 1:16–17. Thus, Paul from the beginning alerts the readers to the letter’s theme: the gospel of God through Jesus Christ.

Finally, 1:1–7, along with 1:8–15, corresponds with the preamble section of the covenant format that is so visible in Deuteronomy. The preamble section of the Old Testament covenant structure introduced Yahweh as Israel’s covenant-keeping God. So does 1:1–15, except that Paul equates Jesus Christ with God, whose new-covenant gospel now impacts not only Jews but also Gentiles.

The following outline will guide the examination of Romans 1:1–7:

1. Paul is called to be an apostle of the gospel of God in Christ, which is the fulfillment of the twofold Old Testament end-time promise (1:1)
2. The restoration of Israel (1:2–4)
3. The conversion of Gentiles (1:5–7)

## Historical and Cultural Background

1. Ancient Greek letters contained three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. The New Testament letters, including Paul's, do the same.

2. The "Holy Scriptures" that Paul refers to in 1:2 are the Old Testament, which, in its Hebrew form, is divided into three sections: Torah (Law), Nebiim (Prophets), and Ketubim (Writings). That Paul and the other New Testament authors followed this threefold division of the Old Testament is clear (see Luke 24:27, 44; cf. in other ancient Jewish literature the prologue of Sirach; 4 Ezra 14.37–48; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.37–42).

3. Although the primary source for Paul's gospel is the Old Testament, his Roman audience would not have missed that the word "gospel" conjured up praise for Caesar Augustus and the *pax Romana*, the peace that his rule brought to the Mediterranean world. This study of Romans will show that just as Paul shows the inadequacy of the Old Testament law for salvation, so does he undermine any misplaced confidence in Caesar. Indeed, if Paul has his way, his upcoming mission to Spain at the hands of Roman Christianity will result in the second coming of Christ and the overthrow of the Roman Empire!

4. In 1:1–7 Paul seems to cast himself in the role of the Suffering Servant from the

## Key Themes of Romans 1:1–7

- Paul has been called by God to be an apostle, especially to the Gentiles (1:1, 5–7).
- Paul's message is the gospel of God in Christ, which is the end-time fulfillment of the twofold Old Testament promise of the restoration of Israel (1:2–4) and the conversion of the Gentiles (1:5–7).
- But Paul reverses the order: first comes the conversion of the Gentiles, and then the restoration of Israel (compare 1:1–7 with 11:25–27).
- Paul utilizes the preamble section of the Old Testament covenant format.

book of Isaiah. Note the following possible connections:

Paul is a servant (compare 1:1 with Isa. 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12).

Paul is called (compare 1:1, 6–7 with Isa. 41:9; 42:6; 43:1; 45:3–4; 48:12, 15; 49:1; 51:2).

Paul is an apostle, a sent one (compare 1:1 with Isa. 6:8).

Paul is sent to share good news (compare 1:1–7 with Isa. 40:9).

Paul is sent to the Gentiles (compare 1:5–7 with Isa. 42:6–7).

This is a letter written between AD 97 and 103, which was found in the remains of a Roman fort at ancient Vindolanda (modern Chesterholm, Northumberland, England). Written on a thin piece of wood, it starts, "Claudia Severa [sender] to her Lepidina [recipient] greetings." The body of the letter is an invitation to a birthday celebration, and it ends with the greeting section, "Give my greetings to your Cerialis. My Aelius and my little son send him their greetings. I shall expect you, sister. Farewell, sister, my dearest soul, as I hope to prosper, and hail" (Klauck, *Ancient Letter*, 107). Two different styles of handwriting are evident, indicating that the majority of the letter was dictated to a scribe and the last two lines were penned by the sender herself.

## Interpretive Insights

**1:1** *Paul, a servant . . . an apostle . . . set apart for the gospel of God.* Paul provides three descriptions of himself. First, he is a servant or slave (*doulos*) of Jesus Christ. Besides the demeaning connotation of *doulos*, Paul also may have intended a positive allusion to the Old Testament “servant of Yahweh” tradition that was applied to Israel (Neh. 1:6; Isa. 43:10), the prophets (2 Kings 9:7; 17:23), Moses (Josh. 14:7; 2 Kings 18:12), Joshua (Josh. 24:29), and especially the Suffering Servant in Isaiah (Isa. 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). Paul’s usage of the less common title “Christ Jesus,” instead of the more common “Jesus Christ,” may allude to his mystic encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul tends to use “Christ Jesus” when alluding to his dramatic conversion experience. Second, Paul is called to be an apostle, which means that he has been accorded the same status as the original twelve disciples. This is true even if Paul never knew the historical Jesus. What mattered was that Paul had met the resurrected Jesus (e.g., Gal. 1:15–18; 1 Cor. 15:8). Third, Paul was set apart for the gospel of God. “Set apart” probably refers to Paul’s divine call from birth to be an apostle of Christ, a call that was actualized on the Damascus road (see Gal. 1:15–18). As noted earlier, the term “gospel” has its taproot in the promise of the good news of the end-time restoration of Israel (see esp. Isa. 40:9; 52:7; 61:1 [cf. Luke 4:18]; also Isa. 60:6; Joel 2:32; Nah. 1:15). Such a message of good news also included the conversion of the Gentiles (see Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–3; Rom. 9:25–27; 15:16–33). This is the gospel of “God” in Christ because

it originated in the Old Testament as the divine promise to Israel and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

**1:2** *the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets.* Commentators agree that “prophets” here refers to the whole of the Old Testament. Thus, Paul is saying that the Old Testament prophetically witnesses to the gospel of God. This can be seen already in Genesis 12:1–3, where God promises to bless Abraham’s descendants (Jews) as well as the nations of the world (Gentiles). Indeed, this is how Paul read Genesis 12:1–3 (see Rom. 4:9–12; cf. Gal. 3:6–9). And that twofold promise of God’s blessing on Jews (the restoration of Israel) and Gentiles (conversion of the nations) receives eschatological status in Isaiah 40–66. This twofold promise is spelled out in Romans 1:3–4 concerning Israel and in 1:5–7 concerning Gentiles. Jesus Christ is the one ordained by God to bring about the fulfillment of those promises.

**1:3–4** *descendant of David . . . Son of God.* First, many interpreters believe that these two verses consist of a pre-Pauline hymn or creed about Jesus because of the un-Pauline words here (“descendant/seed of David,” “Spirit of holiness”) and the parallelism inherent in the verses. The parallelism, seen more clearly in the Greek text, is as follows:

who has come from the seed of David	who was appointed <sup>1</sup> Son of God in power
according to the flesh	according to the Spirit of holiness (from the resurrection of the dead)

Second, the key to interpreting 1:3–4 is to grasp the meaning of the contrast of “flesh”

(NIV mg.) versus “Spirit of holiness.” Although the issue is debated, the best view interprets flesh/Spirit as the contrast between the present age and the age to come. To the former belongs the flesh, in this case Jesus, the human descendant of David; to the latter pertains the age to come, the age of the Spirit. Paul later will make clear that Jesus’ humanity is only in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3). Although the meaning of the phrase “Spirit of holiness” is uncertain (it appears only here in the New Testament), the Greek phrase most likely reflects a Semitic construction referring to the Holy Spirit.

Third, in light of the first two points, we may conclude that “Son” / “Son of God” in 1:3–4 forms an *inclusio*, signifying that the eternal, preexistent Son of God became human in the form of the seed of David, and, at his resurrection, the Son (Jesus Christ) was raised to a new status: the powerfully exalted, heavenly Son of God.

Fourth, the message of this christological piece is that in Jesus Christ the promised restoration of Israel is beginning to be fulfilled. Note the following four connections between 1:3–4 and the promise in the Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish literature of the restoration of Israel, laid out in table 1.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: Jesus Christ in Romans 1:3–4 and the Restoration of Israel**

Restoration of Israel	Romans 1:3–4: Jesus is the . . .
The good news of the restoration of Israel (Isa. 40–66)	“gospel” (Rom. 1:1–7)
The Davidic Messiah will restore Israel in the age to come (2 Sam. 7:12–16; Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5–6; 30:9; 33:14–18; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Pss. Sol. 17.21; 4Q174)	Davidic Messiah (compare Rom. 1:3 with Matt. 1:1–16; Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5; 22:16)

Restoration of Israel	Romans 1:3–4: Jesus is the . . .
Israel is the Son of God (Exod. 4:22–23; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1; Wis. 9:7; 18:13; Jub. 1.24–25; Pss. Sol. 17.30; 18.4)	Son of God, the true/restored Israel (compare Rom. 1:3–4 with Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13)
The future restoration of Israel is likened to the resurrection of the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:1–14)	one raised from the dead (Rom. 1:4)

**1:5** *Through him we received grace and apostleship . . . obedience that comes from faith.* Paul’s description of his calling as that of “grace and apostleship” suggests that his encounter on the Damascus road with the risen Jesus was both his conversion to Christ and his call to be the apostle to the Gentiles. We should not eliminate the former of these from the equation, as some interpreters do. The meaning of the phrase “obedience of faith” or “obedience that comes from faith” (NIV) is debated and may mean that obedience is the expression of faith (“obedience that is faith”), or that obedience results from faith. In either case, this faith/obedience refers to the Old Testament end-time promise that Gentiles will convert to the true God upon the restoration of Israel (see Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–3; Rom. 9:25–27; 15:16–33), except that Paul reverses that order in Romans 11:24–27. Indeed, the eschatological conversion of the Gentiles is the theme of 1:5–7 as a whole.

**1:6** *And you also.* Paul implies two things here. First, Gentile Christians are the dominant group over the minority Jewish Christians in the Roman congregations; hence, this is his comment to them (cf. 11:11–24). Second, they are under Paul’s apostolic authority as the premier apostle to the Gentiles.

**1:7** *To all in Rome.* Although the words “in Rome” are absent from a few ancient manuscripts, certainly they belong to the original text, providing the name of the recipients of the letter. Paul applies three Old Testament labels for Israel to the Gentile Christians at Rome: “called” (cf. Deut. 4:37; 10:15; Isa. 41:9; 48:12), “beloved” (cf. Deut. 4:37; 10:15; see also Deut. 7:8; 23:5), and “saints” (cf. Exod. 19:5–6; Lev. 19:2; Deut. 7:6). The apostle to the Gentiles thereby communicates that they are as much a part of the people of God as is Israel.

Too much should not be made of the fact that Paul does not address the Christians in Rome as “the church in Rome,” since he omits that title in the greeting of some of his other letters (Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians).

Paul offers the Christian salutation to the Roman church: “grace” and “peace.” “Grace” (*charis*) is an adaptation of the typical Greek greeting (which uses the verb *chairō*), in that Paul roots God’s grace in Christ, and “peace” is an adaptation of the Jewish greeting *shalom*, and also comes from Christ.

### Theological Insights

At least four theological insights surface in Romans 1:1–7: (1) The themes of promise and fulfillment undergird these opening verses and, for that matter, the whole letter. (2) Paul is careful to suggest that there is only one people of God: believing Jews and believing Gentiles. (3) Paul reads his Old Testament messianically (as did the other New Testament authors): Christ is its climax. (4) Later church creeds about the two natures of Jesus Christ and the Trinity are implicit here.

### Teaching the Text

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Three applications regarding the gospel for all audiences emerge from Romans 1:1–7. First, the theological orientation of the gospel is the Old Testament. Thus, the gospel is rooted in the Old Testament, fulfilled in Jesus Christ the promised Messiah, and articulated by Paul the Jewish Christian. To lose this orientation is to follow the path of the heretic Marcion, who claimed that the Bible presents two different gods, the Old Testament god of wrath and the New Testament god of love. One of my professors used to say that to be a strong Christian, one had to know the Old Testament. He was right. The Old Testament demonstrates the one God’s love and justice, while the New Testament does the same.

Second, the personal benefits of the gospel are breathtaking: peace, love, and holiness from God through Christ. Romans will fill out the details regarding these blessings, but suffice it to say here that the love of God in Christ provides sinners with peace with God when they accept by faith that Christ died for their sins and arose for their justification.

Third, the evangelistic scope of the gospel is cosmic. Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, is Savior of the world and Lord of the universe. The message of Jesus Christ knows no boundaries. It spread from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the world, thanks to the ministries of the thirteen apostles, including the apostle Paul.

### Illustrating the Text

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*The theological orientation of the gospel is the Old Testament.*

**Education:** A number of years ago, a Harvard faculty committee declared that “the

aim of a liberal education” was “to unsettle presumptions, to defamiliarize the familiar, to reveal what is going on beneath and behind appearances, to disorient young people and to help them to find ways to reorient themselves.” This implied a holistic way of living that emphasized independent thinking with a certain amount of skepticism for what has been done before, including one’s upbringing. Such a perspective is in keeping with modern individualistic culture with its focus on questioning, self-discovery, and personal satisfaction. A more traditional approach to living is discussed in a book called *On Thinking Institutionally*, by the political scientist Hugh Heclo, who emphasizes not what we want from life but what it wants from us. Heclo writes, “institutionalists see themselves as debtors who owe something, not creditors to whom something is owed.”<sup>3</sup>

***The scope of the gospel is universal, reaching out to Jews and Gentiles.***

**Hymn Text:** “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” by Edward Perronet. Particularly relevant in this text by Perronet (1726–92) are “Ye chosen seed of Israel’s race, / Ye ransomed from the fall, / Hail Him who saves you by his grace, / And crown Him Lord of all” (stanza 2); “Let every kindred, every tribe / On this terrestrial ball, / To Him all majesty ascribe” (stanza 4); and “Extol the Stem of Jesse’s Rod” (stanza 5).

Bust of Seneca, one side of a double-headed herm (first to third century AD)

***Obedience of faith means justification and sanctification should not be separated.***

**Apologetics:** *All of Grace*, by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. In this work (1894), Spurgeon illustrates the concept of obedience of faith by noting that justification without sanctification is not salvation at all. “It would call the leper clean and leave him to die of his disease; it would forgive the rebellion and allow the rebel to remain an enemy to his king. . . . It would stop the stream for a time but leave an open fountain of defilement which would sooner or later break forth with increased power.”<sup>4</sup>

**Quote:** Seneca. The Roman philosopher Seneca (ca. AD 4–65), whose life coincided with Paul’s, said that all people were looking toward salvation. What we need, he said, is “a hand let down to lift us up.”<sup>5</sup>

