

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does Paul say about himself? v. 1

Paul says that he is:

- (a) A servant of Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated *servant* could be translated as *bondservant* or *slave*.
- (b) Called to be an *apostle*. The word *apostle* comes directly from a Greek word meaning *messenger* or *one under orders*.
- (c) Set apart for the gospel of God.

2. What does he say about the gospel? vs. 1-3

- (a) It is *God's* gospel, not Paul's own message.
- (b) It was promised beforehand by God through his prophets in the Old Testament scriptures.
- (c) The gospel is the good tidings concerning God's Son.

3. What does he say about Jesus Christ? vs. 3-4

- (a) As regards his human nature, Jesus is a descendant of King David.
- (b) As regards his divine nature, he is the Son of God. The proof of his divinity, or God-nature, was his resurrection from the dead.
- (c) Jesus Christ is our Lord. The Greek word translated *Lord* means he to whom a person belongs; one's master, one's God.

4. What is Jesus Christ's relationship to Paul? vs. 4-5

- (a) Jesus Christ is Paul's Lord (see Acts 9:5).
- (b) Paul received grace and apostleship through Jesus Christ. *Grace* is favor or something freely given without respect to the worthiness of the recipient. Apostleship was part of God's grace to Paul. In sending Paul forth as an apostle God favored him with authority and responsibility that he did not deserve.

5. What is Paul's relationship to the Christians in Rome? vs. 6-10

- (a) They, like Paul, were called to belong to Christ.
- (b) Paul and his readers have a common Father and a common Lord.
- (c) He always prays for them.
- (d) He wants to visit them.

6. What are four reasons Paul wants to visit Rome. vs. 11-15

- (a) He wants to impart some spiritual gift to the Christians in Rome to build up and strengthen their faith.
- (b) He wants to receive encouragement from them. He expects his own faith to be strengthened by his visit.
- (c) He expects to reap a spiritual harvest in Rome, that is, he hopes to convert more Gentiles there to Christ.
- (d) He is obligated to all people, all nations. God commissioned him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles everywhere, including Rome.

7. What is Paul's attitude towards his task? Why does he have this attitude? vs. 14-16

- (a) He is eager and unashamed to preach in Rome.

(b) He is not hesitant, reticent, or at a loss for words when contemplating preaching in proud Rome because of the power of the gospel: the gospel is the power of God for salvation!

8. What is the theme of the gospel? vs. 16-17, see also vs. 2-3

The theme of the gospel is the righteousness of God, which is the power of God for salvation.

9. How is the gospel made known to us? v. 17

God has *revealed* the gospel. It is not something we come to know by our own observation, experience, or discussion. God made it known by his prophets, apostles, and Christ himself. We find their message in the scriptures. God inspired the scriptures such that they are a complete, trustworthy, and error-free record of his revelation. See 2 Timothy 3:15-16.

10. How do we receive the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel? v. 17

We make the gospel and all that it promises our own by *faith*, that is, by *believing* what God has said and by *trusting* in Jesus Christ, in whom is found the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel.

STUDY NOTES

1. Paul.

The author of this book was the Apostle Paul, a native of the city of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia (southern Turkey). Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, was a Jew by nationality who enjoyed the legal status of Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:26-28). He had been brought up a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:5, Philippians 3:4-6) and had studied in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Like other rabbis of his time, Paul had learned a secular trade to support himself; he was a tent maker, or possibly a leather worker (Acts 18:1-3).

Saul the Pharisee had been a fierce enemy of the followers of Christ (Acts 26:9-11). But one day, while traveling to Damascus to initiate a persecution of the Christians there, the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision (Acts 9:1-9). Saul was immediately converted to Christ; three days later he was baptized in Damascus.

Looking back on his life without Christ, Paul concluded that everything he had once taken pride in - his Hebrew ancestry, circumcision, integrity or righteousness as measured by the Law of Moses - was, spiritually speaking, garbage (Philippians 3:8-11). He no longer considered those things to be his righteousness or the basis of his acceptance by God. Instead, he trusted that God had provided a divine righteousness for him in Jesus Christ. This perfect righteousness, appropriated personally through faith in Christ, was the subject of the gospel that Paul preached for the rest of his life. It is this righteousness which Paul expounds in the Book of Romans.

When Paul appeared to Ananias, the disciple who baptized him in Damascus, the Lord declared that he had chosen Paul to preach to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Within days of his conversion Paul was preaching Christ with the same zeal he had formerly employed against the Lord, using his knowledge of the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Acts 9:19-20). From that time on Paul was engaged in controversy with his fellow Jews whenever and wherever he preached Christ.

Although we often think of Paul as the great apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:2), he had been chosen to preach Christ to all people, Jews as well as Gentiles (Acts 9:15). When Paul entered a new town he normally would preach first in the synagogue to his fellow Jews, turning to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected his message (e.g., see Acts 13:44-48). He never gave up trying to convert his own people (Acts 28:17-30). Paul loved them and was anguished over their rejection of Christ (Romans 9:1-3, 10:1).

We don't know when Paul first realized that his calling would take him ultimately to Rome. He made three evangelizing journeys before his trip to Rome; each journey took him further westward from Palestine and closer to Rome. By the middle of his third journey, if not before, Paul knew he would eventually reach the capital of the empire (Acts 19:21).

It was towards the end of his third journey, while he spent three months in Corinth, that Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome. In it he expresses his intention to journey on to Spain after visiting Rome, taking the word of Christ to the westernmost outpost of the empire.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome. According to tradition he was martyred in Rome during the reign of Nero several years later. We don't know if he ever succeeded in reaching Spain.

2. Rome in Paul's day.

The Roman Empire in Paul's day included nearly all the lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea as well as Gaul (France, Belgium, and the Netherlands), and Germany west of the Rhine River. Roman military power had made the empire secure from foreign invaders and had established peace, order, and safety - the *Pax Romana* - within its borders. Commerce between Rome and the provinces was

active and unhindered. Subject peoples of many races and languages lived in Rome itself. Many were slaves, but many also were free men and women. Rome was a cosmopolitan city, the hub of a world empire.

The Romans allowed their non-Roman subjects a good deal of autonomy in matters of local government, custom, and religion. Citizens of Rome, however, were subject to Roman law and assured of Roman justice wherever they lived. When Paul finally traveled to Rome, it was as a prisoner who had been accused of crime by Jewish officials in Palestine and who had exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal directly to Caesar (Acts 25:9-12). Although some Roman officials may have been corrupt (Acts 24:24-27), and the protection of Roman law extended only to Roman citizens, on the whole Rome took pains to ensure justice for all. Rome's legal system is still the basis of jurisprudence in many Western European nations today.

In contrast to Roman law, Roman morality and religion were decaying. Educated Romans did not believe in the old gods anymore, even though many maintained the traditional norms and ceremonies of their fathers. Some Romans had turned from their traditional religion to religions that had entered from the East. By Paul's time the so-called *mystery religions* of Greek origin had established a foothold in Rome. The cult of Isis and Osiris had been introduced from Egypt, and the worship of Mithras had found its way to Rome from Persia. The Jews were also engaged in missionary activity (Matthew 25:15), and a few Romans had turned to Judaism (Luke 7:5; Acts 10:1-2).

In the time of the Roman republic, more than two hundred years earlier, Romans had been proud of their moral virtues. They had prized chastity, bravery, self-sacrifice, simplicity, and charitable treatment of the vanquished. But by Paul's day the ancient virtues had been replaced in practice by sexual vice, infidelity, personal ambition and selfishness, overindulgence, and the pursuit of luxury. Roman morals had become corrupt; the Romans themselves bewailed the fact. Very likely those Romans who had converted to Judaism had been attracted by the worship of one holy God and the high moral code of the Law of Moses.

Consider the parallels between the Roman Empire of Paul's day and America today: decades of political stability, flourishing world trade, an emphasis on justice for all (at least all citizens), a decline of traditional religion and an invasion of eastern religions, moral corruption - and the hunger of a few for spiritual reality. We need Paul's gospel now as much as Rome did then.

3. The church in Rome.

The Book of Acts is silent regarding the origins of the church in Rome. It records instances in which the gospel made a notable advance into a new ethnic group or geographical region through the ministry of the apostles. It does not do so in the case of Rome. This suggests that the church in Rome may have grown out of the spontaneous activity of ordinary Christians rather than out of organized missionary activity. Jews, Greeks, and others who had been converted in the provinces and had taken up residence in Rome, natives of Rome who had been converted while traveling in the eastern Mediterranean, and local converts of such believers would have gathered together for prayer, teaching, mutual comfort and exhortation, and the breaking of bread as did Christians elsewhere (Acts 2:46-47).

Whatever its origin, the church in Rome was well established by the time Paul wrote Romans (1:8). He did not write his letter primarily to convert its recipients to Christ, but rather to deepen their understanding of the faith. Moreover, he expected that they had grown in the grace of God to the point where they would strengthen his own faith as well (1:11-12). As we study Romans we find that Paul takes certain basic truths of the faith as givens - the trinitarian nature of God, historical facts of Jesus' life and death, the contents of the Old Testament. He assumes the Romans know these and does not expound them at length. He endeavors instead to show all aspects of the truth that "the just shall live by faith" (1:17).

The church in Rome contained believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Paul explicitly declares some Christians in Rome to be Gentiles (1:23). He also refers to some as brothers who know the law, that is, the Law of Moses. (7:1); most likely they are Jewish Christians. Priscilla and Aquila, whom he greets by name (16:3) were Jews (Acts 18:2). The presence of both Jewish and Gentile believers in the church in Rome is reflected in Paul's emphasis that both Jews and Gentiles are guilty sinners before God (3:9-23), that there is but one God with one way of salvation for all people (3:29-30, 4:16-17), and that God's eternal plan involves both Jews and Gentiles (11:11-32).

4. The human and divine natures of Jesus.

Paul refers briefly to the human and divine natures of Jesus in 1:3-4. He does not expound on the two natures of Christ at length because he is writing to believers who know these truths. Nevertheless, we do well to review these truths at the beginning of our study because they constitute part of the unexpressed background of Romans.

As far as his human ancestry is concerned, Jesus was a descendant of King David. This fact would have been significant to Jews. God had promised David, the second and greatest king of Israel, that one of his descendants would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. God would love David's son (descendant) so much that he would be his Father forever and the king would be his Son (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2). Jews looked forward to the coming of this *Messiah* (*Christos* in the Greek, i.e., Christ). Anyone who claimed to be the Christ would have to be a descendant of David. Jesus met the human qualification.

Jesus was also the divine Son of God. The term *Son of God* meant more than the Jews realized when they read prophecies regarding the Messiah as God's Son. They believed God was speaking metaphorically or figuratively in such passages. In fact, he was speaking literally: the Christ is divine as well as human. He is the eternal Son, the second person in the triune Godhead. The Jewish leaders became enraged when Jesus asserted his divine nature; they believed he was guilty of blasphemy (John 2:19-22). But the resurrection was a powerful proof of Jesus' deity (v. 4). Jesus had predicted his resurrection as a witness that he was who he claimed to be, the Christ, the divine Son of the Father (John 2:19-22).

By virtue of both his descent from David and his deity, Jesus was Lord. The Greek word *kurios*, which means *lord*, had divine implications as well as secular meaning in the Roman world of Paul's day (1 Corinthians 8:5-6). Christians who were ordered to swear allegiance to Caesar as Lord knew that more was involved than acknowledging the political lordship of Caesar. Many Christians refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord because they had only one divine Lord, Jesus Christ. Their refusal brought waves of official persecution on believers for the first two centuries of the Christian era.

5. The righteousness of God.

Verse 17 states the theme of Romans: the righteousness of God. *The righteousness of God* refers to the righteousness God provides in Christ for sinful humankind. It also refers to the righteousness of God's character and actions. Paul proclaims the good news that God has provided a righteousness for us who have none of our own, either by virtue of our nature or our good deeds. He also defends the justice of God's dealings with humankind and displays the righteousness of God's character.

In Romans the English words *righteousness* and *justice* are translations of the same Greek word. Similarly, the English words *righteous* and *just* are translations of a single Greek word. Sometimes a passage can be understood better by substituting *just* for *righteous* (or vice versa), or by substituting *justice* for *righteousness*.

6. "by faith to faith" (1:17).

The Greek of verse 17 is more ambiguous than the English of the ESV, and translators and

commentators have understood this phrase in several ways.

The Greek word translated *faith* can also mean *faithfulness*. Thus 1:17 could be translated to indicate that God, in faithfulness to his covenant promise, has revealed a righteousness to men, to be received by faith. We shall see that Paul is very zealous to defend the faithfulness of God in Romans (e.g., see 3:3, 11:1, 11:29).

Alternatively, the verse could mean that the Christian life begins when a sinner puts his faith in Christ, and then continues to live a life of faith and trust in Christ as long as he lives.

Either interpretation expresses biblical truth. Nevertheless, the interpretation adopted by the ESV (and nearly all other English translations) probably should be preferred here on the strength of its agreement with the phrase that follows, “the righteous shall live by faith,” a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4. That phrase has a double meaning. The Greek word order is “the righteous by faith shall live.” The words *by faith* can be taken with the words that precede them to indicate that those who are righteous by faith shall gain life. Alternatively, *by faith* can be taken by the words that follow to indicate that those who are righteous live their lives by faith or trust in God. Christian faith has both a beginning aspect and a continuing one. Our righteousness in Christ is truly “by faith to faith” in both senses.