

ROMANS
FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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J.K. MCKEE



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ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
Ara: Aramaic	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Baoli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	KJV: King James Version
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	LXX: Septuagint
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	m. Mishnah
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	MT: Masoretic Text
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIV: New International Version (1984)
GNT: Greek New Testament	NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
Heb: Hebrew	NT: New Testament
	orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world

OT: Old Testament
PME: Practical Messianic Edition of the Apostolic
Scriptures
PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New
Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
TLV: Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New
Covenant (2011)

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New
Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New
Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
Yid: Yiddish
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

PROLOGUE

I have been *extremely eager* to conduct a Messianic examination of Paul’s letter to the Romans, especially since finishing my M.A. coursework in Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (2008). While in seminary, I took not one, but two, exegesis classes on Romans.ⁱ There are many valuable proposals being made in contemporary Romans scholarship, which today’s Messianic people are not likely to have heard about. More than anything else, though, I think that each person in today’s Messianic movement—Jewish or non-Jewish—is likely to be aware of the fact that much of what Paul’s letter to the Romans communicated, to its ancient audience, is quite relevant for the changing contours and unique dynamics of our own faith community. *Unlike your typical Christian reader of Romans, this letter bears some rather timely importance for a Messianic reader, as it actually parallels many of the on-the-ground circumstances and issues that we are presently facing and wrestling through.*

This study of Romans represents a significant rite of passage for the ministry of Outreach Israel. First of all, this study has the distinction of being the first full Wednesday Night Bible Study being entirely conducted in North Texas, following our family and ministry move in December 2012.ⁱⁱ Secondly, and I think more importantly, is that *Romans for the Practical Messianic* represents the first of three studies which will complete my examination of the Pauline Epistles as commentaries, as *Practical Messianic* commentaries on Galatians through 1&2 Timothy and Titus have already been completed. The amount of work leading up to this point has certainly been rather massive—between previous commentaries and other publications—as previous projects have given me the ability to already work through many of the difficult-to-understand vignettes of Paul’s letter to the Romans, as well as collect my thoughts and notes on other Romans passages.

The Epistle to the Romans widely represents the Apostle Paul’s presentation of the good news of salvation, to his own Jewish people and those of the nations, set against a backdrop of the circumstances that many in the early Body of Messiah were facing. Romans 1:16 is undeniably a major theme of not only his letter, but also the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Messianic movement: “For I am not ashamed of the Good News, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who trusts—to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (TLV). While Romans explains the many dynamics of this good news, in the theological terms for Paul’s ancient audience to understand—the venerable Apostle was not averse to issuing some corrective instruction to these people. Salvation history has a definite trajectory built into it—that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26)—something which involves a massive salvation of Paul’s own Jewish people and the consummation of the Messianic Kingdom, and which we are still obviously waiting for today. Yet, getting to this point decisively means that each one of God’s people must learn how to “love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor” (12:10, NRSV). Paul does have to sort out many ancient prejudices that Jews, Greeks, and Romans had for one another—even in the Body of Messiah. We have prejudices today, even as Messianic Believers, which the Lord needs us to remove from ourselves.

Today’s Messianic people, in my experience as a teacher and a writer, tend to have a great appreciation for Romans—but frequently because of the classic “salvation verses” which are quite quotable. “[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23); “having now been justified by His blood” (5:9); “...grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Yeshua the Messiah our Lord” (5:21)—are among

ⁱ One with Prof. Woody Anderson (Spring 2007), and another with Prof. Jim Miller (Fall 2008).

ⁱⁱ The first Messianic Apologetics book entirely composed in North Texas was *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*, released in February 2013.

While our Wednesday Night Bible Study podcasts examined the Epistle of James from January 2013-June 2013, this was actually a revisit of a study first conducted from August 2005-November 2005 in Central Florida.

the many spiritually uplifting statements which we have all heard and have been encouraged by. However, today's Messianic people do struggle with a number of Romans passages. We need a better handle on Romans 10:4, which in most Bibles reads, "For Christ is the end of the law..." (NASU). Romans 7:4 is commonly skipped over, "you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Messiah." There are details in Romans chs. 9-11 which need to be probed a bit more deeply, and no longer skipped over. We tend to just not know what to do with the whole scene of Romans ch. 14, per the issue of eating and sacred days. Paul's letter to the Romans has various passages which have been traditionally interpreted as anti-Torah, and which require further attention on the part of Messianic Believers.

While there have been many good studies conducted on Paul's letter to the Romans by Messianic congregational and fellowship leaders, and even a few commentaries released,ⁱⁱⁱ *Romans for the Practical Messianic* is a commentary that has been released decisively for the 2010s. Much has happened in the broad Messianic movement, in just the past five years or so (2009-2014), both theologically and spiritually, which an examination of Romans will provide many answers and solutions for—even if we might be at some pains, or even a loss of sorts, to implement them! Many of you who have already had some answers on Paul's perspective of "works of law," "circumcision," "justification," and Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Body of Messiah from my preceding volume *Galatians for the Practical Messianic* (which some of you may need to read first), will doubtlessly appreciate *Romans for the Practical Messianic*. Just like Galatians, there are various places in Romans where we will need to reorient our approach from thinking that the Apostle Paul is writing directly to modern people, as we place ourselves back into considering his perspective in composing this letter, understanding what its original recipients were being told, and then proceed to deduce a proper application for our own circumstances in the Twenty-First Century.

This resource has been produced for far more reasons than just to "plug up" a few holes in our Messianic boat, providing some more detailed analyses of the common places where Messianic Believers struggle (i.e., chs. 7, 9-11, 14). *Romans for the Practical Messianic* has been produced to provide some more information on various passages and issues, which others in our faith community have not addressed in sufficient detail, have avoided, or have glossed over without realizing it. Most especially, though, this commentary has been produced to issue some key admonitions about our attitudes and spirituality, as Paul's letter to the Romans has some unique instructions and corrections to be received by Twenty-First Century Messianic Believers. As I said in the closing sentence to the entry for Romans in my workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, "**In the future, Messianic understanding and application of Paul's letter to the Romans will surely blossom, and bring with it some much needed clarity and insight to our emerging faith community.**"^{iv} This commentary has been surely produced with this intention in mind!

I present *Romans for the Practical Messianic* to you, the Messianic reader, with the major intention being "that the requirement of the *Torah* might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4, TLV). May we each learn important lessons from Romans, which many have rightly thought is the most influential letter ever written in human history.

J.K. McKee
Editor, *Messianic Apologetics*

ⁱⁱⁱ Among these notably include Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Chapters 1-8* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2005); *Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Chapters 9-16* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007).

^{iv} J.K. McKee, *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic* (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2007/2012), 101.

INTRODUCTION

Among the scope of texts found within the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, the Epistle to the Romans¹ (Grk. *Pros Rōmaious*, ΠΡΟΣ ΡΩΜΑΙΟΥΣ), undeniably stands out as being quite significant. Romans is the longest, single sustained piece of writing that originates from the Apostle Paul, and as such is listed as the first among the Pauline corpus. While there are certainly words of admonishment, correction, and even rebuke encountered in Romans, there is also a significant eloquence found from Paul's personal faith in Israel's Messiah, his philosophy of ministry, and his deeply held convictions about God and His Creation. Many people, both religious and not, have had to consider the significant impact that the Epistle to the Romans has had on Western civilization—probably in more ways than Paul himself ever intended.

Before delving into Paul's letter to the Roman Believers, have any of us ever stepped back a few paces, and really wondered what we are preparing to get ourselves into? Having taken multiple seminary classes on Romans, and certainly having to reflect on the content of Paul's letter throughout my own ministry experiences over a number of years, it is no understatement to recognize that: **Romans is the most influential letter ever written in history.** Romans has influenced historical Christianity and its theology to be sure, but Romans has also, in turn, influenced the views of those in civil law and politics. How Europeans of the Middle Ages and into the Protestant Reformation approached the authority of God, the placement of man in God's Creation, the role of various human authorities, and God's intended purpose for people—was certainly influenced by various passages in the Epistle to the Romans. Whether various historic figures in religious or political leadership properly applied Paul's words or not, that Romans has had an influence on much of our Western way of life, is a fact that has to be recognized.

If there is one good thing that many modern Biblical interpreters do try to be conscious of, it is that we have to interpret a text like the Epistle to the Romans, as best as we can, *first* from the perspective of its original recipients—and *then* try to extrapolate a fair degree of modern application for our contemporary circumstances. In doing this, modern Believers desiring to be true to God's Word are going to find some significant words of relevance for Twenty-First Century life. Lamentably, human beings going after false gods and conducting in immoral sexual behavior—the main thrust of Romans ch. 1—has not changed too much in two millennia. Then again, there are passages of Paul's letter, like Romans chs. 9-11 or ch. 14, which do not bear too much significance for your average evangelical Christian reader—but bear some heightened importance for a Messianic reader when their First Century circumstances are considered.

The main intent of the Epistle to the Romans, aside from its many discussions on God as Creator, Yeshua (Jesus) as Savior, and the need for human beings to be redeemed from their sins—is that the Apostle Paul was on his way to Rome (1:11-13). *I am Paul, and this is what I am all about*, is an obvious component of the letter, which too many miss. While the Roman Believers knew of Paul and Paul knew of them, and Paul was even personally acquainted with certain individual Roman Believers—on the whole Paul had not met the Romans in person. Paul's ministry in declaring the good news was beginning to shift from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Western Mediterranean (15:19, 22-24), with his eyes specifically set on Spain (15:24). Paul needed a base of support, similar to how Antioch or Ephesus had served him in the past, and the Roman Messiah followers—in the capital of the Empire no less—were an obvious group of people from which to

¹ Please note that in spite of the common reference to Romans as “the Book of Romans,” I am going to purposefully refer to the text as either the Epistle to the Romans or Paul's letter to the Romans, and not use this reference. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

solicit help. Romans is, to a wide degree, a letter of “self promotion,” but with the specific intent of laying forth the significance of the good news for Paul, to a broad audience of Jews, Greeks, and Romans. As one of the most classic verses of the letter declares, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16). Paul makes the salvation message one that is readily available to all members of the human race, because all have been subject to the common curse of sin.

Fortunately, unlike some of Paul’s other letters, because of the intention of Paul needing to *explain himself more fully*, to an audience with whom he was not too acquainted, this forced him to elaborate in much greater detail on topics of theological gravity. Unlike his preceding Epistle to the Galatians, to which Romans is often compared, Romans was not issued to help regulate a dire circumstance that had just erupted and needed immediate help. The Roman Believers had their issues, to be sure, but Paul’s letter to them demonstrates a much calmer atmosphere, and the venue permitted him the ability to wax greatly on who he was as a Jewish Believer with distinct ministry abilities to go out to the nations (1:5; 11:13). Romans has, many times, been often appealed to by examiners of Galatians to “balance out,” as it were, various statements made by Paul in Galatians, where he appears to be a bit emotional, and where the same subject matter is being discussed. There are remarks made by Paul in Romans, which do further explain Paul’s views in Galatians.

All of us who approach the Epistle to the Romans will be influenced, in some degree, by how this letter has been interpreted and applied throughout Christian history—and this is not necessarily a bad thing. As *ABD* summaries, “It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the Epistle to the Romans. Coming at a crucial point in the career of the apostle Paul, Romans represents the longest extant Pauline epistle and the most complete exposition of the Pauline gospel. Moreover, this lengthy epistle currently occupies a prominent place in the canon of the NT and has had a profound and lasting impact on the Christian faith. It is little wonder, then, that Romans has received more scholarly attention than any other Pauline epistle.”² Romans 1:17, quoting Habakkuk 2:4, may be legitimately recognized to have helped start the Protestant Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, via some of the work of Martin Luther. And, the Epistle to the Romans has various streams of interpretation along with it, especially present within the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition, as Paul’s letter doubtlessly contains important theology to be probed and reflected upon by Believers. Yet the orientation of any examiner of Romans is key: **Is Romans principally a theological treatise, or a letter to ancient Believers?** An emphasis on the latter is becoming more and more prominent in contemporary Romans’ studies. Douglas J. Moo properly asserts,

“[L]ike every book in the NT, Romans is rooted in history. It is not a systematic theology but a letter, written in specific circumstances and with specific purposes. The message of Romans is, indeed, timeless; but to understand its message aright, we must appreciate the specific context out of which Romans was written.”³

There are important themes in Paul’s letter to the Romans, which various readers may consider to be timeless. In Romans we encounter discussions on justification (3:20-26), salvation (1:16; 5:9-10; 8:24), reconciliation (5:10-11), atonement (3:25), freedom (6:20; 7:3; 8:1-2), sanctification (1:7; 6:22; 15:16), transformation (12:2), new life in Messiah (6:4-5, 23; 8:29), glorification (8:18, 21, 30), the good news or gospel (1:16), and also human sin (1:18-3:20). There are some details regarding these themes, as we will discover, which are debated per some of Romans First Century circumstances. First Century themes regarding Romans do involve the issue of Israel (chs. 9-11), and Believers having to function in a pagan world (12:1-15:13).⁴

There are sections of Romans which require careful attention to detail, and an evaluation of what Paul’s intent was. Doing this, it is very easy to get lost in much of the discussion of Romans, at the expense of the text of Romans itself. N.T. Wright, perhaps the most influential New Testament theologian of our generation, notes early in the Introduction to his Romans commentary, “anyone who claimed to have read all the commentaries

² Charles D. Myers, Jr., “Romans, Epistle to the,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:816.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 1.

⁴ These references are largely taken from John Reumann, “Romans,” in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1277.

(let alone all the other secondary literature) on Romans would be lying. Likewise, anyone who tried to refer to it all, let alone enter into debate with it all, would produce an unreadable book.”⁵ It is important that we be aware of what various historical figures and contemporary examiners of Romans have said for sure—but Paul’s letter, albeit sixteen chapters, was still going to have arrived in Rome, and would have been audibly read to fellowships of Believers, perhaps within a scope of an hour to ninety minutes to two hours.

While many useful perspectives and thoughts have been interjected over the centuries regarding Romans—**we have to principally deal with the text of Romans**—and secondarily consider proposals offered by theologians and commentators. Romans was certainly employed by Christian figures such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley—and generally by every generation throughout Christian history,⁶ especially since the Protestant Reformation.⁷ Where necessary, we will engage with some views of Romans passages where there are key historical precedents and important streams of thought, which need to be recognized. At the same time, while some of these will be beneficial to consider—some of these will also prove to be underdeveloped or lacking additional information.

A significant new reformation, so to speak, has not only been in process in our day via the arrival of the modern Messianic movement, a significant number of Jewish people coming to faith in Israel’s Messiah, and non-Jewish Believers embracing their Hebraic Roots in a very tangible way—but also via theological trends which are taking better care to approach and interpret the Apostle Paul for who he was as a First Century Jew. The Epistle to the Romans plays an important part in this. James D.G. Dunn makes the important points in the Introduction to his Romans commentary:

“From his Pharisaic training no doubt came Paul’s tremendous grasp of the Scriptures, not only the Torah, but also the prophets and the writings, which is put to such extensive use in his letter. He also shows knowledge of Jewish writings which circulated in the diaspora without attaining the status of ‘scripture’...From his Pharisaic training too no doubt came his skill as an exegete, with not a few hermeneutical ‘tricks of the trade’ evident in such passages as chaps. 4 and 5.

“The basic point for our understanding of the letter, however, is that his Jewish and Pharisaic background became and remained an integral part of Paul. His self-identity as a Jew and his concern with the heritage of his people provide one side of the dialogue which continues throughout the whole letter, the warp which runs back and forward throughout the whole pattern.”⁸

Considering Paul’s Jewish background, the intertextual references he makes to the Tanach, various extra-Biblical references that he also makes, and considering his personal pain over the widescale Jewish rejection of Yeshua (9:1-3)—are obviously important things for Messianic readers of Romans. And, each of us has the responsibility, in considering key details, to be adequately admonished by them for our individual and corporate Messianic spirituality.

A reader of Romans can never go wrong with understanding it from the viewpoint of Paul trying to serve the Body of Messiah, implementing the gospel in communities that are to be transformed by His love (1:1). An examiner of Paul’s letter on the whole, though, enters into his mind, his psyche, at a very important part of his ministry service in the First Century. While we need not get bogged down or overloaded with what others have said about Paul—a fair examination of Romans cannot be hurried, either. Wright ably directs us,

“It is no good picking out a few favorite lines from Romans and hoping from them to understand the whole book. One might as well try to get the feel of a Beethoven symphony by humming over half a dozen bars from different movements. Romans is, indeed, a symphonic composition: Themes are stated and developed (often in counterpoint with each other), recapitulated in different keys, anticipated in previous movements and echoed in subsequent ones.”⁹

⁵ N.T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:395.

⁶ Cf. C.E.B. Cranfield, *International Critical Commentary: Romans 1-8* (London: T&T Clark, 1975), pp 30-44.

⁷ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), pp 20-24.

⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans*, Vol. 38a. (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), pp xl-xli.

⁹ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:396.

Some of you only know Romans from various quotable verses here and there, and others of you only know Romans from various theological frameworks which have been super-imposed onto the letter. Letting Paul speak for himself, to this ancient group of Messiah followers—and hence evaluating what he might say to our still-developing and maturing Messianic faith community—will be most critical for each of us in the present season.

PAUL AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE ROMANS

Unlike contemporary examination in Biblical Studies of some of the other letters designated to have originated from the Apostle Paul,¹⁰ Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Romans has never been questioned. All ancient authorities are agreed that the Apostle Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans, as there were no disputes in early Christian history made about the authorship of this letter. The affirmation of genuine Pauline authorship continues until today, even among liberal scholars, where Romans is upheld as the main authentic letter from the Apostle, by which all other claimed Pauline writings must be compared. A liberal resource like *IDB* notably describes how, “The authenticity of the letter is not seriously questioned and is not, in fact, open to question. The rejection of Romans involves the rejection of all the Pauline letters, for there is no other letter with any greater claim to authenticity which could serve as a standard of comparison.”¹¹

It is widely recognized, by about all contemporary expositors of Romans, that the purpose for Paul writing this letter was to prepare the Roman Believers for a personal visit from him. Paul’s work in the East had largely been accomplished, and now he was planning to expand outward toward the West. Just as cities like Antioch and Ephesus had served as staging areas for Paul and his associates to use for evangelizing the East, Paul was planning to use Rome as a hub for evangelizing the West, as he indicated a desire to travel to Spain (1:10-15; 15:22-29).¹² We do know that from the close of the Book of Acts that Paul would make it to the city of Rome (Acts 28:11-31). The tenor of the various greetings issued to people by Paul in ch. 16, who were among the Roman Believers, is that he was personally acquainted with various leaders as individuals, but he was not personally acquainted with the different fellowship groups, even though he had heard about some of their challenges. We get the impression that many of the individuals Paul knew he either encountered in person in his travels, and/or he had some level of personal correspondence with them at one point in his ministry service.

WHERE WAS PAUL WHEN HE WROTE THIS LETTER?

The most significant pieces of information present about the location of composition, within Paul’s letter to the Romans, appear when he stated how Phoebe will be the courier taking the letter to the Romans, and how she is “a deacon of the [assembly] at Cenchreae” (16:1, NRSV). Also stated by Paul is how recently “Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (15:26). Cenchrea was the main port for the city of Corinth, and so most place the composition of Romans sometime during Paul’s stay in Corinth or Achaia (Acts 20:2-3). Given the tone of Romans ch. 1, and its strong remarks made about idolatry and homosexuality, a location within **the Corinthian metropolitan area** for Romans’ composition would seem rather logical. Conservatives and liberals alike are in widespread agreement that the vicinity of Corinth was the location where Romans was written.

¹⁰ The presumed Deutero-Pauline letters, where various liberal scholars may conclude that these materials were written in the name of Paul sometime after his death, include: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus.

The author ascribes to Pauline authorship of all of his attributed letters, as for the *Practical Messianic* commentaries have already been composed on the so-called Deutero-Pauline letters.

¹¹ F.W. Beare, “Romans, Letter to the,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4:112; cf. Myers, “Romans, Epistle to the,” in *ABD*, 5:816.

¹² Cf. Beare, “Romans, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 4:114-115; D.G. Miller, “Romans, Epistle to,” in *ISBE*, 4:223; J.D.G. Dunn, “Romans, Letter to the,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), pp 839-840; D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp 393-394.

Among those who would be present in Corinth are noted by Paul at the close of his letter: “Gaius, host to me and to the whole [assembly], greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you” (16:23). Gaius is one of two people whom Paul saw immersed during his time in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14). Gaius as host to Paul, if he had any personal wherewithal, could also have been the one who hired Tertius as Paul’s scribe in composing the letter to the Romans (16:22). (Of course, Tertius as a fellow Believer could just as well have donated of his time and resources to assist Paul.) It has been deduced, perhaps, that an epistle the length of Romans, if composed by a professional scribe of antiquity, could have cost 20.68 denarii, the equivalent of around \$2275 in present U.S. currency.¹³

WHEN DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER?

Based on internal evidence in Romans, and external evidence from Acts and ancient history, examiners tend to be in broad agreement that 56-58 C.E. is the general timeframe for the composition of the Epistle to the Romans. This dating is widely associated with the appointment of Gallio, proconsul of Corinth (51-52/52-53 C.E.), Paul being tried by him at Corinth (Acts 18:12), followed by Paul’s stay in Corinth (Acts 18:18), and then much later Paul’s subsequent three month stay in Greece (Acts 20:2). This allows examiners to date the composition of Romans to the mid-to-late 50s C.E., during Paul’s Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-20:6). The composition of Romans notably also took place during the closing period of Paul’s collection mission for the Jerusalem Believers (15:25-27), which was intended to not only help the poor Jewish Believers in Judea, but also lessen some of the tensions that existed between the relatively conservative Judean Jewish Believers, and the less-conservative Jewish and non-Jewish Believers out in the Mediterranean.

The dating of the composition of Romans tends to also be widely associated with the Edict of Claudius (Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4), itself dated to 49 C.E., which saw to it that all of the Jews were ejected from the city of Rome. The composition of Romans is possibly also connected to the issue of taxation during the reign of Nero (Tacitus *Annals* 13),¹⁴ which might very well be what is addressed in ch. 13 per obedience to the government. The letter to the Romans was composed about seven years or so before Nero’s burning of the city (Tacitus *Annals* 15.44), which was blamed on the residents known as “Christians.”

WHO WAS THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF THIS LETTER?

The Epistle to the Romans is specifically addressed “to all who are beloved of God in Rome” (1:7). Rome was the capital of the Empire, and was a highly diverse city of people.¹⁵ There are debates among scholars about First Century Rome’s total population,¹⁶ as it has been estimated anywhere from around 500,000 to one million, with Rome’s Jewish community numbering somewhere around 50,000. Grant R. Osborne actually draws the conclusion of how, “Rome had a sizeable population of Jews, estimated at forty to fifty thousand...almost the size of Jerusalem itself!”¹⁷ making it a highly important community to reach with the good news of Israel’s Messiah. The city of Rome also had a very large Greek-speaking population.¹⁸

Traditionally in Christian history, the assembly at Rome was believed to have been founded by Peter and Paul (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.1.2),¹⁹ although whether these two directly founded a community of Messiah followers—as opposed to having influenced it significantly—is debated. The good news of Yeshua arrived in the synagogues of Rome most probably via the influence of Jews who had been present at the *Shavuot*/Pentecost in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit had been poured out (Acts 2:10-11), and concurrent with this the dynamic preaching of the Apostle Peter (Acts 2:14-36) may be said to have helped the spiritual fervor

¹³ Craig S. Keener, *New Covenant Commentary Series: Romans* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 1.

¹⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 36a:l.iii.

¹⁵ A useful summary of the city of Rome is seen in T.R. Schreiner, “The Letter of Paul to the Romans,” in Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), pp 2153-2154.

¹⁶ James R. Edwards, *New International Biblical Commentary: Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), pp 7-8.

¹⁷ Osborne, Grant R. *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 15.

¹⁸ Beare, “Romans, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 4:114.

¹⁹ “...while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church...” (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.1.2; [BibleWorks 9.0: Ante-Nicene Fathers](#). MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM).

of various Roman Jews in seeing the gospel declared to their companions in the city upon their return home. This message of salvation would have been accepted by many of the Roman Jews, as well as many proselytes and God-fearers associated with the Roman Jewish community.

Early in the reign of Claudius Caesar, it is reported how he severely limited public meetings among the Jews of Rome: "As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings" (*Cassius Dio Roman History* 60.6.6).²⁰ The Jews were later ejected from the city of Rome by the Edict of Claudius, issued in 49 C.E., which is a piece of historical data of significant interest to readers of both the Book of Acts and the Epistle to the Romans, for obvious reasons: "**Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city**" (Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4).²¹

Paul's colleagues Aquila and Priscilla were two Jewish Believers whom Paul met in Corinth, "because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome" (Acts 18:2). It is widely recognized how the Edict of Claudius was issued because the good news of the Messiah or the Christ had hit the Jewish synagogues of Rome, and had caused a significant disruption in the city. D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo describe in their *Introduction to the New Testament*, "It is generally agreed that 'Chrestus' is a corruption of the Greek Χριστός (*Christos*, 'Christ') and that Suetonius's remark refers to violent debates within the Jewish community in Rome over the claims of Jesus to be the Christ."²² They go on to further summarize a fairly standard background setting for the Epistle to the Romans, which is widely agreed upon by both conservative and liberal Christian examiners:

"Since the Romans at this point would not have distinguished Jews from Jewish Christians, both would have been affected by Claudius's expulsion. But as with similar expulsions on other occasions, the edict probably did not stay in force for long; and less than a decade later, we find the Jews Aquila and Priscilla back in Rome (Rom. 16:3). During its enforcement, however, the edict must have had a profound impact on the church in Rome. In the absence of Jewish Christians, those Gentiles who had been attracted to Christianity would have taken over the church, and Jewish Christians who then returned would probably be in a minority and perhaps be viewed with some condescension by the now-dominant Gentile wing."²³

When the Jews were expelled from the city of Rome, the Jewish Believers were expelled with them—as the Romans only saw troublemakers, not making any distinction. This would have left the fellowships or groups of Messiah followers left behind as being (almost) exclusively non-Jewish, originally having come from among various proselytes or God-fearers who had remained, and then new Believers entering in from Rome's metropolitan sectors. Following Claudius' death in 54 C.E., integration problems began when the Jewish Believers started returning to Rome, presumably expecting things to return to the way they had been. The now (wide) majority non-Jewish community of Believers had some various problems arise, and it is safe to say that a variety of Ancient Roman, fiercely negative stereotypes of Jewish people and Judaism, were things that served as a factor in the negative attitudes that Paul corrected in his letter. The main bulk of these prejudices, obviously interspersed with some misinformation, are stated by the historian Tacitus:

²⁰ Cassius Dio: *Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary (1914-1927). Accessible online at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/.

²¹ Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 202.

²² Carson and Moo, 395.

²³ *Ibid.*, 396.

Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp 373-387 is one examiner who notably rejects the Edict of Claudius proposition, and instead only thinks that the "Chrestus" mentioned by Suetonius is some other religious figure, unrelated to Yeshua of Nazareth being declared as the Messiah or Christ; Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp 12-13 finds Nanos to be unconvincing on this.

“In order to secure the allegiance of his people in the future, Moses prescribed for them a novel religion quite different from those of the rest of mankind. Among the Jews all things are profane that we hold sacred; on the other hand they regard as permissible what seems to us immoral. In the innermost part of the Temple, they consecrated an image of the animal which had delivered them from their wandering and thirst, choosing a ram as beast of sacrifice to demonstrate, it seems, their contempt for Hammon. The bull is also offered up, because the Egyptians worship it as Apis. They avoid eating pork in memory of their tribulations, as they themselves were once infected with the disease to which this creature is subject. They still fast frequently as an admission of the hunger they once endured so long, and to symbolize their hurried meal the bread eaten by the Jews is unleavened. We are told that the seventh day was set aside for rest because this marked the end of their toils. In course of time the seductions of idleness made them devote every seventh year to indolence as well. Others say that this is a mark of respect to Saturn, either because they owe the basic principles of their religion to the Idaeii, who, we are told, were expelled in the company of Saturn and became the founders of the Jewish race, or because, among the seven stars that rule mankind, the one that describes the highest orbit and exerts the greatest influence is Saturn. A further argument is that most of the heavenly bodies complete their path and revolutions in the multiples of seven.

“Whatever their origin, these observances are sanctioned by their antiquity. The other practices of the Jews are sinister and revolting, and have entrenched themselves by their very wickedness. Wretches of the most abandoned kind who had no use for the religion of their fathers took to contributing dues and free-will offerings to swell the Jewish exchequer; and other reasons for their increasing wealth may be found in their stubborn loyalty and ready benevolence towards brother Jews. But the rest of the world they confront with the hatred reserved for enemies. They will not feed or intermarry with gentiles. Though a most lascivious people, the Jews avoid sexual intercourse with women of alien race. Among themselves nothing is barred. They have introduced the practice of circumcision to show that they are different from others. Proselytes in Jewry adopt the same practices, and the very first lesson they learn is to despise the gods, shed all feelings of patriotism, and consider parents, children and brothers as readily expendable. However, the Jews see to it that their numbers increase. It is a deadly sin to kill a born or unborn child, and they think that eternal life is granted to those who die in battle or execution—hence their eagerness to have children, and their contempt for death. Rather than cremate their dead, they prefer to bury them in imitation of the Egyptian fashion, and they have the same concern and beliefs about the world below. But their conception of heavenly beings is quite different. The Egyptians worship a variety of animals and half-human, half-bestial forms, whereas the Jewish religion is a purely spiritual monotheism. They hold it to be impious to make idols of perishable materials in the likeness of man: for them, the Most High and Eternal cannot be portrayed by human hands and will never pass away. For this reason they erect no images in their cities, still less in their temple. Their kings are not so flattered, the Roman emperors not so honoured. However, their priests used to perform their chants to the flute and drums, crowned with ivy, and a golden vine was discovered in the Temple; and this has led some to imagine that the god thus worshipped was the Prince Liber, the conqueror of the East. But the two cults are diametrically opposed. Liber founded a festive and happy cult: the Jewish belief is paradoxical and degraded” (Tacitus *The Histories* 5.4-5).²⁴

This letter was issued “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people” (1:7, NIV), and so there is no doubting that Romans was written to people in Rome who have acknowledged Israel’s God and His Messiah. There can, however, be some discussion about the internal audience of the Epistle to the Romans. Was the Epistle to the Romans *only written* to non-Jewish Believers, or was the Epistle to the Romans written to a *mixed community* of both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers?

It is to be rightly recognized how there are some places within Romans that are directed to Jewish Believers, such as seeing Paul’s word, “if you bear the name ‘Jew’ and rely upon the Law and boast in God” (2:17). There are other places within the letter where he says, “I am speaking to you who are Gentiles” (11:13). James R. Edwards asserts, “The theme of Jews and Gentiles ebbs and flows throughout the epistle. It is clear that Romans is addressed to predominantly Gentile congregations (1:5; 13-15; 11:13), though one in which a

²⁴ Cornelius Tacitus: *The Histories*, trans. Kenneth Wellesley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp 272-274.

significant Jewish element was present (1:16-17; 9:11; 14:15).²⁵ Colin G. Kruse further adds, “it is significant that 50 percent of the names the apostle mentions in chapter 16 are Jewish, and it is highly unlikely that he would have written the letter without having them in mind.”²⁶ Paying attention to those parts of Romans, which have more Jewish-specific issues or non-Jewish-specific issues in mind, is something for readers to significantly keep aware of—especially those who have, at times, principally approached Romans as a theological treatise and not as a letter written for First Century Believers. This letter would have been read aloud to the Roman Messiah followers, and as they heard it, various groups would obviously have to pay closer attention to certain parts of the letter.

Even with recognizing that the Epistle to the Romans was written with a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish audience, and the distinct issues that arose with the former getting reintegrated into the Roman community of Messiah followers, knowing the exact majority/minority demographics is not easy. C.E.B. Cranfield observes, “it is impossible to decide with anything like absolute certainty whether at the time Paul wrote to them the majority of the Roman Christians were Gentiles or Jews, and that we ought therefore to leave this question open. What is quite certain is that both the Jewish-Christian, and the Gentile-Christian, elements were considerable: it was clearly not a matter of an overwhelming majority and a tiny minority.”²⁷ What needs to be dismissed for sure, are any broad statements on the general remarks made in Romans such as *..Paul writes the Gentiles here in Rome...*, when there might not be any specific statement in the surrounding context to warrant such a claim. On the whole, the Epistle to the Romans was written to a mixed group of people, although various vignettes will be encountered with sub-groups in mind.

A good case can be made, from surveying the different people in ch. 16, that the Roman Believers were divided into a number of home congregations or fellowships. Dunn indicates, “the fact that Paul never speaks of the Christians in Rome as a church [i.e., *ekklesia*] (‘the church in Rome’) may well be significant, especially since it is so out of keeping with Paul’s usual practice (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 4:15; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; cf. Gal 1:12). For one thing, it confirms that the [Believers] in Rome were too numerous to meet in a single house, but it may also indicate that a more public gathering...was too hazardous to contemplate. And for another, it strongly suggests that the Christian house congregations shared the same sort of fragmented existence as the wider Jewish community.”²⁸ Moo also makes the important point, “It is also possible, though more speculative, that these different house churches were divided theologically.”²⁹ Recognizing that there was not a single group of Messiah followers in Rome, and that there was some division—if for any other reason because of the size of the community—will be important to remember, especially when considering the issues of ch. 14, where some sort of mixed fellowship among the Believers is described, which may have been when cross-gatherings of home fellowships met together.

There are instructions given to non-Jewish Believers in Rome, particularly detectable in chs. 9-11 and 14, on how for them to not only approach individual Jewish non-Believers, but also how to approach a Jewish community which on the whole had not recognized Israel’s Messiah. This begs some important questions of how closely involved the Messiah followers in Rome were with the local Jewish synagogues. No reader should disagree that there were Believers who likely attended functions with the local Roman synagogues, in addition to the Messiah followers themselves gathering together. Yet the question has been raised, aside from the Believers being formally recognized by the Roman government as an associated group with Judaism, and hence a legal religion, whether the Believers were an actual sub-group within the Roman Synagogue establishment.³⁰ Dunn, in describing Paul’s usage of the Tanach Scriptures, and in particular the role of the Greek Septuagint, details how some level of association with the Roman Synagogue would have been necessary, if for any other reason to access Holy Writ:

²⁵ Edwards, 15; cf. Moo, pp 9-13; Witherington, pp 7-8.

²⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 2.

²⁷ Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 21.

²⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:lii.

²⁹ Moo, 5.

³⁰ Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, pp 13-14; Mark Nanos, “The Letter of Paul to the Romans,” in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253.

“... Paul in writing to the...groups in Rome can evidently assume that knowledge of the OT in its Greek version would be well enough known. But knowledge of the OT within the ancient world was confined almost wholly to Jewish and Jewish-derived communities: the LXX is not known in Greco-Roman literary circles...Consequently to be able to assume such a knowledge of the scriptures as Paul does in Romans he would have to assume that his readership by and large had enjoyed a substantial link with the synagogues in Rome.”³¹

It certainly can be debated, per the issues caused by the Edict of Claudius, if by the time Paul’s letter to the Romans was composed, if it was issued to groups of Believers directly operating within the Jewish Synagogue—or, as we should think more likely, various break-aways with more limited association. That the Messiah followers were associated with the wider Jewish community in Rome, is fairly necessary, but some fracturing is also detectable. Also likely is that in view of the broad integration issues between Jewish non-Believers, Jewish Believers, and non-Jewish Believers, from the fallout of the Edict of Claudius—that the Messiah followers may have maintained a lower profile than they would have in other cities.

While there have been those in the Messianic community who would like to think that Paul’s letter to the Romans was written in Hebrew or Aramaic, the history surrounding the letter’s composition reveals otherwise, when we consider the audience. Cranfield provides an important summary on the high level of Greek composition represented by the Epistle to the Romans, and the necessary influence of the Septuagint upon it:

“The range of vocabulary is in itself evidence of a degree of culture and refinement. It includes, for example, such a good literary word as ἀντιστρατεύεσθαι [*antistrateuesthai*], which occurs nowhere else in the whole Greek Bible, and various rather unusual words which are specially appropriate in a particular context (e.g. ἀποκαταδοκία [*apokaradokia*]...). It includes also words from the vocabulary of Greek moral philosophy which had become part of the common language of the more educated and thoughtful people of the Hellenistic world (e.g. καθῆκον [*kathēkon*]). In a considerable element of the vocabulary of Romans, as of other NT documents, the influence of the LXX is to be seen. There are the words which, as used in Romans, are quite unintelligible unless seen in the light of the LXX (e.g. δικαιοῦν [*dikaion*], δικαιοσύνη [*dikaïōsis*] (and, in some of their occurrences, δίκαιος [*dikaios*] and δικαιοσύνη [*dikaïosunē*]), κοινός [*koinos*], προσωπολήψια [*prosōpolēmpsia*]), and also a much larger number of words, which, though up to a point intelligible on the basis of ordinary secular Greek usage, are certainly not given the full significance which they have in Romans (or, in some cases, in some of their occurrences in Romans), unless they are understood in the light of their use (or the use of words connected with them) in the OT (e.g. ἀλήθεια [*alētheia*], διαθήκη [*diathēkē*], δόξα [*doxa*], δούλος [*doulos*] (as used in 1.1), ἐκλογή [*eklogē*], ἐπαγγελία [*epangelia*], καλεῖν [*kalein*], κύριος [*kurios*], νόμος [*nomos*], προγινώσκειν [*proginōskein*]—to mention just a few). Many of the words with strong LXX associations were necessarily characteristic of Greek-speaking Christianity from the very beginning, and, as used in Romans, have not only their OT background but also their background in the common usage of the Greek-speaking church.”³²

The question can be raised, per the city of Rome being widely Latin speaking, of why the Epistle to the Romans was composed in Greek and not Latin. (And there is certainly a plethora of Christian materials from the Second Century, from Italy, in Latin.) Ben Witherington III addresses this, partially appealing to a statement by Cicero, who said, “For if any one thinks that there is a smaller gain of glory derived from Greek verses than from Latin ones, he is greatly mistaken, because Greek poetry is read among all nations, Latin is confined to its own natural limits, which are narrow enough” (*Pro Achaia* 23).³³ Witherington says,

“On first blush it might seem odd that Paul would address a largely Gentile audience of Romans in Greek rather than Latin. After all, Paul knew very well that Latin was the language of Rome, and it was also the official and legal language of the Roman colony from which he wrote Romans. Yet in fact Greek had long

³¹ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:l.

³² Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, pp 24-25; cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:xl; Keener, 2.

³³ Cicero: *Pro Achaia*. Accessible online at <<http://perseus.uchicago.edu/perseus/cgi/citequery3.pl?dbname=LatinAugust2012&query=Cic.%20Arch.&getid=1>>.