ROMANS · SERIES ONE · MESSAGE ONE

ROMANS

An Introduction

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God…"

The letter, the city it was written to,
and the man God used to write it

Preached Sunday, October 18, 2026

Redeeming Grace Church
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HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

What you are holding

This booklet follows the message preached at Redeeming Grace Church on Sunday, October 18, 2026 — in the same order, with the same charts and maps that were on the screen that morning.

Nothing has been added to the teaching. What has been added is room. On a Sunday morning a map goes by in twenty seconds; here you can sit with it. A date gets said once; here it is written down, with the source beside it, so you can check it and go further.

The letter itself is what matters. Everything in these pages exists to get you into Romans and out of the way.

A WORD ABOUT THE NUMBERS

Ancient history gives us fewer hard figures than we would like. Where a number in this booklet is a modern estimate rather than an ancient record, it is marked as such on the chart or in the text. A full note is on page 34.

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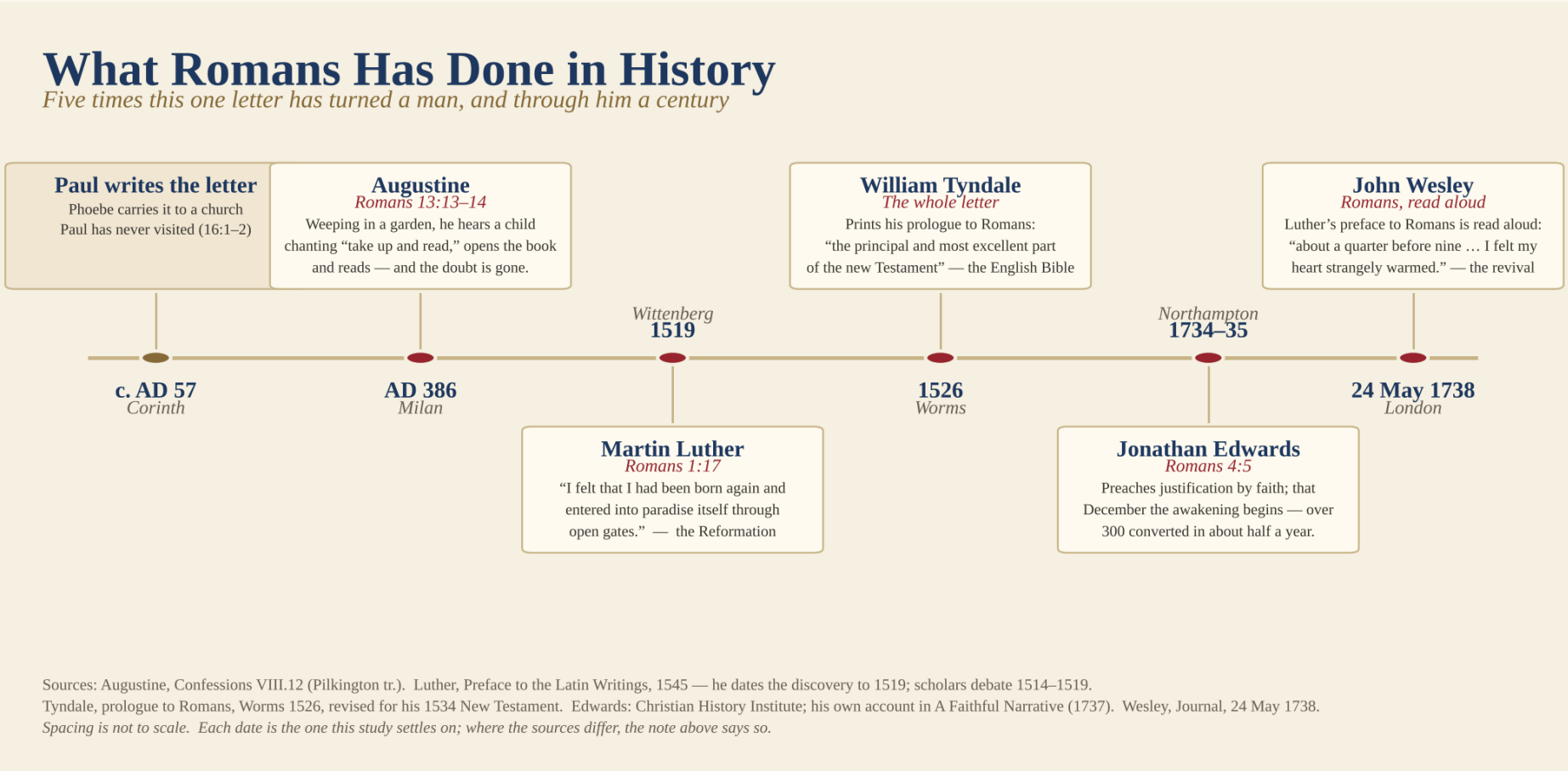
PART ONE

Introduction

Why this book — what God has done with it, what it answers, and what I am asking of you.

Romans is the single greatest complete book on the gospel and on salvation that we have. Before we open the first verse, it is worth seeing what this one letter has already done.

What Romans has done in history



Five times this one letter has turned a man, and through him a century. Each of the five is told in full on the next two pages, with its source. Spacing on the chart is not to scale.

Five times this letter has turned a man

Milan, AD 386 *Augustine — Romans 13:13–14*

Thirty-two years old, brilliant, and unable to break with his sin. Weeping in a garden, he hears a child's voice over the wall chanting *"take up and read; take up and read."* He opens the book and his eye falls on Romans:

> *"Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."*
>
> **Romans 13:13–14**

The doubt is gone. Augustine becomes the most influential theologian the Western church has had.

Augustine, Confessions VIII.12.

Wittenberg, 1519 *Luther — Romans 1:17*

An Augustinian monk lecturing on the Psalms is stopped by a single verse:

> *"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"*
>
> **Romans 1:17**

Of what followed he wrote, *"I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates."* The Reformation follows.

Luther, Preface to the Latin Writings (1545). He dates the discovery to 1519; scholars debate 1514–1519.

Worms, 1526 *Tyndale — the whole letter*

Tyndale prints his prologue to Romans and calls it *"the principal and most excellent part of the new Testament."* This is the letter driving the English Bible into English hands — at the cost of Tyndale's life ten years later.

Tyndale, prologue to Romans, Worms 1526; revised for his 1534 New Testament.

Northampton, 1734–35 *Edwards — Romans 4:5*

Edwards preaches a series on justification by faith alone, from Paul's own words:

> *"Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works."*
>
> **Romans 4:4–6**

That December the awakening begins — over three hundred converted in about half a year.

Edwards, A Faithful Narrative (1737).

London, 24 May 1738 *Wesley — Romans, read aloud*

A failed missionary, back from Georgia, goes "very unwillingly" to a meeting on Aldersgate Street, where someone was reading Luther's preface to Romans. *"About a quarter before nine… I felt my heart strangely warmed."* The Methodist revival follows.

Wesley, Journal, 24 May 1738.

WHY THIS BOOK

It answers the deepest questions we carry

These are not academic questions. They are the ones people actually bring — to a hospital room, to a kitchen table, to a pastor's office. Romans takes up every one of them.

What follows is not a summary of the letter. It is a map of where the letter goes, so that when you read and reach one of these places, you know what you have found.

It is the single greatest complete book on the gospel and on salvation.

No matter where you are — struggling with salvation, struggling with sin, or struggling with the sheer heaviness of the Christian life — **this book will transform you.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Eleven questions, and where Romans answers them

THE QUESTION	WHERE ROMANS ANSWERS IT
Why is there sin in the world?	The one man, and what came through him — **5:12**; and the exchange of **1:21–25**.
What happens to people who reject God?	God *"gave them up"* — said three times in **1:24, 26, 28**; and the day of wrath, **2:5**.
Is anyone good?	**3:10–12** — *"None is righteous, no, not one."* And **3:23**.
What about those who never heard the gospel?	What creation itself makes plain, **1:19–20**; conscience, **2:14–16**; and the chain of hearing and sending, **10:14–17**.
Why do I still sin as a believer?	Romans **7** — and the answer of Romans **8**.
Why does God allow suffering?	**8:18**, the sufferings weighed against the glory; and **8:28**.
Can I lose this?	**8:38–39** — *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*
Has God finished with Israel?	**11:1** — *"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!"* — and all of chapters **9–11**.
How do I live with people I disagree with?	**14:1–15:13** — the strong, the weak, and the welcome.
What is our relationship with the government?	**13:1–7**.
How do we deal with the poor, the rejected, the foreigner?	**12:13**, *"Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."* The collection Paul is carrying for the poor saints in Jerusalem, **15:25–27**. And **15:7**, *"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."*

I. INTRODUCTION

The main theme of this book

God's good news. The good news about God's salvation. **The gospel.**

The Greek word is *euangelion* — "good news," or "gospel." It appears **eleven times** in Romans, and Paul puts it in the first verse: he is *"set apart for the gospel of God."*

That phrase will carry the whole letter. Not good news Paul thought up. God's own good news, which God promised long before, about God's own Son.

> *"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."*
>
> **Romans 1:16**

That verse is where this series is headed. Four Sundays from the first verse to that one.

AND SO

This is my ask of you

Read it *faithfully*.
Read it *meditatively*.

Let the Holy Spirit lead you, guide you, and transform you.

A plan for reading the whole letter is on page 33. It is not a reading schedule to keep up with; it is a path through the six movements of the letter, at whatever pace you can actually hold.

Read it expectantly, waiting for God to speak to you. He wrote it to be understood, and He wrote it for you.

PART TWO

Explain the book and the text

Romans 1:1 — the background we need before we can read the first verse.

Where we are going:

1. **The book's design** — how the letter is organized
2. **The first century** — how far the gospel had come
3. **Rome** — the city this letter was written to
4. **The church in Rome** — who they were and how they met
5. **Paul** — who the man was *(Part Three)*

Paul's goal: the obedience of faith

Paul's goal in writing is **the obedience of faith in the gospel.** He says it at the start, and he says it again at the end. Everything in between sits inside those two bookends.

> *"...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about **the obedience of faith** for the sake of his name among all the nations..."*
>
> **Romans 1:5**

Verses 1–7 are a single sentence in the Greek; verse 5 is one clause inside it. The whole sentence is printed in full on page 24.

> *"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about **the obedience of faith**—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."*
>
> **Romans 16:25–27**

The same phrase, at the first turn of the letter and at the last. That is not an accident of vocabulary. It is Paul telling you what he is after.

A gospel that leads to obedient and faithful living. Not obedience that earns the gospel — the whole letter will fight that idea — but obedience that comes *out* of it, because a man who has been given this news cannot stay the man he was.

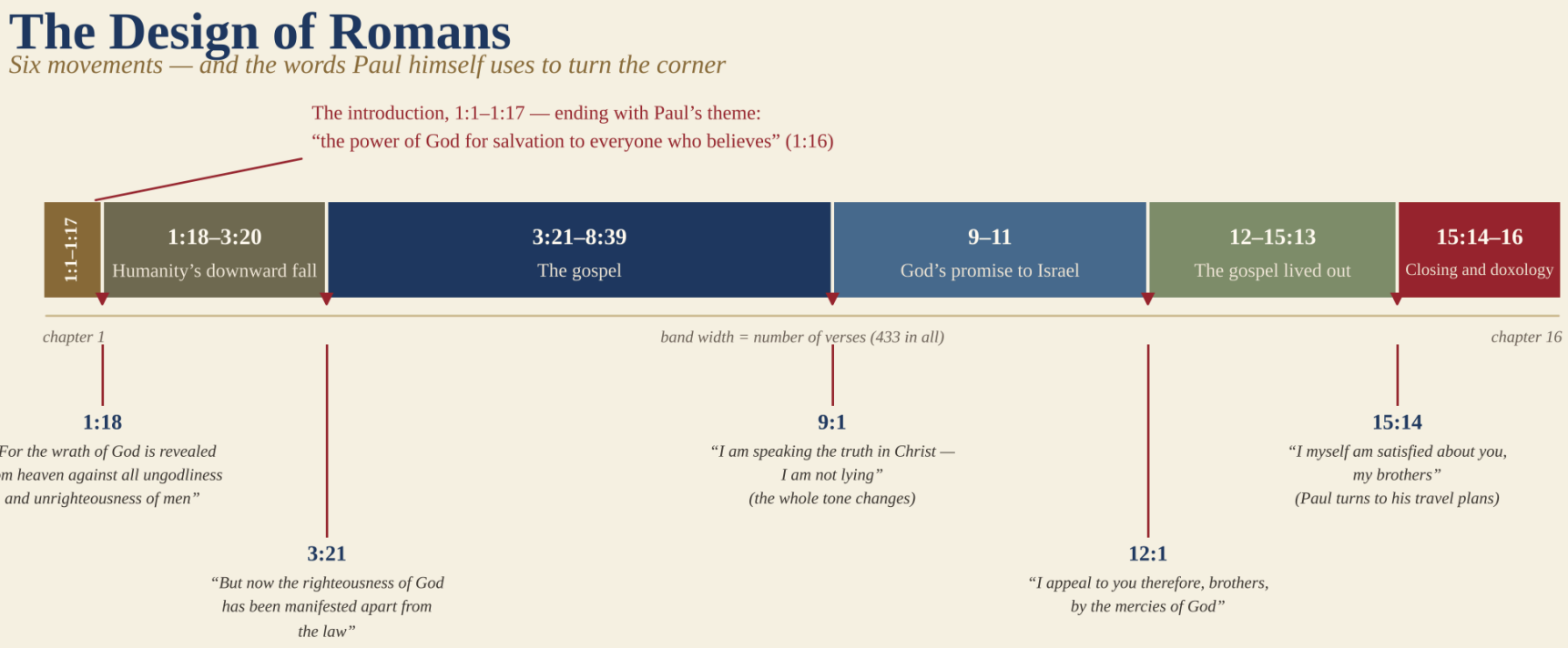
SIX DIVISIONS

The letter falls into six movements. You do not have to take anyone's word for where they are: **Paul himself writes the seam at each turn.** At every division there is a sentence where he visibly changes direction — a *"but now,"* a *"therefore,"* a change of tone so sharp you can hear it.

The chart on the next page shows all six, with Paul's own words at each seam. The width of each band is the number of verses it holds — 433 verses in all.

These divisions are the ones this preaching series follows.

The design of Romans



Six movements — and the words Paul himself uses to turn the corner. Band width is the number of verses. Series One preaches the first band, 1:1–1:17, in four Sundays; the whole letter will take about two years.

How far the gospel had come

Two dates hold this whole letter in place.

AD 33
The crucifixion and the resurrection. Friday, 3 April.

AD 57
Romans is written, from Corinth, in the winter of 56–57.

Twenty-four years. That is all the time there is between the empty tomb outside Jerusalem and a letter arriving in the capital of the world, addressed to believers already gathered there in houses and workshops.

Twenty-four years, and no committee, no building programme, no printing press, no road that was not Rome's own. That is how fast and how far God moved the gospel.

And notice what the map on page 14 shows: **there was already a church in Rome before Paul ever got there.** He writes to people he has never met. He will not arrive until AD 60 — in chains.

WHERE ROMANS SITS AMONG PAUL'S LETTERS

By the winter he writes Romans, Paul has already written Galatians, both letters to Thessalonica, and both to Corinth. Four more — Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon — will be written from house arrest in Rome. The last three come at the very end.

Romans falls almost exactly in the middle: late enough that he has thought it all the way through, early enough that he still has ten years to live.

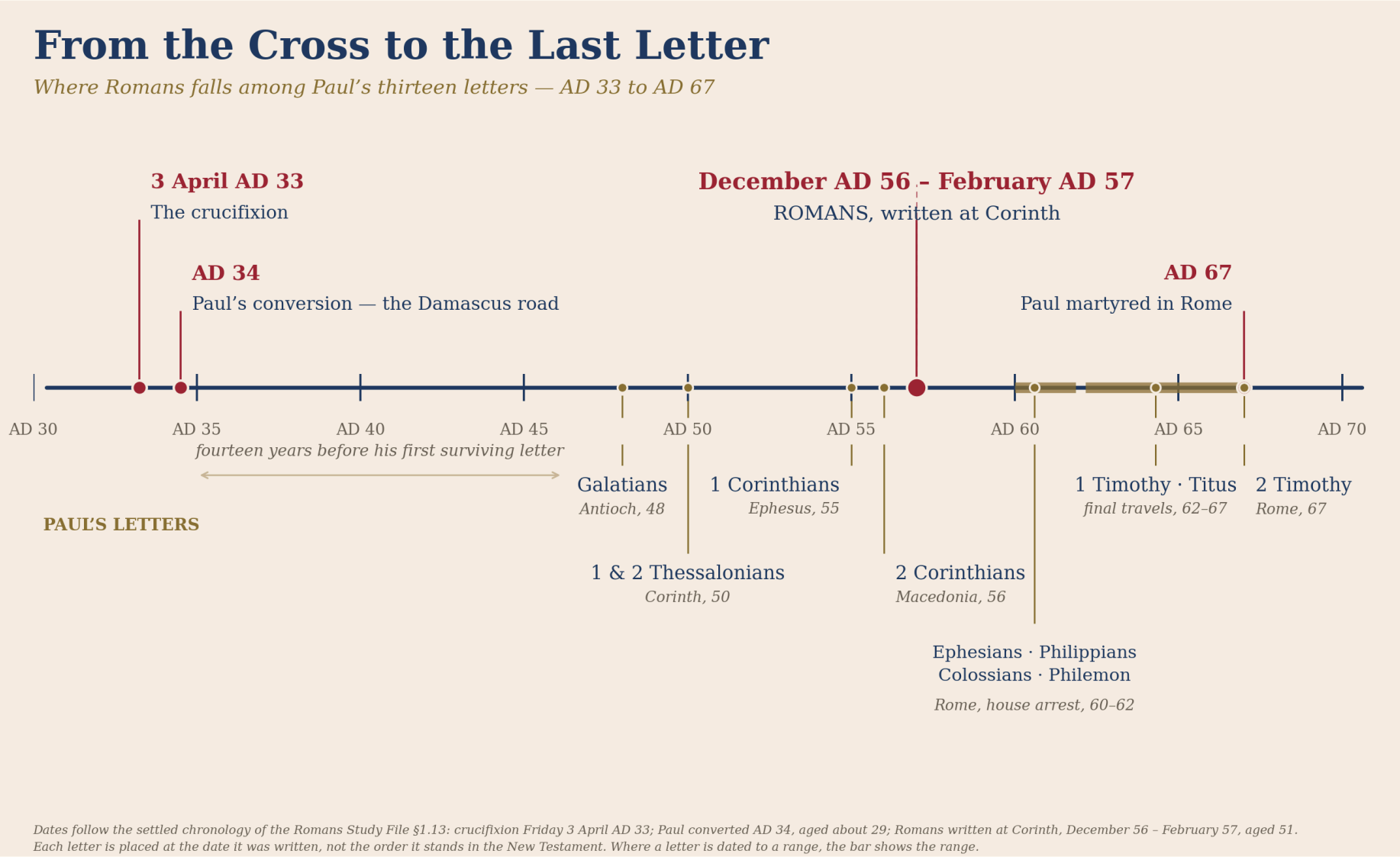
PAUL'S PLAN AS HE WRITES

Corinth → Jerusalem → Rome → Spain.

That is the plan he states in chapter 15. First to Jerusalem with the collection for the poor believers there; then at last to Rome, to be "*refreshed in your company*"; then on to Spain, where Christ has not been named.

It did not happen that way. He reached Jerusalem and was arrested. He reached Rome in chains. Whether he ever saw Spain, no one knows.

From the cross to the last letter



Where Romans falls among Paul's thirteen letters — AD 33 to AD 67. Each letter is placed at the date it was written, not the order it stands in the New Testament. Dates follow the settled chronology of this study.

The gospel's reach by AD 57



Churches attested in Acts and Paul's letters by the time Romans was written, and Paul's three journeys. Rome's church already existed before Paul arrived (Romans 1:8–13); he reaches the city only in AD 60, as a prisoner (Acts 28:14–16). Routes are approximate.

The plan behind Romans

The Plan Behind Romans

Where Paul has been, where he is going, and why he writes to a church he has never visited (Romans 15:14–33)



What actually happened: Paul reached Jerusalem, was arrested (Acts 21), and came to Rome in chains in AD 60 (Acts 28). Whether he ever reached Spain is uncertain (cf. 1 Clement 5:7, "the limit of the west"). Routes schematic.

Where Paul has been, where he is going, and why he writes to a church he has never visited (Romans 15:14–33). Phoebe carries the letter (16:1–2); her route is not recorded. What actually happened: Paul reached Jerusalem, was arrested (Acts 21), and came to Rome in chains in AD 60 (Acts 28).

The city this letter was written to

THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD

800,000 to 1,000,000 people — the largest city in the Mediterranean world. Roughly 45 to 60 million lived under Roman rule.

Most of them lived in apartment blocks — Latin *insulae*, "tenement blocks." Late Roman city records list between 42,000 and 46,000 of them against fewer than 2,000 private houses. Five storeys high. The higher you climbed, the smaller, darker and cheaper the rooms got, and fire and collapse were constant dangers.

SLAVES AND IMMIGRANTS

A city of immigrants from every corner of the empire — and a city of owned people. Estimates put slaves at roughly **one person in five in Italy.**

Rome ran on them: teachers, doctors, secretaries, cooks, miners, field hands. Not a class apart from the city's working life — the city's working life itself.

Roman law put it plainly:

> *"Whatever is acquired through a slave is acquired for the master."*
>
> **Gaius, *Institutes* 1.52**

A slave owned nothing — not even what he earned. Not his time, not his body, not his wages.

Hold that, because Paul has a great deal to say about slaves in this letter. He begins in the very first sentence, and the word he uses about himself is the one Rome used about the man who owned nothing.

LANGUAGE

Greek and Latin both. Greek, not Latin, was the common tongue of the East — and **Paul writes to Rome in Greek.**

RELIGION

Roman religion was **not about personal belief.** It was about keeping *pax deorum* — "the peace of the gods" — by performing the right rituals, so that the city and the household would prosper. Get the ritual right and the gods stay favourable. That was the whole transaction.

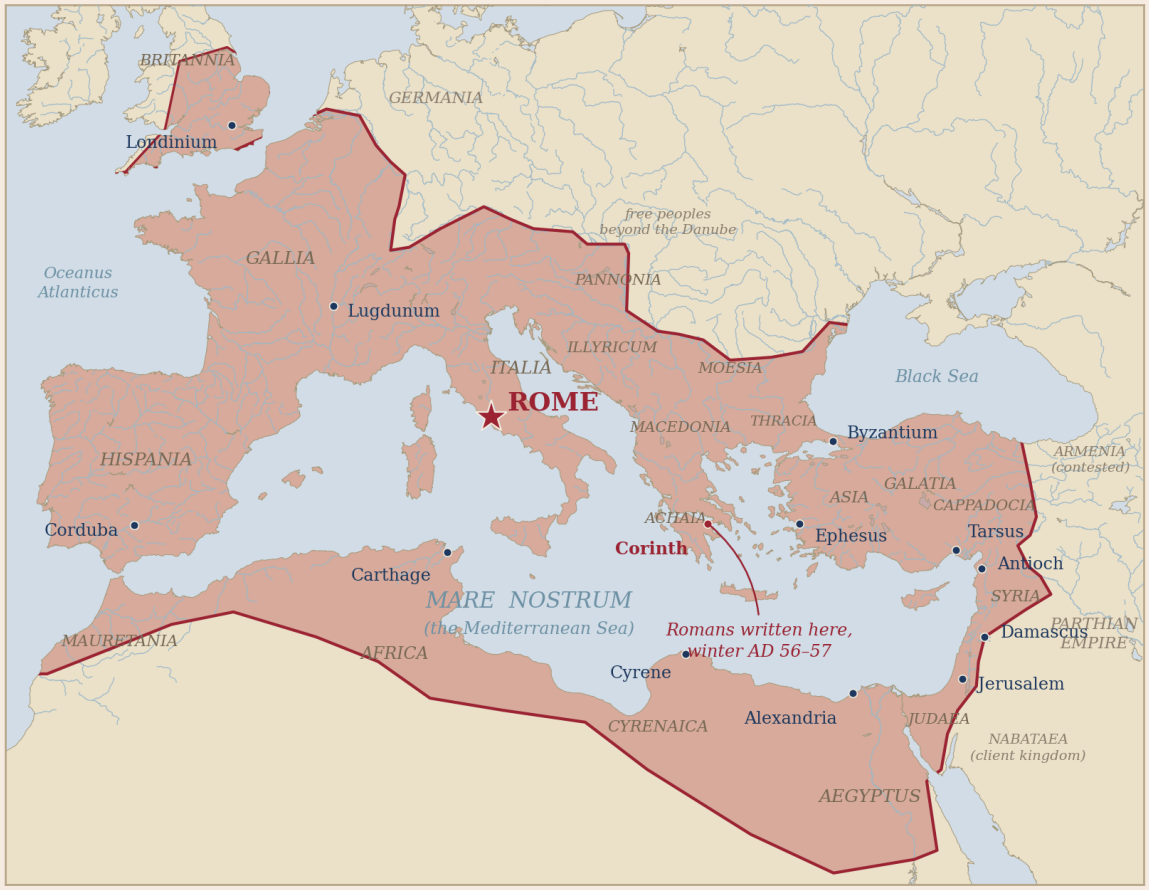
- **State gods** — Jupiter on the Capitoline, Juno, Minerva, Mars, Vesta.
- **The emperor cult** — Julius Caesar and Augustus had been declared gods; Claudius was declared one in AD 54. Household gods in every home.
- **Eastern religions** — Isis had a great temple in the Campus Martius, Cybele one on the Palatine. Astrology and magic everywhere.

Into that city comes a letter announcing one God, one Lord, one gospel, and no ritual that can buy Him.

The Roman Empire when Paul wrote

The Roman Empire When Paul Wrote

c. AD 57 — the world this letter was written into, and the city it was written to



THE EXTENT OF ROMAN RULE

- Roman territory, c. AD 57
- Land frontier — Rhine, Danube, Euphrates and the desert edge
- Rome
- Major city of the empire

THE WORLD IT WAS WRITTEN INTO

Roughly 45–60 million people lived under Roman rule.
a modern reconstruction, not an ancient count

Rome itself held 800,000–1,000,000.
widely held

About one person in five in Italy was enslaved.
widely held — and Paul's first word about himself is slave

Greek, not Latin, was the common tongue of the East — and Paul writes to Rome in Greek.
solid

Nero had been emperor three years.
he was nineteen; the fire and the persecution are seven years away

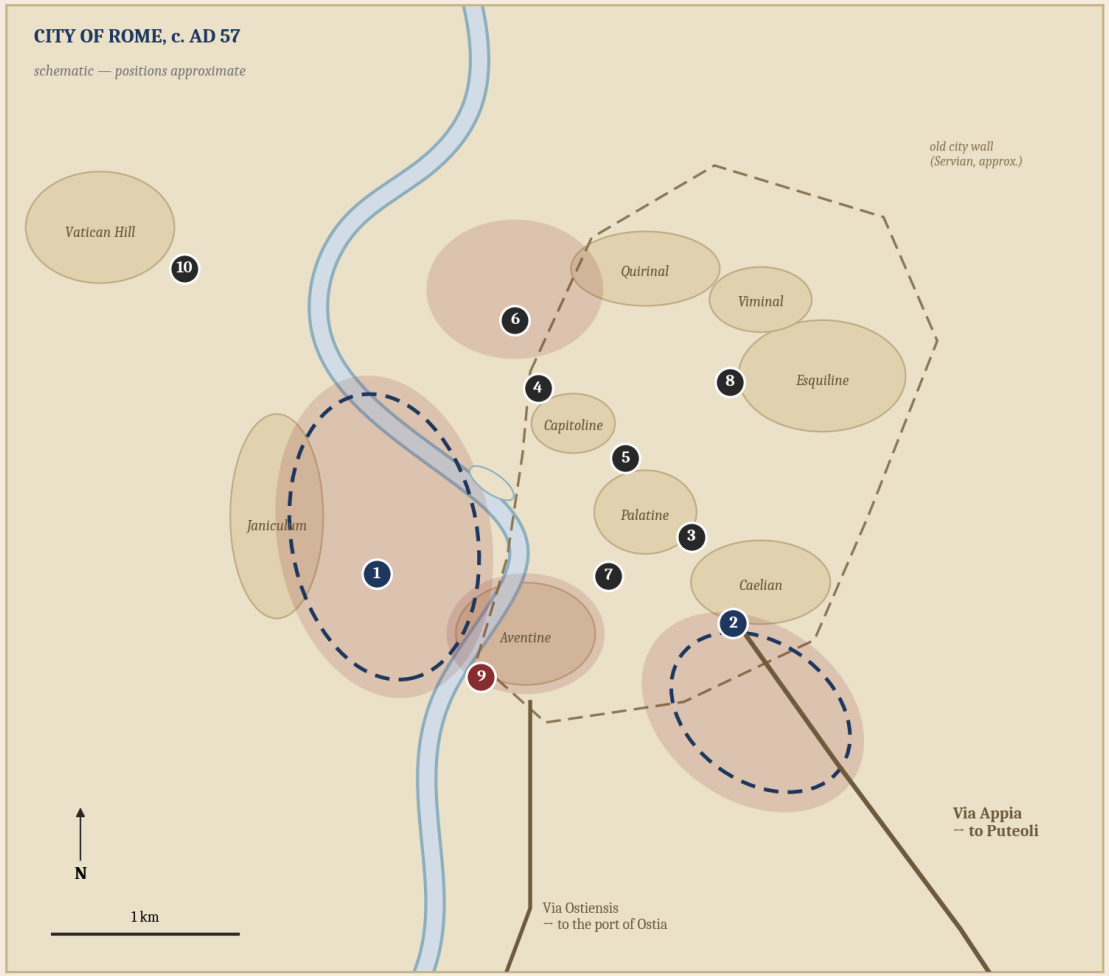
Frontiers are approximate, drawn for c. AD 57: Britain held only in the south (conquest begun AD 43); Thrace annexed AD 46; Mauretania AD 40–44. Armenia was contested with Parthia and Nabataea was a client kingdom — both shown outside. Dacia, and Britain north of the Humber, were not yet Roman. Coastline: GSHHS via Basemap.

c. AD 57 — the world this letter was written into, and the city it was written to. Frontiers are approximate. The population figures are modern reconstructions, not ancient censuses.

Rome when Paul wrote

Rome When Paul Wrote

A city of perhaps a million — and where its Jews and earliest Christians lived



1. **Trastevere** — Large Jewish district "across the Tiber", mostly freed slaves (Philo, Embassy 155).
2. **Porta Capena** — Gate where the Appian Way begins; Jews noted nearby (Juvenal, Satire 3.10–16). Believers came this road to meet Paul in AD 60 (Acts 28:15).
3. **Palatine** — Imperial palace of Nero (r. 54–68).
4. **Capitoline** — Temple of Jupiter Best and Greatest — heart of state religion.
5. **Forum** — Civic and religious center; Senate house.
6. **Campus Martius** — Temples including Isis; public buildings.
7. **Circus Maximus** — Chariot races; the great fire of AD 64 began near here (Tacitus, Annals 15.38).
8. **Subura** — Crowded, noisy tenement district.
9. **Aventine** — Later tradition places Prisca's house-church here (Santa Prisca) — tradition only.
10. **Vatican** — Nero's gardens and circus — site of Christian executions after AD 64 (Tacitus, Annals 15.44).

Areas linked to Rome's Jewish community

Areas where Lampe locates the earliest Christians (Trastevere, Appian Way, Aventine, Campus Martius) — a reconstruction

Sources: Philo, Embassy to Gaius 155; Juvenal, Satire 3; Tacitus, Annals 15.38, 15.44; P. Lampe, From Paul to Valentinus (2003), Part 2. Hill and river positions approximate.

A city of perhaps a million — and where its Jews and earliest Christians lived. Positions are schematic. The shaded Christian areas are a modern reconstruction (Lampe); the Aventine house-church is later tradition only.

Who they were, and how they met

Around **a thousand believers, or fewer**, in a city of a million. One in a thousand, at most.

No apostle founded this church. Peter did not plant it. Paul did not plant it. As far as we can tell, it began with ordinary Jewish believers and travellers carrying the message home — people whose names we will never know, doing the most ordinary thing in the world, which is telling someone.

That is worth sitting with. The most important letter in the New Testament was addressed to a congregation nobody famous started.

NO BUILDINGS

There were **no church buildings.** Not one, anywhere, for another two centuries. People met in homes, in apartments, and in workshops.

Two kinds of room, mostly. A well-to-do house — a *domus* — where a host like Gaius could take in *"the whole church"* (16:23), though even a good-sized house held only thirty to fifty people. Or a rented room in a tenement block: a ground-floor shop that became a meeting room after the working day.

Prisca and Aquila were tentmakers or leather-workers (Acts 18:3), and a church met *"in their house"* (16:5) — quite possibly a workshop exactly like that.

FIVE GATHERINGS, NOT ONE

Romans 16 names **at least five distinct groups** — five separate gatherings of believers scattered across the city. There was no single Sunday meeting of the Roman church. There could not have been; there was no room big enough.

And notice how Paul addresses them. He never writes *"to the church in Rome."* He writes:

> *"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*
>
> **Romans 1:7**

Scattered, small, meeting in rented rooms, with no building and no founder — and the word God uses for them is *loved*, and *called*, and *saints*.

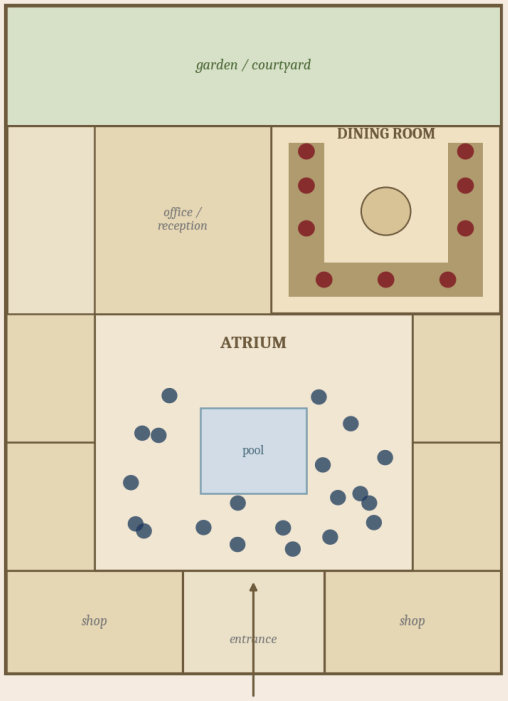
Where the church met

Where the Church Met: Two Kinds of House Church

No church buildings existed yet. Believers gathered in homes and workshops — schematic illustrations, not to scale

A. A well-to-do house (domus)

e.g., Gaius, "host to me and to the whole church" (Rom 16:23)



Dining room (triclinium)

Three couches; about nine people reclined to eat — usually the host and his social equals.

Atrium

Everyone else sat or stood in the open hall. This split may lie behind the divided Lord's Supper Paul rebukes in Corinth (1 Cor 11:17–34).

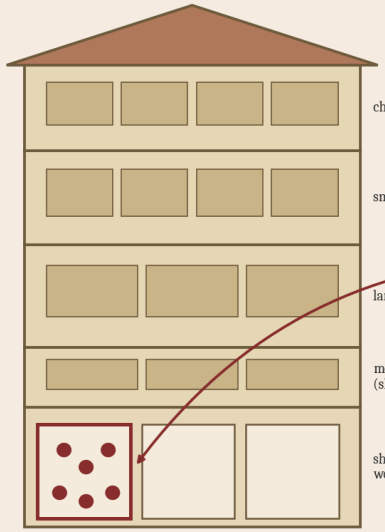
How many?

Murphy-O'Connor estimated that even a good-sized house could hold only about 30–50 people — so a city's believers met in several homes.

Hosts in Romans 16: Prisca & Aquila (16:5); in Corinth, Gaius (16:23).

B. A tenement block (insula)

Where most of Rome's million people lived



Rooms got smaller, darker and cheaper the higher you climbed; fire and collapse were constant dangers.

Prisca & Aquila were tentmakers or leather-workers (Acts 18:3); a church met "in their house" (Rom 16:5) — quite possibly a workshop like this.

A "workshop church"

A ground-floor shop could double as a meeting room after the working day (a likely scenario, not a recorded one).

Some groups in Romans 16 may have met in rented rooms like these with no wealthy patron (Jewett) — a reconstruction.

Late Roman city records list about 42,000–46,000 tenement blocks but under 2,000 houses.

Sources: J. Murphy-O'Connor, St. Paul's Corinth (3rd ed., 2002); R. Jewett, Romans (Hermeneia, 2007); regionary catalogues as summarized in Wikipedia, "Insula (building)." Figures and rooms are schematic.

No church buildings existed yet. Believers gathered in homes and workshops. Both drawings are schematic illustrations, not excavated plans. The "workshop church" is a likely scenario, not a recorded one.

Nero, and what was coming

Nero was nineteen years old when this letter arrived in his city.

He had become emperor at sixteen, after his mother killed Claudius. He would rule for fourteen years, and he would become one of the most wicked men ever to hold power anywhere.

But in AD 57 none of that had happened yet. **These were still the good years.** He was young, he was popular, he was guided by better men than himself. The believers reading this letter had no particular reason to be afraid of him.

The dark was coming.

AD 59
He murders his mother.

July, AD 64
The great fire burns much of Rome. Nero lays the blame on the Christians.

AD 67
Paul is executed in Rome.

SEVEN YEARS

That is the gap. **Seven years** between this letter arriving and the fire that turned the empire against the church in it. What followed was among the most barbaric torture and killing in human history. Tacitus — no friend of the Christians, who called the faith a *"deadly superstition"* — records it plainly enough that it has never needed exaggerating.

Tacitus, Annals 15.44. The details are not reproduced here.

WHICH MEANS

The people who first read this letter — who first heard chapter 5 on suffering, and chapter 8 on what cannot separate us from the love of God — were seven years away from needing every word of it.

They did not know that. **God did.**

So read Romans 5 and Romans 8 again with that in your mind. They are not inspirational writing. They are field equipment, delivered seven years early to people who were going to need it.

Not random greetings

You come to the end of Romans and you find a long list of names, and you wonder why they are there. Just greetings. Just a courtesy at the bottom of a letter.

Twenty-six people are greeted in Rome. Men and women. Jews and Gentiles. Slaves, freed slaves, and at least one member of a powerful household. A woman who "risked her neck." A man whose mother had been *"a mother to me as well."* Paul had never been to this city, and he knew two dozen people in it by name.

Now put the dates beside the names. **I wonder how many of those people were persecuted, tortured, and martyred within seven years of receiving this letter.**

The timing is not an accident. **God was preparing and equipping His church** — naming them, loving them, and handing them chapters 5 and 8 before they needed them.

> *"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*
>
> **Romans 5:3–5**

> *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"*
>
> **Romans 8:35**

That is the faithfulness of our God.

He does not send His people into the fire unequipped. He sends the letter first.

Who was who in Romans 16

Who Was Who in Romans 16

The senders in Corinth, the courier, and at least five gatherings of believers in Rome

IN CORINTH — 16:21–23

Paul
the author

Tertius
wrote the letter down (16:22)

Gaius
Paul's host and the whole church's

Erastus
city treasurer

Quartus
"the brother"

Timothy
"my fellow worker"

Lucius, Jason, Sosipater
"my kinsmen" — fellow Jews

Tertius is the only one of Paul's secretaries who names himself in a letter: "I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord" (16:22).

PHOEBE — 16:1–2

servant (diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae; patron of many, including Paul. Carries the letter.

to Rome

IN ROME — "to all those in Rome who are loved by God" (1:7)

1. Church in their house — 16:3–5

Prisca ★
co-worker; risked her neck

Aquila ★
Jewish; tentmaker (Acts 18:2–3)

Met Paul in Corinth after the Jews were expelled (AD 49)

2. Family of Aristobulus — 16:10

Believers in this household (slaves/freedmen?)

Possibly the household of Herod the Great's grandson, friend of Claudius (Lightfoot) — disputed

3. Family of Narcissus — 16:11

"Those in the Lord" in this household — not all were

Possibly Claudius's powerful freedman, forced to die in AD 54 (Tacitus, Ann. 13.1) — disputed

4. "...and the brothers with them" — 16:14

Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas

All Greek names; likely slaves or freed slaves, possibly immigrants from the East (Lampe; Jewett)

5. "...and all the saints with them" — 16:15

Philologus, Julia, Nereus, his sister, Olympas

Possibly a household group (Philologus and Julia may be a married couple)

Others greeted by name (group not stated) — 16:5–13

Epaenetus ★	Mary	Andronicus ★	Junia ★	Ampliatus ★	Urbanus ★	Stachys ★
Apelles	Herodion	Tryphaena	Tryphosa	Persis	Rufus	his mother ★

Epaenetus: Paul's first convert in Asia. Andronicus & Junia: Jewish "kinsmen," fellow prisoners, believers before Paul. Herodion: "kinsman." Rufus: possibly the son of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21). Rufus's mother had been "a mother to me as well."

Key: **blue = men** **red = women** ★ = the text shows Paul knew them personally (shared work, prison, hospitality, "my beloved"). 26 people are greeted in Rome: 24 by name plus Rufus's mother and Nereus's sister.

The senders in Corinth, the courier, and at least five gatherings of believers in Rome. Blue = men, red = women. Items marked "disputed" on the chart are identifications scholars disagree about.

PART THREE

Paul — the man God used

Romans 1:1, read inside the one long sentence it opens.

> *"**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,** which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*
>
> **Romans 1:1–7**

*Verses 1 to 7 are **one sentence**. Paul does not come up for air until he has named himself, his Master, his commission, the Scriptures, the Son, the resurrection, the nations, and the people he is writing to.*

Saul of Tarsus

Born in Tarsus, a university city in Cilicia — modern-day Turkey — around AD 5. Think of a college town with a serious reputation. He was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:28), which was a rare and valuable thing.

His name was **Saul**, after King Saul of the Old Testament — the most famous man of his own tribe. It was the **Lord Jesus** who later gave him the name Paul.

Raised and trained in Jerusalem.

> *"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day."*
>
> **Acts 22:3**

Gamaliel was the most respected rabbi of the age. This was the best theological education available anywhere on earth at that moment, and Saul had it.

A trade in his hands. Tentmaker, or leather-worker (Acts 18:3). Pharisee disciples were expected to have one, and he paid his own way with it for the rest of his life.

AN EXTREMIST

Not a moderate man who later got religion. A man already burning, pointed in the wrong direction. In his own words — and his own words are the best source we have:

> *"If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless."*
>
> **Philippians 3:4–6**
>
> *"And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers."*
>
> **Galatians 1:14**

"Pharisee" meant a man who had taken on himself the whole oral tradition as well as the written law — tithing herbs, ritual washing before every meal, separation from anything that could defile. The name itself probably comes from a root meaning *separated*.

He was already a man set apart. He was set apart for the law.

From Saul to Paul

Luke does not soften what this man did.

> *"And Saul approved of his execution."*
>
> **Acts 8:1**
>
> *"But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."*
>
> **Acts 8:3**
>
> *"But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."*
>
> **Acts 9:1–2**

House after house. Men *and women*. He later says of himself, *"I persecuted this Way to the death"* (Acts 22:4).

THE DAMASCUS ROAD — AD 34, ABOUT AGE 29

Acts tells this story **three times** — Luke's narration in chapter 9, Paul to the Jerusalem crowd in chapter 22, Paul to Agrippa in chapter 26. The threefold telling is Luke's way of marking how much it matters.

> *"And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"*
>
> **Acts 9:4–5**

Christ identifies Himself with His church. Paul thought he was arresting a sect. He was told he had been laying hands on Jesus.

And the commission comes in the same breath as the conversion — in the very language of Romans 1:1:

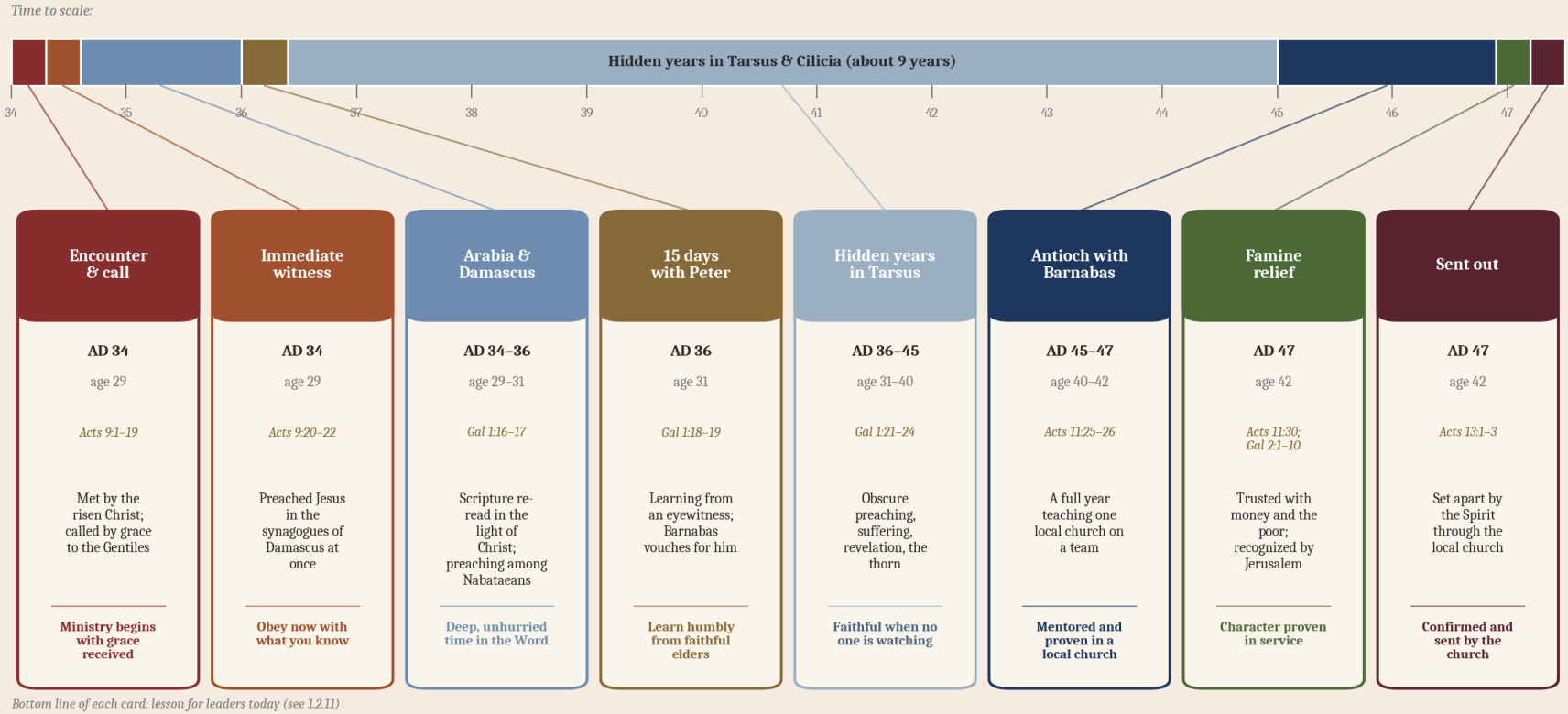
> *"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.'"*
>
> **Acts 9:15**

That is why Paul is an apostle. It was not a career. It was a calling from our Lord, given on the day he was knocked flat.

Damascus to the first journey

Thirteen Years of Preparation: Damascus to the First Journey

How God prepared Paul, AD 34–47 (settled dates; ages from working birth date c. AD 5)



Called on day one (Acts 9:15) — sent out thirteen years later (Acts 13:2–3). Dates and reasons: Romans Study File, sections 1.2 and 1.13.

Called on day one (Acts 9:15) — sent out thirteen years later (Acts 13:2–3). He was not idle in those years, but he was not yet sent. Ages are figured from a working birth date of c. AD 5.

A man like any one of us

We make Paul into a monument. He did not.

> *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."*
>
> **1 Timothy 1:15–16**
>
> *"For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."*
>
> **1 Corinthians 15:9**

A sinner. The foremost of sinners, by his own reckoning, written near the end of his life — not at the beginning, when he might have been exaggerating for effect.

And then the ordinary things.

- He gets cold and asks for his coat, and for his books: *"When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments"* (2 Timothy 4:13).
- He had a falling-out with Barnabas over John Mark so sharp that the two of them parted company (Acts 15:39).

> *"And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."*
>
> **1 Corinthians 2:3–5**
>
> *"For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.'"*
>
> **2 Corinthians 10:10**

He was afraid. He was unimpressive to look at, and a poor speaker — and he quotes the insult himself, which tells you something about the man.

He asked God three times to take away *"a thorn… in the flesh"* and was told no (2 Corinthians 12:7–8).

> *"Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea."*
>
> **2 Corinthians 11:24–25**

That was written only months before Romans. So when you read *"we rejoice in our sufferings"* in chapter 5, **understand that it is written by a man with the marks still on his body.**

Follow me as I follow Christ

This is why God gave us the man and not only his doctrine.

You cannot imitate an abstraction. You can imitate a man — a frightened, scarred, unimpressive, forgiven man who kept walking.

> *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."*
>
> **1 Corinthians 11:1**
>
> *"Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."*
>
> **Philippians 3:17**
>
> *"What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me —practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."*
>
> **Philippians 4:9**

Read the first of those again, and do not drop the second half of the sentence: *"as I am of Christ."*

Paul never offers himself as the destination. He offers himself as a man walking in a direction. The invitation is to come alongside someone who is going somewhere — and if he ever stopped following Christ, the invitation would expire with him.

That is how a pastor is to be followed. That is how any Christian is to be followed. Not *be like me*, but *come this way with me, because of the One I am going toward.*

Paul's goal in our imitating him is that we would be like Christ. Nothing less, and nothing else.

This is also the sentence the booklet As I Follow Christ is built on, if you want to go further with it.

AND THAT IS WHERE THE FIRST VERSE IS GOING

Paul does not open this letter with his credentials. He opens it with his owner. The first word he uses about himself — before *apostle*, before *set apart* — is the word Rome used for a man who owned nothing, not even what he earned.

That is next Sunday, and it is what the whole letter rests on: **God's gospel, about God's Son, carried by a man who belonged entirely to Him.**

Corinth, the winter of AD 56–57

About 51 years old.
Not a young man's letter.

About 22 years a Christian.
He has had two decades to think this through.

Three missionary journeys finished.
A fourth is being planned. It will not happen.

Writing from Corinth.
Having just helped that church out of deep sin — the trouble behind 1 and 2 Corinthians.

This is the pinnacle of his life and his experience. He has seen it all and faced it all as a Christian: the shipwrecks, the beatings, the councils, the quarrels, the prisons, the churches planted and the churches that broke his heart.

He is fully qualified to write a letter like this, and this is the point at which God has him write it.

AND THEN

Three years later he enters Rome — in chains (spring, AD 60).

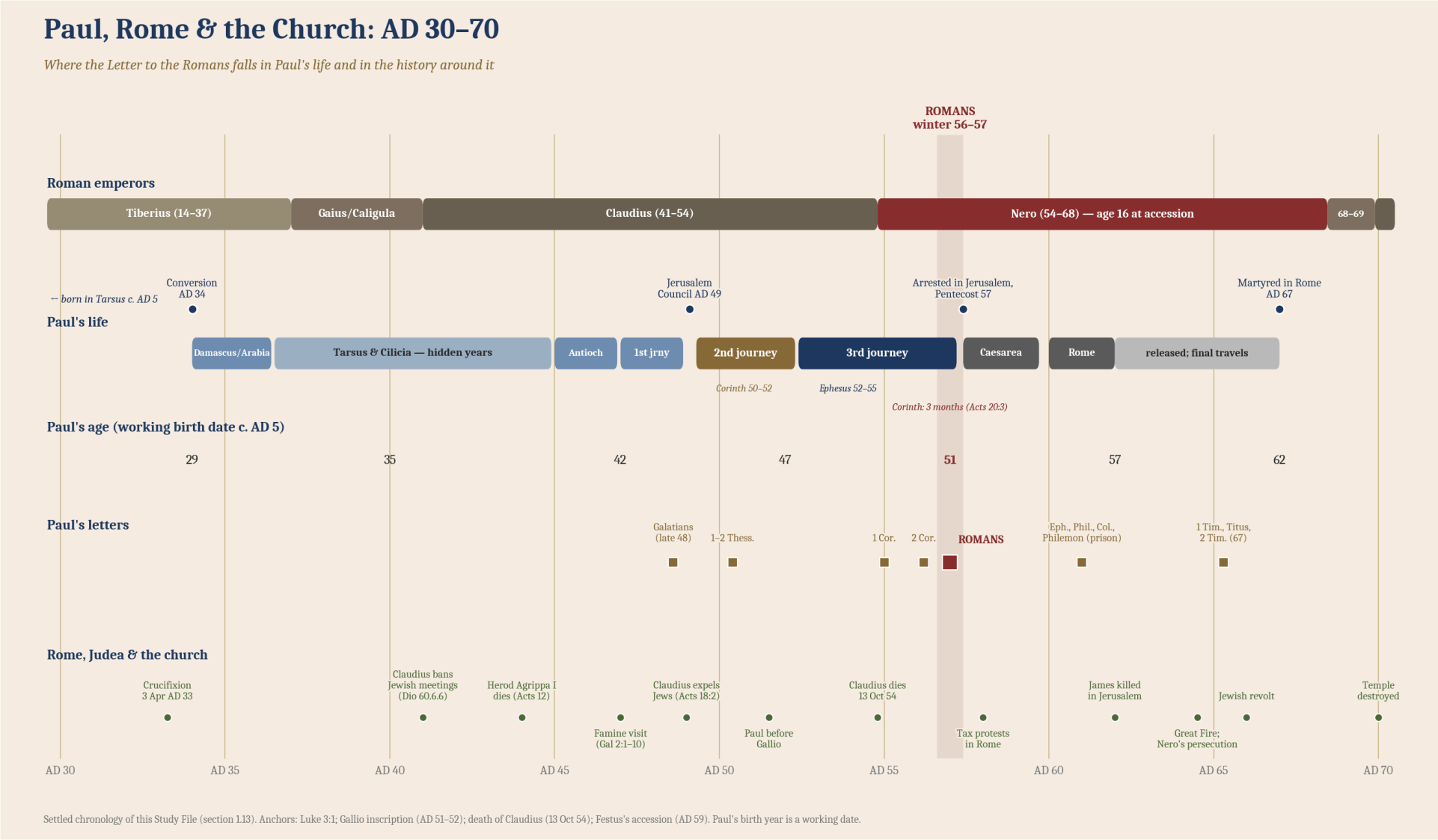
> *"And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage."*
>
> **Acts 28:15**

Stop on that. **Those are the people who had received this letter three years earlier.** They walked thirty and forty miles down the Appian Way to meet a prisoner they had never seen, because he had written them this.

He thanked God and took courage. The letter had done its work before he ever arrived.

Ten years later he is executed in Rome (AD 67).

Paul, Rome and the church: AD 30–70



Where the letter to the Romans falls in Paul's life and in the history around it. Anchors for the chronology: Luke 3:1; the Gallio inscription (AD 51–52); the death of Claudius (13 October 54); Festus's accession (AD 59). Paul's birth year is a working date.

PART FOUR

Closing

We have not reached the first verse yet. We have only cleared the ground in front of it — the book, the city, the church, and the man.

Next Sunday we take Romans 1:1–7 whole, the one long sentence, and the phrase at the centre of Paul's purpose in writing: **the obedience of faith.**

Between now and then, do the one thing this letter asks of you, which is to read it.

READ THIS BOOK

1. **Faithfully**
2. **Meditatively**
3. **Letting the Holy Spirit lead you, guide you, and transform you**

Next Sunday, October 25: Romans 1:1–7.

FOR THE WEEKS AHEAD

Reading Romans — a path through the six movements

This is not a schedule to keep up with. It is a path, broken at the letter's own seams rather than at convenient stopping places, so that each sitting holds a whole thought.

Sixteen readings. Take them at whatever pace you can actually hold — one a day, or one every few days. **Finishing slowly beats quitting on time.**

DAY	MOVEMENT	READ
1	**Introduction**	1:1–17
2	**The fall**	1:18–32
3		2:1–29
4		3:1–20
5	**The gospel**	3:21–31
6		4:1–25
7		5:1–21
8		6:1–23
9		7:1–25
10		8:1–39
11	**Israel**	9:1–33
12		10:1–21
13		11:1–36
14	**Lived out**	12:1–13:14
15		14:1–15:13
16	**Closing**	15:14–16:27

THEN READ IT AGAIN

Romans does not open on one pass. Read it through, then start over. The second time through, the arguments you fought with the first time begin to come apart in your hands and show you what they are made of.

Ask one question of every paragraph: **what does this tell me about God?** Not first about me. About Him. The letter is built that way, and reading it that way is what changes a person.

HONESTY ABOUT THE HISTORY

A note on the numbers

Ancient history hands us fewer firm figures than we would like. It is worth knowing which is which.

Settled in this study

The crucifixion on Friday, 3 April AD 33; Paul's conversion in AD 34; Romans written at Corinth in the winter of 56–57; Paul's execution in AD 67. These rest on fixed anchors — Luke 3:1, the Gallio inscription, the death of Claudius on 13 October 54.

A working date

Paul's birth, around AD 5. Every age given for him in this booklet depends on it, so read them as "about."

Widely held reconstructions

Rome's population of 800,000–1,000,000; roughly 45–60 million under Roman rule; about one person in five in Italy enslaved; 42,000–46,000 tenement blocks. These are modern estimates built from fragments. No ancient census survives.

An estimate only

The number of believers in Rome — around a thousand or fewer. No ancient source gives a figure.

Tradition only

Prisca's house-church on the Aventine.

SO YOU CAN CHECK IT AND GO FURTHER

Sources

Scripture

All quotations from the English Standard Version. Quotations are given whole, with their qualifiers, rather than clipped.

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Gaius, *Institutes* 1.52. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 155. Juvenal, *Satire* 3. Cassius Dio 60.6.6.

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The church in Rome

P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus* (2003), Part 2. R. Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia, 2007). J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (3rd ed., 2002).

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Augustine, *Confessions* VIII.12. Luther, Preface to the Latin Writings (1545). Tyndale, prologue to Romans (Worms, 1526; revised 1534). Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative* (1737). Wesley, *Journal*, 24 May 1738.

Chronology and maps

Dates follow the settled chronology of this study's Romans file. Coastlines on the maps: GSHHS via Basemap. Routes and frontiers are approximate and schematic.

REDEEMING GRACE CHURCH

“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.”

ROMANS 1:16

We exist to bring glory to God by making,
maturing, and multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ.

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Charts and maps prepared for the Romans study, October 2026.
This booklet accompanies the message preached on October 18, 2026, and follows its order.