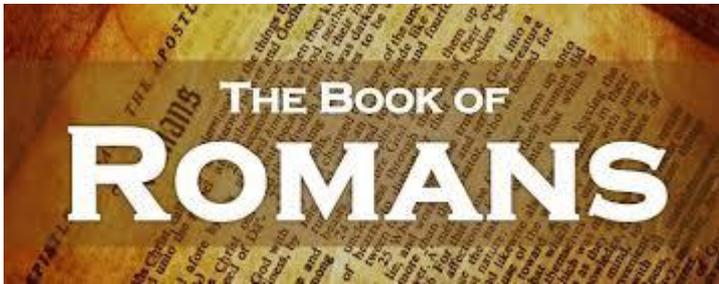


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Romans from a Messianic Jewish Perspective

To my cousin Claudia, her marvelous talent for writing, and her tremendous heart for God have given her a wonderful lifelong ministry to her family and students. They have been blessed to know her and learn from this amazing woman, full of grace and truth.



If you had to pick one book that is foundational to Messianic **Jewish** theology, it is the book of **Romans**. Much of it is from rabbinic theology that you don't often hear.

Author

The consensus of biblical scholars universally agree that **Paul** is the author of **Romans**. Even the ancient heretics admitted **Romans** was written by **him**. So, do the modern (nineteenth century and later) radical German critics, who deny many other facts in the Scriptures. **Paul** identified **himself** as the author by name, of course (**1:1**), but that is no guarantee of the acceptance of **his** authorship, since **he** did that in all **his** letters, including those for which **his** authorship is questioned or denied. In **Romans**, **Paul** referred to **himself** by name only once, in contrast with several of **his** other letters; but a number of other internal details support **Paul's** authorship. **He** claimed to be of **the tribe of Benjamin (11:1)**. **He** sent greetings to **Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3)**, whom **Paul** had met in **Corinth (Acts 18:2-3)** and left in **Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19)** on **his** second missionary journey. **Paul** referred to **his** journey to **Jerusalem** with the love gift from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (**Romans 15:25-27**), facts confirmed in the book of **Acts (19:21, 20:1-5, 21:15 and 17-19)** and the epistles to the **Corinthians (First Corinthians 16:1-5; Second Corinthians 8:1-12, 9:1-5)**. And **Paul** mentioned

several times **his** intention to visit **Rome (Romans 1:10-13 and 15, 15:22-32)**, a fact also confirmed in the book of **Acts (19:21)**. These confirming coincidences between **Romans** and **Acts** in particular support **Paul** as the author of this letter.¹

Unity

Acceptance of the unity and integrity of **Romans** is another matter, however. A number of critics, from Marcion to the present have questioned **Chapters 15** and **16** or parts of both as belonging to the letter. **Chapter 16** is a special target, in part because of **Paul's** greetings to **Pricilla** and **Aquila** who were last seen settled in **Ephesus (Acts 18:19 and 26)**. But the couple had previously lived in **Rome (Acts 18:2)** and had left only because of an imperial decree. Their return to **Rome** when circumstances permitted is reasonable. The major Greek manuscripts support the unity of the letter, a position endorsed by the overwhelming consensus of scholarship.² Therefore, we must conclude that the letter that **Paul** wrote to **Rome** contained all sixteen chapters found in modern texts and translations.

Place and Date

Romans was written in 57 AD from Corinth, before **Paul** had even visited **Rome**.

The Use of the Complete Jewish Bible

Because I am writing this commentary on the book of **Roman** from a **Jewish** perspective, I will be using *the Complete Jewish Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

The use of ADONAI

Long before **Yeshua's** day, the word **ADONAI** had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God's** personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yod-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton**, meaning the four-letter name of **the LORD**, and this remains the rule in most modern **Jewish** settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** where **YHVH** is meant. In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His** name became so sacred to them that they started to

substitute the phrase *the Name*, instead of writing or pronouncing **His** Name. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His** Name were lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no syllables. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*.

The use of TaNaKh

The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for “Torah”), **N** (for “Nevi'im,” the Prophets), and **K** (for “Ketuvim,” the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term “Old Covenant” implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Jesus Himself** said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB)**. I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** instead of the phrase the Old Testament, throughout this devotional commentary.

The Use of the phrase, “the righteous of the TaNaKh,” rather than using Old Testament saints

Messianic synagogues, and the **Jewish** messianic community in general, never use the phrase Old Testament saints. From a **Jewish** perspective, they prefer to use the phrase, “righteous of **the TaNaKh**.” Therefore, I will be using “the righteous of **the TaNaKh**,” rather than Old Testament saints throughout this devotional commentary.

Theological Values

The book of **Romans** is the first systematic theology in history. **Messiah** is the theological ground and starting point of the letter. **Paul's** understanding of **Messiah** is the only topic broad enough to unify **his** various emphases. And, though no paragraph is devoted to the **Messiah** per se in the doctrinal portion of the letter, we must not neglect the importance of **Romans 1:3-4**, where **Paul** describes the content of **his** gospel in terms of **Messiah**. Other passages point to the need for **justification (3:21-26)** and its universal illustrations (**5:12-21**). In fact, all the topics in the letter are grounded in **Yeshua Messiah**. This was so basic in **Paul's**

teaching, and was so clearly understood in the early church, that **he** could assume that the believers in the church at **Rome** shared the same conviction. In this sense, while the *Messiahship* of **Yeshua** is expressed as a *topic*, it is the basis for everything in the letter.

Audience

Troubled by conflicts in **Rome** between **Gentile** disciples and the **Jewish** community, **Sha'ul/Paul** (to see link click [Ag - Paul, a Slave of Messiah Yeshua](#)) focuses in the book of **Romans** on how **God's** promises to **the people of Isra'el** relate to **Gentiles** who had come to faith in **Messiah**. The book is intended to help **them** understand the unbelief of the majority of **Jews**, **God's** continuing work with **Isra'el**, the **Jewish** roots of the gospel, the full inclusion of **Gentiles** as **children of Abraham**, and the necessity of serving **the Jewish people**.

There was history between the **Gentile** disciples in **Rome** and the **Jewish** community. Many of the **Gentiles** who came to believe in **Yeshua** had previously been **God-fearers** (see the commentary on [Acts Bb - An Ethiopian Asks about Isaiah 53](#)). Some **Jews** from the synagogues became Messianic **Jews** and were part of the same congregations as these **Gentiles**. In fact, the founders of the congregations may have been Messianic **Jews**.

Yet as the **Roman** congregations grew, so did resentment toward the **Jewish** community. The **Roman** government regarded the **Way (Acts 9:2)** as a subgroup of Judaism, and almost certainly regarded **Gentile** followers of **Yeshua** as proselytes and adherents of the **Jewish** sect. It is possible that some **Jewish** leaders – who were in no way Pharisees or connected with Pharisaism – did not accept those **Gentiles** as members of the **Jewish** community. This led to resentment and arrogance, in which some **Gentile** followers of **Yeshua** questioned whether **Jews** could really be **the chosen ones**. **Sha'ul's** answer was, and is, positive and decisive: **God has repudiated His people? Heaven forbid (11:1)**. **YHVH** has not set aside **His people** and resentment has no place in **God's** Kingdom. **The Messiah** is a servant of **the Jewish people (15:8)**, as are **His** Roman followers. **The Jewish people** remain **ADONAI's beloved (11:28-29)**, and being **in Messiah** means the **Gentiles** in **Yeshua** are forever attached to **Isra'el**.³ Understanding the book of **Romans** properly depends on determining at what times **Paul** was talking to the **Jews**, talking to the **Gentiles**, and talking generally to everyone in the church at Rome.

Purpose

While **Phoebe's** projected trip to **Rome (16:2)** was undoubtedly the specific occasion for **Paul's** writing this letter, **he** had several objectives in writing. The most obvious was to announce **his** plans to visit **Rome** after **his** return to **Jerusalem (Romans 15:24, 28-29; Acts 19:21)** and to prepare the community of believers there for **his** coming. The believers in **Rome** had been on **Paul's** heart and prayer list for a long time (**1:9-10**) and **his** desire to visit them and to minister to them, unfulfilled to this point, was finally about to be satisfied (**1:11-15, 15:22-23, 29, 32**). Therefore, **Paul** wanted to inform them of **his** plans and to have them anticipate and pray for their fulfillment (**15:30-32**).

A second purpose **Paul** had for writing this letter was to present a complete and detailed statement of the gospel message **he** proclaimed. **Paul** was **eager to proclaim the Good News also to you who live in Rome (1:15)** and **he** wanted them to know what it was. As a result, in this letter **Paul** accomplished what **Jude** desired to do **to write to you about the salvation we share (Jude 3a)**. Perhaps **Jude** was kept from doing this because **Paul** already had, for **Romans** certainly is a very full and logical presentation of **the Triune Godhead's** plan of salvation for human beings from its beginning in man's condemnation in sin to its consummation in their sharing eternity in **God's** presence, conformed to the image of **God's Son, the Lord Yeshua Messiah**.

A third purpose for writing this letter is not as obvious as the first two. It is related to the tension between the **Jewish** and **Gentile** segments in the church at **Rome**, and possible conflict between them. **Paul** was hounded in his ministry by **Judaizers** (see the commentary on [Galatians Ag - Who Were the Judaizers?](#)), who followed **him** from city to city and sought to lead **his** converts away from the liberty in the gospel (**Galatians 5:1**). The letter to the **Galatians** is **Paul's** classic, though not **his** only, response to **the Judaizers**. **Their** attacks on **Paul** incorporated physical violence about the time this letter to **the Romans** was written (**Acts 20:3**). Whether **the Judaizers** had reached **Rome** before **Paul** or not, the **Jew-verses-Gentile** issue looms large in this letter. **Paul** did not take sides, but **he** carefully set forth both sides of the question. On the one hand, **he** emphasized the historical and chronological priority of **the Jews - to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile (1:16)**. **He** also stressed **the advantage . . . in being a Jew (3:1-2, 9:4-5)**.

On the other hand, **Paul** pointed out that **since there is only one God (3:30)**. In contrast with the historical period covered by the TaNaKh, when the **Jews** alone were **God's chosen people**, now, united with **the Messiah** of **Isra'el**, believing **Gentiles** and **Jews** are fully equal members of **God's people** with respect to salvation. **He** is the **God** of the **Gentiles** as well as the **God** of the **Jews (3:39)**. As a result, **Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin (3:9)** and alike are saved by faith in **the Lord Yeshua Messiah** and **His** redemptive and propitiatory sacrifice. Furthermore, in order to bring believing **Gentiles** into **His** program of salvation, extending **His** grace to all human beings, **God** temporarily halted **His** specific program for **Isra'el** as a chosen nation, since that nation through its official leaders and as a whole had rejected in unbelief **God's Son** as **the Messiah**. During this period **God** continues to have a believing **remnant chosen by grace (11:5)** until the full number of the **Gentiles** has come in **(11:25)** and **God** takes up again and fulfills **His** promises to **Isra'el** as a nation.

Related to **the Jewish-Gentile** tension that runs throughout this letter is a muted but definite undertone that questions **God's** goodness and wisdom and justice as seen in **His** plan of salvation. No complaints against **God** are voiced, but they are implied. As a result, this letter to the **Romans** is more than an exposition of **Paul's gospel of grace (Acts 20:24)**, a declaration of **God's** plan of salvation for all human beings by grace through faith. It is a theodicy, an apologetic for **God**, a defense and vindication of **God's** nature and **His** plan for saving people. It sets **God** forth **to be just and the One who justifies the man who has faith in Yeshua (3:26)**. It exults in **the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (11:33)** and challenges the readers: **Let God be true, and every man a liar.**⁴

Theme

Growing out of **Paul's** three purposes for writing this letter (especially the latter two purposes), is the theme of the work. In the simplest and most general terms it is **the gospel (1:16)**. More specifically it is **a righteousness from God** which is **revealed** in that gospel and is understood and appropriated **by faith from first to last (1:17)**. **The righteousness from God Himself** possesses and manifests in all **His** actions; and second, it is the righteousness that **God** gives to human beings by grace through faith. This involves an imputed righteous standing before **God** (justification) and an imparted righteous practice and a progressively transformed lifestyle, the latter due to the regenerating and indwelling **Ruach Ha'Kodesh**

(regeneration and sanctification). Practice is consummated and conformed to standing (glorification) when a believer in **Yeshua Messiah** through death and resurrection or through translation - **our adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies (8:23)** - stands in the presence of **God, conformed to the likeness of His Son (8:29)**. **God's** program of salvation for people will not fail because it is **His** work, and **He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Messiah Yeshua (Philippians 1:6)**.⁵