

An Introduction To Romans

I embarked on my study of Romans in around March 2016, but swiftly found myself doing various other studies simultaneously, as I attempted to fill in the historical backdrop necessary to properly understanding the book. By May I had completed the studies of the first two chapters, when a variety of circumstances befell me, and I found it necessary to put the studies on hold. A year later, in May 2017, I am finally in a position to start up again. Standing back from the book has helped me, as really I feel the bigger picture more overwhelmingly than ever before.

The Bible, to me, is really all about God's relationship with his creation, mankind, (and all the rest of his creation). By understanding the relationship, we are able to understand God's mind, and in understanding God's mind, we learn to understand what he wants for us human beings, that of course being what is best for us. The Bible is not only about Israel and the Church, but a great deal of this relationship between God and man is seen through the particular story of first the Israelite people, and then the Church.

I do not want to get into a complete overview of the Bible here, so I will try and keep it succinct. Around three thousand nine hundred years ago, God called Abraham, and out of Abraham came Jacob, (through Isaac), and Jacob's name was then changed to Israel, and he fathered the 12 tribes of Israel. The Israelite people then spent around 400 years in captivity, latterly in Egypt, before escaping and coming to the border of the land God had promised Abraham 400 years previously, modern day Palestine. In 1447BC on Mount Sinai, God gave the laws of Israel to Moses. These defined how Israel was to operate as a society. In 1407BC the next generation of Israelites entered the land, and Israel ceased to be a nation in the wilderness, and became a nation with a land, and a legal system written by God himself. God actually never wanted this kind of arrangement; he wanted a personal relationship with people at an individual level, but the Israelites were not able to handle that idea, and so God gave them a written code to show them right from wrong. Over the next 1500 years the Israelites repeatedly failed God, and also fell into apostasy and worshipped other gods. God had warned them against this, but nonetheless they ended up worshipping the gods of the peoples around them, and this violated the agreement (the old covenant) and appalled God. An example of apostasy would be the worshipping of Molech and the practice of child sacrifice through immolation.

After King Solomon's death in 931BC God split Israel into two component parts, on account of Solomon's terrible apostasy. The Kingdom became the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The Southern Kingdom was for the tribe of Judah. King David was a Judean, and Solomon likewise. As the Levites had already all left the Northern Kingdom also, and made Jerusalem their headquarters, they were automatically included with the tribe of Judah. The Levites of course had no land allocation and were originally dispersed throughout Israel. God also allied the tribe of Benjamin with Judah, so they also resided in the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom was comprised of the rest of the tribes of Israel. Reuben was Jacob's oldest son, but he had been disqualified from inheriting the Birthright, and so Jacob handed it on to both

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Joseph and Judah. He actually divided the Headship of the family from the Birthright, so Judah inherited the Kingship, but Joseph inherited the birthright. This meant that the name of Israel was Joseph's, (and then Ephraim's), inheritance. So the Northern Kingdom retained the name of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom became Judea.

Two hundred or so years later God tired of the apostasy of the Northern Kingdom, so he basically de-covenanted them; he divorced them and ended the covenant with them. They were scattered by the Assyrians into foreign lands, with just a tiny few remaining in Israel. At this point the Jews, plus the Levites and Benjaminites, became the torch-bearers for the covenanted people, and the sole Israelites left. [However, God did also promise to remarry the divorced Israelites, so the picture is somewhat complicated. This remarriage took place when Christ came. Of this more anon.]

The Northern Kingdom was divorced and scattered in 721BC, which then meant the entire focus of God's relationship with his covenanted people, from 721BC until Christ, was the Kingdom Of Judah, that is: the Jews, Benjaminites and Levites. When we get to Paul's writings, we will see that he frequently uses two, three, or even more, definitions of the same entity. However, we really need to understand that generally he refers to Jews, Benjaminites and Levites as Jews, i.e. as citizens of Judah. (The Jews also were Israelites, clearly.)

I suppose we can now safely start talking about the nub of the matter. By dividing Israel into two entities, God handed Ephraim-Israel, (the Northern Kingdom), and Judah, (the Southern Kingdom), very different destinies. Ephraim by being de-covenanted was no longer under the Law. Only the Jews therefore remained under the Law. Ephraim had already been punished for apostasy, and the punishment had been their scattering and removal from the land of Israel, and having no further part in being Israelites, until that time when God would remarry them, which occurred with Christ. The Jews however had not been punished for apostasy, and were free to learn from the example of the Northern Kingdom, and get right with God. However that did not happen. They too fell into apostasy, and God sent the prophets to warn them, most notably Jeremiah who was the last call. But they refused to heed the prophets, and in 608BC time ran out, and they came under judgement. Unlike Ephraim, who was de-covenanted, Judah was put under the full force of the Law. This distinction is vital to our understanding of Romans.

I have explained in great length the timeline of God's judgement on Judah, in my explanation of Daniel's 70 weeks. I will re-iterate it here.

In 608BC Judah went into exile in Babylon. (Daniel was amongst the first exiles).

In 538BC King Cyrus ended the exile, and Judah returned to the land. The 70 weeks of judgement then began.

The 490 years of judgement are however interrupted, and so they actually last 610 years. Therefore the 490 years runs from 538BC to AD73. This is very important to understand, and

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anyone who teaches otherwise is most likely in error!

This means that the final climactic week of Daniel's weeks was the 7 years from AD66-73. This was of course the 7 year war when Rome annihilated Judah and destroyed Jerusalem. This final week was the culmination of everything written in the Law. It was the Law exacting justice. Those who believed in Christ came out from under the Law through the mercy of Christ, but those who rejected Christ cursed themselves as they put themselves under the judgement of the Law.

So when Jesus said that not one jot or tittle would pass from the Law til all was fulfilled, what he meant was that the judgement of Jerusalem and Judah still remained. The Law was fulfilled with the destruction of Judah. Likewise when God said to Jesus to sit at his right hand until he had put his enemies under his feet, it meant until Christ's enemies, (non-believing Jews), had been destroyed in AD66-73, the final week of Daniel. I will do a more fulsome study of this another time. What is most pertinent when we come to Romans is to understand when Paul is writing and who he is writing too.

Written circa AD61, shortly before his death, Paul's letter to the Romans is really God presenting the case against all of unbelieving Israel under the Old Covenant; that is, the Jews, (which, just to complicate matters, really means Jews, Benjaminites and Levites). It is the case for the prosecution, and Paul is the chief prosecutor. If you understand this, and that the letter is directly about apostate Jewry, the people who had rejected the prophets, killed Christ, and still refused to repent, and that God is acting according to his character, which is that he loves justice, and justice demands a proper court procedure, then you will be able to grasp the core purpose of the Book.

Of course this understanding requires the right framework, which is that the Old Covenant expired in AD73, and not before, and that for a period of 40 years the Old and New Covenants co-existed. It is a dangerous thing to claim to be 100% right, but I strongly believe this is the correct way to understand the Law, Daniel's 70 weeks, and the destruction of Jerusalem.

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