



Reading of the Epistle to the Romans

Good to know

1. The Epistle to the Romans, a title that evokes the powerful empire that had dominated the western world. For people in Paul's time, Rome was the center of the world in every sense of the word: in the fields of law, culture, power, and knowledge. A letter to this educated audience must therefore have been impressive.
2. The Epistle to the Romans is concise and consistent with its explanation of the Christian faith. Few people can claim to have mastered this book. Yet, great revivals in the history of the Church have occurred as a result of studying this book. The spiritual revivals of Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley all originated in the reading of Romans.
3. Chapter 1, verses 16 and 17, which is Paul's main message to the Romans, forever changed Martin Luther's life. When Luther finally understood the phrase « the righteousness of God, » he said, « As I read this word, I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven. »
4. The Epistle to the Romans is the fifth one written by Paul, after 1 Corinthians. It was written in Corinth during Paul's third visit to that city (2 Cor. 13:1). It rightly occupies the first place among the Epistles, for it is the one which, throughout the New Testament, gives the most complete exposition of the fundamental truths of Christianity.
5. Paul had written the Epistle to the Romans as he traveled to raise funds to help the hungry. Another letter (ref. 2 Cor. 8) gives more details about this charitable mission for the Jews in Jerusalem. Paul's action is an example of unity for a church made up of Jews and non-Jews, a unity needed for groups ravaged by the divisions described in Romans 14.
6. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul brilliantly lays the foundations of all Christian doctrine, which at that time was still transmitted orally from city to city. Indeed, he wanted to convince these demanding readers that Christ had the answer to all the important questions of life.
7. Paul had enjoyed the legal protection of the Roman Empire in most of his ministry. The first generation of Christians had enjoyed freedom of worship and legal protection just as the Jews. But, soon afterwards, emperors such as Nero cruelly attacked the Christians, torturing and massacring thousands of them, probably including Paul himself, who was beheaded.