



ROMANS

Know the Truth

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NLT Study Series: Romans

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SERIES FOREWORD

The purpose of the *NLT Study Series* is to call individuals and groups into serious conversation with God and engagement with his word.

We have designed these studies to provide you and your group with a complete, new Bible study experience. Our aim has been to help you engage seriously with the Bible's content, interacting with it in a meaningful and deeply personal way, not just regurgitating rote answers to fill-in-the-blank questions or producing purely subjective opinions. We also hope to encourage true community study with the honest sharing of different perspectives and experiences. Most of all, we want to help foster your direct communication with God, encouraging you to tell God what is on your mind and heart. We want to help you understand what God is teaching you and apply it to the realities of personal and community life.

To this end, each study in the *NLT Study Series* includes twelve weeks of individual and group studies focusing on understanding the meaning of the text of Scripture, reflecting on it personally and with others, and responding actively to what God is saying to you through it.

Each volume of the *NLT Study Series* can be used by itself, with no other resources, but you can also use it with your Bible of choice. Each volume of the *NLT Study Series* includes, along with the twelve-week study, one book of the *NLT Study Bible*, with both the text of Scripture and all of the study aids alongside it. The *NLT Study Bible* was designed to open up the world of the Bible and to make the meaning and significance of Scripture clear, so it makes a great personal and small-group study resource.

It is our hope and prayer that these studies will help you and those in your group to understand God's word more clearly, to walk with God more fully, and to grow with one another in relationship with our God.

Open my eyes to see

the wonderful truths in your instructions. PSALM 119:18

Come . . . let us walk in the light of the LORD! ISAIAH 2:5

Sean A. Harrison
General Editor

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INTRODUCTION TO THE Romans Study

IN ROMANS PAUL EXPLAINS the Good News about Jesus Christ. “It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile” (Rom 1:16). William Tyndale, one of the earliest and greatest English Bible translators, once said that Romans is “a light and a way in unto the whole scripture,” and that “the more it is studied the easier it is, the more it is chewed the pleasanter it is, . . . so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein.”¹

Paul addresses a number of questions and problems based on the Good News and its implications. What should we think about the Torah, God’s law? What is the status of the Jewish people? What is the role of the Holy Spirit? Should we feel free to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols and then sold in the public market? As you read, ask how each of the passages is related to “the Good News about Christ” (Rom 1:16). Keeping the Good News in mind as the central theme of the letter will help you understand what Paul is communicating in each of the parts of the letter.

Romans, like all of Paul’s writings, is a letter to a specific group of Christians. In the first week of your study, you will read the introduction to Romans from the *NLT Study Bible*. Read it carefully and thoughtfully. Pay close attention to the “Setting,” which explains the situation in which Romans was written. Read the “Summary” and “Purpose” sections to form in your mind the big picture of the letter. Then, as you work through the rest of Romans, refer back to the introduction periodically—particularly the “Purpose” and “Summary”—to remind yourself of the big picture and of Paul’s purpose in writing the section you are currently studying.

Romans is not easy. There are, certainly, passages that speak directly and clearly. “We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God,” says Paul in Rom 8:28, and we who believe him find encouragement as we go through difficulty. Likewise, we are comforted when we see our own sin for what it is and then read, “There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Such passages are clear and precious.

Other passages are difficult to grasp, as Paul reasons precisely and methodically in support of his points. This study will challenge you to work through Paul’s reasoning and arguments, and it will reward your perseverance.

“To grapple with Romans is to engage in dialogue with one of the most creative theological minds of all time from the most creative period of Christian thought.”² Wrestle with Paul, seek to grasp what he is saying, and argue with him when you need to. Engage in vigorous dialogue with Paul and with God as you study Romans.

May you find Romans to be “a light and a way,” full of precious and great treasure. May God give you a fuller understanding, through Romans, of how the Good News about Christ “is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes.”

Sean A. Harrison
Wheaton, Illinois
April 2009

¹ From the prologue to Romans in the Tyndale New Testament (1534 edition), quoted in F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 9.

² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), xiii.

How to Use This Study

THE PRIMARY WAY we recommend using this Bible study guide is for personal daily meditation and study, along with weekly fellowship and discussion.

The introductory session (p. A13) is designed to launch the group study. Group participants need not prepare for this session, but the leader is encouraged to work through it in advance in order to be able to guide the group effectively. The introductory session provides orientation to the Letter to the Romans, and gives a taste of what the daily and weekly study will be like for the following twelve weeks.

Each week, there are five personal daily studies plus a group session. You can use the daily study guide for your personal daily conversation with God, or you can use it around the table with your family.

You don't need to participate in a weekly group meeting in order to use this study guide. For instance, you can just do the study individually, working through the daily studies and then using the weekly group session as a time of reflection.

Similarly, you don't have to use the study on a daily basis in order to benefit from using it in a group setting. You can just do the study with the group each week by reading the passages, thinking about the discussion questions, and participating in the group discussion.

Ultimately, it's between you and God how you use this study. The more you put into it, the more you will get out of it. If you are meeting with a group, we encourage you to decide together what your level of commitment will be, and then encourage each other to stick with it. Then keep up your part of your commitment to the group.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DAILY STUDY

Each daily study is designed to be completed within 15 minutes, but optional "Further Study" is usually provided for those who want to go into greater depth.

Start the daily study by reading the passage recommended for each day. Reflect on what it means, and write down your questions and thoughts about it.

You can use the space provided in the book to write thoughts and answers to questions. If you find that you need more space, we recommend purchasing a small blank book with lined paper to use as a Bible study journal. Use the journal to write your answers to the reflection questions, your own thoughts about the passage, what you think God is saying to you, and your prayers to God about what you have studied.

The NLT Study Series is designed to be used with the *NLT Study Bible*. The letter to the Romans from the *NLT Study Bible* is included for your reading and study. You can also use the *NLT Study Bible* itself, either the print edition or the online version at www.nltstudybible.com. The included section of the *NLT Study Bible* retains its page numbering, so the study guide can be used to refer to either the included section or the *NLT Study Bible* itself.

It can be helpful to highlight or mark the Bible text and study materials where they answer your questions or speak to you in some way. You can:

- underline, circle, or highlight significant words and phrases,
- put brackets around sections of text,
- write keywords in the margin to indicate a topic,
- write page numbers cross-referencing the study guide,
- write dates cross-referencing your journal entries.

Finally, talk with God about what you are learning and how you are responding to it, but also take time to listen to him and hear what he might be saying to you through it. Cultivate your relationship with God day by day.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GROUP STUDY

When the group comes together, read the entire passage for the week together, then spend some time letting each person share their own dialogue with God and the Bible that week: insights they've gained, questions they have, and so on.

Then use the discussion questions to stimulate the discussion for that week. You don't have to do all of the questions—you can pick just one.

When the discussion is winding down, spend some time reflecting on what God is saying to you as a group, and how you are going to respond to what God is saying. Spend some time praying together about these things.

Finally, take a look at the passage for the coming week, and make sure everyone understands what they will be doing in preparation for the next meeting of the group.

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

The Power of God

SESSION GOALS

- Get oriented to the letter to the Romans.
- Discuss what members hope to learn and how we hope to grow in this study.
- Introduce how we are going to be studying together.
- Answer any questions about how to begin.
- Commit ourselves to the Lord and to each other, to participate to the best of our ability.

GETTING ORIENTED TO THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Answer the following questions, either individually, or in discussion together with your group.

What do you know about the apostle Paul? Can you recall any events from his life in the Bible?

What do you know about Paul's letter to the Romans? Can you recall any key verses from the book?

What particular issues are you struggling with in your spiritual life?

How do you hope to grow spiritually from your study of the letter to the Romans?

READING: ROMANS 1:16-17

Read Rom 1:16-17 aloud; if you're in a group, choose one reader. Read slowly, clearly, thoughtfully. What questions or observations do you have after reading this passage?

STUDY

In what way is the Good News "the power of God at work"? How is this message powerful?

Why does Paul say that the Good News is for “the Jew first and also the Gentile?”
(See also 2:9-11.)

What, according to the study note on Rom 1:17, does it mean to be “right in [God’s] sight”? How do we obtain this status?

REFLECTION

Are you right in God’s sight? How do you know?

What might God be saying to you through Rom 1:16-17?

QUESTIONS

Do you have questions about doing the daily study or preparing for the next meeting?

PRAYER

Take turns praying about this Bible study and the next twelve weeks. You can tell God what your thoughts and questions are, and ask him for his help, strength, insight. You can thank him for this Bible study and for the Bible itself. You can ask him to speak to you and to the others in the group. The leader, in closing, can also commit this study to God.

WEEK
ONE

*Good News
and Bad*

INTRODUCTION;
ROMANS
1:1-32

OUTLINE



DAY 1 ... Romans Introduction

DAY 2 ... Romans 1:1-7

DAY 3 ... Romans 1:8-17

DAY 4 ... Romans 1:18-23

DAY 5 ... Romans 1:24-32

Group Session

DAY 1 ♦ Romans Introduction

READING: ROMANS INTRODUCTION, pp. 1888–1892

Begin with prayer, asking God to give you insight, understanding, and an open heart to listen to and follow his word.

STUDY

Read the “Setting” (p. 1888). Why do you think it was important for Paul to address the division between Jewish and Gentile Christians?

Read the “Summary” (pp. 1889–1890). What is the unifying theme of the letter? How does Paul develop this theme throughout the letter?

Read “Paul’s Purpose in Writing” (pp. 1890–1891). What were Paul’s purposes in writing Romans?

FURTHER STUDY (Optional)

Read the “Interpretation” section (pp. 1891–1892). Do the two schools of thought concerning Romans conflict or harmonize? Is one or the other of them right? Neither? Both? Please explain.

REFLECTION

What questions does the Romans introduction answer for you? What questions does it raise?

What do you think God is saying to you through your study of the Romans introduction?

PRAYER

Talk to God about what you have read, any questions or concerns you might have, and what you think he might be saying to you today. You can write your prayer here if you wish.

DAY 2 ♦ Romans 1:1-7

READING: ROMANS 1:1-7

Begin with prayer, asking God to give you insight, understanding, and an open heart to listen to and follow his word.

STUDY

What did Paul mean in saying that he was “a slave of Christ Jesus” (1:1)? When and how was Paul “chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News”? Why are these claims important for his letter to the Romans?

Why is it significant that God’s Son was “born into King David’s family line” (1:3-4)? How did Jesus’ resurrection show him “to be the Son of God”?

How do people receive grace and peace from God (1:7)? How does this grace and peace change their lives and experiences?

FURTHER STUDY (Optional)

The Greek word for “called” (*klētos*), according to the word study dictionary in the *NLT Study Bible*, means “an invitation to someone to accept responsibilities for a particular task or a new relationship. God calls/invites the believer to relationship with him or to a particular role in his Kingdom.” Also read Matt 22:14; Rom 8:28; 11:29; 1 Cor 1:2, 26; Eph 1:18; 4:1; 2 Thes 1:11; 2 Tim 1:9; 2 Pet 1:10; Jude 1:1. How do these passages impact your understanding of what it means to be called to belong to Jesus Christ?

REFLECTION

As described in Rom 1:1-7, what has God done for you?

What do you think God is saying to you personally through Rom 1:1-7?

PRAYER

Talk to God about what you have read, any questions or concerns you might have, and what you think he might be saying to you today. You can write your prayer here if you wish.

DAY 3 ♦ Romans 1:8-17

READING: ROMANS 1:8-17

Begin with prayer, asking God to give you insight, understanding, and an open heart to listen to and follow his word.

STUDY

Paul usually includes a thanksgiving and prayer for his readers near the beginning of his letters. In 1:8, about what does he give thanks for the Roman Christians? What does he pray for them?

How would Paul's visiting the Roman Christians encourage each of them (1:10-12)?

What did Paul hope to accomplish with his visit to the Romans (1:13-15)?

How does 1:16-17 fit into the flow of what Paul is saying in ch 1? When Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of this Good News," what in this context would bring him to say that?

FURTHER STUDY (Optional)

The Greek word for "gift" in 1:11 is *charisma*. The definition of this word in the back of the *NLT Study Bible* says, "This noun refers to a gift generously and freely given as an expression of the giver's favor. In the NT, it often refers to spiritual gifts given by God to believers for various purposes within the body of Christ." Also read Rom 12:6; 1 Cor

1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 28; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Pet 4:10. How could Paul give a *charisma* (spiritual gift) to the Roman Christians?

REFLECTION

If Paul were to visit you or your community, what spiritual gift or blessing would he bring to you? How can you receive that same gift or blessing from God now?

What do you think God is saying to you through your study of Rom 1:8-17?

PRAYER

Talk to God about what you have read, any questions or concerns you might have, and what you think he might be saying to you today. You can write your prayer here if you wish.

DAY 4 ♦ Romans 1:18-23

READING: ROMANS 1:18-23

Begin with prayer, asking God to give you insight, understanding, and an open heart to listen to and follow his word.

STUDY

According to the study note on Rom 1:18–3:20, Paul “teaches about universal sinfulness” in this section. That sounds like bad news, so why is teaching about universal sinfulness a part of Paul’s explanation of the Good News?

Why, according to 1:18-23, is God angry?

According to 1:19-21, what kinds of things do all people know about God? In what sense do all people “know” God (1:21)? In what sense do they *not* “know” God (1:20)?

In what sense does not worshipping God result in foolishness, according to 1:21-23?

FURTHER STUDY (Optional)

The word for “anger” (Greek *orgē*) is defined in the back of the *NLT Study Bible* as follows: “This noun means a strong feeling of displeasure and antagonism, often the response to a standard being violated. This anger can range from an appropriate response of anger against injustice to sinful, selfish anger.” Also read Mark 3:5; John 3:36; Rom 2:5, 8; Eph 2:3; 4:31; 5:6; Col 3:8; Rev 6:17; 16:19; 19:15.

What similarities and differences are there between God’s anger and human anger?

Read the cross-references on 1:21-23 (Deut 4:15-19; 2 Kgs 17:15; Ps 106:20; Jer 10:14; 1 Cor 1:20; Eph 4:17-18). What do they show you about the connection between worship and wisdom? Between the non-worship of God and foolishness?

REFLECTION

To what extent does Rom 1:18-23 describe you?

What do you think God is saying to you through your study of 1:18-23?

PRAYER

Talk to God about what you have read, any questions or concerns you might have, and what you think he might be saying to you today. You can write your prayer here if you wish.

DAY 5 ♦ Romans 1:24-32

READING: ROMANS 1:24-32

Begin with prayer, asking God to give you insight, understanding, and an open heart to listen to and follow his word.

STUDY

According to 1:24-32, what prompted God to abandon these people? What were the results of God’s abandoning them?

Read through the list of vices in 1:28-31 and think about how some of these things are expressed in people's lives and in society today. Can you give examples from things you have seen or heard? Have you experienced any of these things in your own life?

FURTHER STUDY (Optional)

Read 1:24-27 and the study note on 1:26. What is Paul's point in discussing homosexual activity?

Paul says that certain people "suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved." Is this overly harsh? Do people deserve to suffer? What do you make of this?

REFLECTION

Are you in any danger of experiencing God's abandonment? Why or why not?

What response or action is Rom 1:24-32 calling you to right now?

PRAYER

Talk to God about what you have read, any questions or concerns you might have, and what you think he might be saying to you today. You can write your prayer here if you wish.

GROUP SESSION

READING: ROMANS 1:1-32

Read Rom 1:1-32 together as a group.

DISCUSSION

You can use the following questions to guide what you share in the discussion. Give each person at least one opportunity to share with the others.

What did you learn from Rom 1:1-32? What was one thing that stood out to you as you studied this passage? How did Rom 1:1-32 surprise you? Do you have questions about

this passage or the study materials that haven't been answered? What does God seem to be saying to you through what you have studied?

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

You can choose from among these topics to generate a discussion among the members of your group, or you can write your thoughts about one or more of these topics if you're studying solo.

1. Having studied the introduction and first chapter of Romans, how would you summarize the Good News message?
2. Describe your own relationship with God: What is your story? What is your status with God? In what ways do you know him?
3. For people like those who are described in Rom 1:18-32, is there any hope? Why or why not?

GROUP REFLECTION

What is God saying to us as a group through Rom 1:1-32?

ACTION

What are we going to do, individually or as a group, in response to what God is saying to us?

PRAYER

How should we pray for each other in response to God's message to us in this passage?

Take turns talking to God about this passage and about what he is saying.

NEXT: ROMANS 2:1–3:20 (God's Righteous Judgment and All People's Guilt)

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Romans has been called the greatest theological document ever written. In this letter, the apostle Paul explains the Good News—the climactic revelation of God to the world through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul reflects on the human condition, on the meaning of our lives on earth, and on our hope for the world to come. He constantly moves us back to the fundamentals of God's truth revealed in Christ, and he teaches us to deal with the problems, failures, and disputes that characterize life in this world.

SETTING

We do not know who first brought the Good News to Rome. Perhaps Jews from Rome who were converted when God first poured out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:10) took the message back to their home city. Several "house churches" quickly grew up, made up primarily of converts from Judaism.

In AD 49, the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome—including Jewish Christians (see Acts 18:2). Although Paul had never visited Rome (1:13), in his travels he met some of these Roman Christians, such as Priscilla and Aquila (16:3-4; cp. Acts 18:2).

Claudius's decree eventually lapsed, so by the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, many Jewish Christians had returned to Rome. However, in their absence the Gentile Christians had taken the lead in the Christian community in Rome. Therefore, when Paul wrote to the Roman Christians (probably about AD 57), the Roman Christian community was divided into two major factions. The Gentile Christians now comprised the majority group, and they were naturally less concerned about continuity with the OT or with the demands of the law of Moses than their Jewish brothers and sisters. They even looked down on the Jewish Christians (see 11:25). The minority Jewish Christians, for their

part, reacted to the Gentile-Christian majority by insisting on adherence to certain aspects of the law of Moses. Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians to address this theological and social division, a schism that had at its heart the question of continuity and discontinuity between Jewish and Christian faith.



◀ **The Setting of Romans, about AD 57.** Paul probably wrote Romans toward the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–19:41), perhaps from CORINTH. Paul had the opportunity to visit the Romans, as he hoped (1:10-15)—his third missionary journey ended in JERUSALEM, where he was imprisoned and eventually sent to ROME, where he arrived in AD 60 (Acts 28:11-15).

SUMMARY

In the introduction of the letter (1:1-17), Paul identifies himself and his readers (1:1-7), expresses thanks for the Roman Christians (1:8-15), and introduces the theme of the letter: the “Good News about Christ” (1:16-17).

Before elaborating on this Good News, Paul sets out the dark backdrop of universal human sinfulness that makes the Good News necessary. Both Gentiles (1:18-32) and Jews (2:1-3:8) have turned away from God’s revelation of himself. All are “under the power of sin” and cannot be made right with God by anything they do (3:9-20).

Into this hopeless situation comes the Good News, which reveals a

OUTLINE

1:1-17

The Letter Opening

1:18–4:25

*The Heart of the Gospel:
Justification by Faith*

5:1–8:39

*The Assurance Provided
by the Gospel: The Hope
of Salvation*

9:1–11:36

*The Defense of the Gospel:
The Problem of Israel*

12:1–15:13

*The Transforming
Power of the Gospel:
Christian Conduct*

15:14–16:27

The Letter Closing

new “way to be made right” with God. God provided this new way by sending Jesus as a sacrifice for sin, and all human beings can gain the benefits of that sacrifice by faith (3:21-26). Paul highlights the centrality of faith and its nature in 3:27–4:25. He shows that faith excludes boasting and that it enables both Jews and Gentiles to have equal access to God’s grace in Christ (3:27-31). He develops these same points through reference to Abraham (4:1-25).

In chs 5–8, Paul discusses the assurance or security of salvation. The assurance that believers will share God’s glory (5:1-11) is based on the way in which Jesus Christ more than reversed the terrible effects of Adam’s sin (5:12-21). Neither sin (6:1-23) nor the law (7:1-25) can prevent God from accomplishing his purposes for the believer. The Holy Spirit liberates believers from death (8:1-17) and assures them that the sufferings of this life will not keep them from the glory to which God has destined them (8:18-39).

The Good News can only truly be “good news” if the message of Christ stands in continuity with God’s promises in the OT. But the unbelief of so many Jews might show that God’s promises to Israel are not being fulfilled (9:1-5). So, in chs 9–11, Paul demonstrates that God is being faithful to his promises. God had never promised salvation to all Jews, but only to a remnant (9:6-29). The Jews themselves are responsible for their predicament because they refuse to recognize the fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ (9:30–10:21). Furthermore, God is faithfully preserving a remnant of Jewish believers (11:1-10), and God has still more to accomplish for his people Israel (11:11-36).

The Good News rescues people from the penalty of sin, and it also transforms a person’s life. In 12:1–15:13, Paul turns his attention to the transforming power of the Good News. In keeping with God’s mercies, this transformation demands a whole new way of thinking and living (12:1-2).

TIMELINE

Pentecost, AD 30 or 33
*The birth of the church
in Jerusalem*

about AD 31 or 34
*Probable founding of
the church in Rome*

AD 49
*Emperor Claudius expels
Jews from Rome*

AD 53–57
*Paul’s third missionary
journey*

about AD 57
▶ **Paul writes Romans
from Corinth**

AD 57
*Paul travels to Jerusa-
lem and is arrested*

AD 57–59
*Paul is imprisoned in
Caesarea*

AD 59–60
Paul’s voyage to Rome

AD 60–62
*Paul is imprisoned in
Rome*

AD 62~64
*Paul is released, travels
freely*

July AD 64
Fire destroys Rome

AD 64~65
*Persecution of Christians
under Nero
Peter is crucified in
Rome*

about AD 64~65?
*Paul is imprisoned and
martyred in Rome*

The transformed life will be fleshed out in community harmony (12:3-8), manifestations of love (12:9-21; cp. 13:8-10), and submission to the government (13:1-7). The transformed life derives its power from the work God has already done, as well as from the work he has yet to do (13:11-14).

In 14:1–15:13, Paul tackles a specific issue that was a problem in the church at Rome. Christians were criticizing each other over various practices related to the OT law. Paul exhorts them to accept each other and to look to Christ’s example of self-giving love as the model to emulate.

The letter format of Romans emerges again at the end, where Paul touches on his ministry and travel plans (15:14-33), greets and commends fellow workers and other Christians (16:1-16), and concludes with further references to fellow workers, a final warning, and a doxology (16:17-27).

DATE, PLACE, AND OCCASION OF WRITING

Paul probably wrote Romans during a three-month stay in Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2-3), around AD 57. The reference to Cenchrea in 16:1—a port city next to Corinth—identifies the geography more precisely. By this time, Paul had completed his missionary work in the eastern Mediterranean, and his visit to Jerusalem was imminent.

We can determine the general situation in which Romans was written by reviewing Paul’s references to his prior ministry and his future travel plans (15:14-33). Four geographical references provide the framework: (1) Looking back, Paul declared that he had “fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum” (15:19). Illyricum was a Roman province that occupied the same general area as modern-day Serbia and Croatia. Paul noted that he had planted churches in major cities from Jerusalem, through Asia Minor, and into Macedonia and Greece. This was the territory Paul and his companions covered on the three great missionary journeys recorded in Acts. (2) Paul’s intermediate destination was Jerusalem, where he planned to deliver a “gift to the believers” (15:25). This gift was money that Paul had been collecting from the Gentile churches he had founded to assist the church in Jerusalem (15:26; see also 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8–9). (3) After visiting Jerusalem to deliver the collection, Paul planned to go to Rome (15:24). (4) A long stay with the Roman Christians was not Paul’s final goal, as the language of 15:24 (“stop off”) makes clear. His ultimate goal was Spain, where he could pursue his calling to plant churches in places “where the name of Christ has never been heard” (15:20, 24). This information points to a date near the end of the third missionary journey.

[Romans] is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.

MARTIN LUTHER
 “Preface to the Epistle to the Romans”

PAUL’S PURPOSE IN WRITING

Romans combines three specific purposes: to summarize Paul’s theology, to solicit support for a future mission to Spain, and to bring unity to the church in Rome.

Paul saw himself standing at a critical juncture in his ministry (15:20). He had “fully presented” or fulfilled the Good News by taking it to a broad area of the eastern Mediterranean basin (15:19). He now stood ready to move to the far end of the Mediterranean to preach the

Good News in new territory. It is quite natural, then, that Paul took the occasion of his letter to the Romans to summarize his theology as he had hammered it out in the midst of controversy and trial for the previous twenty-five years.

In other words, Romans might be a summary of Paul's theology. Even so, this is not the whole of Paul's purpose in writing—it does not explain why Paul says so little in Romans about key theological ideas (e.g., the person of Christ, the church, the last days). Nor does it explain why Paul would have sent this summary of his theology to the church in Rome.

Another purpose emerges when we turn our attention to Paul's ultimate destination, Spain: Paul wanted to gather support from the Roman Christians for his new mission in a distant land. Paul's "sending church," Antioch, was thousands of miles from Spain. As the apostle sought a new church to partner with him, his attention naturally turned to the church in Rome (15:24). Therefore, it is likely that Paul sent this dense theological treatise to Rome because he wanted to explain who he was and what he believed. Because Paul's message had frequently been misunderstood, he became a controversial figure in the early church. He was undoubtedly aware that some Christians in Rome were suspicious of him and that he therefore must provide a careful and reasoned defense of his position on some of the most debated issues of the faith.

Finally, Paul wrote to a Christian community in Rome that was divided over the degree to which the OT law should continue to guide believers. Paul's long and explicit treatment of this problem (14:1–15:13) reveals that one of his purposes in writing was to heal this rift in the community in Rome.

In Romans, Paul presented the Good News as he had come to understand it. The heart of that Good News is the offer of salvation in Christ for all who believe. Paul explores the problem of human sin, the solution provided in the cross of Christ, and the assurance of glory that a living relationship with Christ provides. The message of the cross of Christ stands both in continuity with the OT (because its promises are truly fulfilled in Christ) and in discontinuity with it (as God in Christ inaugurates a new covenant that transcends the OT law).

INTERPRETATION

Since the time of the Reformation, Romans has been read as a letter about the salvation of the individual. Following the lead of Martin Luther, whose own spiritual pilgrimage was closely tied to the theology of Romans, the Reformers (such as John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli) saw in this letter the classic biblical expression of the truth that human beings are put right with God by their faith in Christ and not by their own effort. The Reformers viewed Paul as fighting against a legalistic Judaism that insisted that people had to obey the law to be saved. Jewish preoccupation with the law had led many Jews to presume that faithfulness to the law was sufficient for salvation (e.g., 10:1-4).

Many contemporary interpreters insist that this Reformation view of Romans left out important elements in understanding both the letter itself and first-century Judaism. Jews in Paul's day, it is argued, did not believe that they had to obey the law to be saved. They were already saved, through God's choosing them to be his people. Obeying the

The reasons why Romans is such a powerful piece of writing, and why it has been so influential in Christian history, are one and the same. . . . We see Paul the Jew wrestling with the implications of his own and his converts' experience of grace and Paul the Christian wrestling with the implications of his Jewish heritage. We see in Romans Paul operating at the interface between Pharisaic Judaism and Christianity, and the transition from the one to the other in process of being worked out.

JAMES D. G. DUNN
Romans, p. xvi

law was the way they maintained their status as God’s people. These interpreters say that Paul was not fighting against legalism but against exclusivism—against the Jewish claim that salvation was confined to Israel and was not to be shared with Gentiles. Accordingly, Paul shows how the Good News relates salvation through faith to the continuity of God’s people from the OT to the NT and to the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in his own day.

This new approach to understanding Romans has much to commend it. Christian interpreters have sometimes missed the notes of grace and faith that are part of Jewish teaching. And Romans does have a lot to say about including Gentiles in God’s people and the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church.

Ultimately, however, neither the Reformation view alone nor the contemporary view alone explains everything in Romans. They need to be combined if we are to appreciate the letter as a whole. At its most foundational level, Romans is about the Good News—and the Good News, first and foremost, is a message about how everyone can have a right relationship with God.

FURTHER READING

ROGER MOHRLANG
Romans in Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 14 (2007)

DOUGLAS J. MOO
The Epistle to the Romans (1996)

JOHN MURRAY
The Epistle to the Romans (1959, 1965)

THOMAS SCHREINER
Romans (1998)

JOHN R. W. STOTT
Romans: God’s Good News for the World (1994)

1. THE LETTER OPENING (1:1-17)

Greetings from Paul

1 This letter is from Paul, a ^aslave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his ^bGood News. ²God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. ³The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David’s family line, ⁴and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus

Christ our Lord. ⁵Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name.

⁶And you are included among those Gentiles who have been ^ccalled to belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

1:1
^a*doulos* (1401)
• Rom 6:20
^b*euangelion* (2098)
• Rom 1:16

1:2
Titus 1:2

1:3
Matt 1:1; 22:42

1:4
1 Cor 15:1-4, 12-23

1:5
Acts 9:15; 26:15-18

1:6
^c*kletos* (2822)
• Rom 8:28

1:1-17 These verses contain the normal features of NT letter introductions: an identification of the writer (1:1-6) and readers (1:7); a thanksgiving (1:8-15); and the theme of the letter (1:16-17).

1:1 slave of Christ Jesus: The word *slave* is used of important OT leaders of God’s people, such as Moses (2 Kgs 18:12), Joshua (Josh 24:29), Elijah (2 Kgs 10:10), and David (2 Sam 7:8). The title underscores Paul’s complete subservience to Christ as Lord. • **sent out** (literally *set apart*): Paul may be alluding to being “set apart” by God for his mission before he was born, as the prophet Jeremiah was (Jer 1:5). He may also be referring to God’s call at the time of his Damascus Road conversion (Acts 9:15-16; cp. Acts 13:2), to preach the Good News to Jews and especially to Gentiles. • **The Good News**, or “gospel,” is a recurrent topic in the opening of the letter (1:1, 9, 15, 16). Paul takes the word from the OT, where the Hebrew equivalent refers to the victory that God wins for his people (Isa 40:9; 41:27; 60:6; 61:1; Nah 1:15; see Joel 2:32).

1:3-4 In the Greek, these verses are in carefully structured parallel form; Paul

might be quoting an early Christian creed or hymn about Jesus Christ as God’s *Son* in order to establish common ground with the Roman Christians, whom he had never visited.

1:3 In his earthly life (literally *As regards the flesh*): Paul often uses “flesh” (Greek *sarx*) to refer to bodily existence in this world (e.g., 4:1; 8:3). • Paul refers to **King David’s family line** because God promised that a descendant of David would be the Messiah and would be given an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:13-16; see Isa 9:7; Jer 33:15). Jesus was born into David’s line (Matt 1:6; Luke 1:27, 32), so he was qualified to fulfill God’s promise.

1:4 and he was shown to be (or *and was designated*): Although he eternally existed as the Son of God (1:3), Jesus’ resurrection demonstrated him to be God’s Son, revealing him in all his power and glory. • **by the power of the Holy Spirit:** Or *by the Spirit of holiness; or in the new realm of the Spirit*.

1:5 given us . . . apostles: Here Paul might have been thinking both of himself and of the other apostles, or he might be using an editorial plural

to refer only to himself. • **the privilege** (or *the grace*): Privilege and **authority** could specify two separate things, but one might explain the other, as in the principle of having apostolic authority. Paul always makes it clear that his distinctive authority is a gift from God (see also 15:15-16). • **so that they will believe and obey him:** This summary of Paul’s purpose in preaching to Gentiles brackets the book of Romans, as he repeats the same idea in slightly different language at the end of the letter (16:26). Paul wanted Gentiles to believe in Jesus Christ; he underscored that believing in Jesus Christ as the Lord entails a commitment to obey him. Faith and obedience are not identical, but one does not occur without the other.

1:7 To be holy means to be set apart for God. This expression is used throughout the OT to describe Israel, God’s chosen **people** (cp. Exod 19:6), whom God called from among all other nations to be his own. By calling the Gentile Christians **his own holy people**, Paul makes it clear that Gentiles are now fully included among God’s people.

1:8

1 Thes 1:8

1:9

Phil 1:8-9

1:11

^acharisma (5486)

• Rom 12:6

1:14

1 Cor 9:16

1:15

Rom 15:20

1:16

Acts 3:26

1 Cor 1:18, 24

^eeuangelion (2098)

• Rom 2:16

^sōtēria (4991)

• Rom 8:24

1:17

^hHab 2:4

Rom 3:21-22

Gal 3:11

Heb 10:38

^dikaïosunē (1343)

• Rom 3:21

^pistis (4102)

• Rom 3:22

1:18

Eph 5:6

Col 3:6

^orgē (3709)

• Rom 2:5

1:19

Acts 14:15-17;

17:24-28

1:20

Job 12:7-9

Ps 19:1

Thanksgiving and Occasion: Paul and the Romans

⁸Let me say first that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith in him is being talked about all over the world. ⁹God knows how often I pray for you. Day and night I bring you and your needs in prayer to God, whom I serve with all my heart by spreading the Good News about his Son.

¹⁰One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you. ¹¹For I long to visit you so I can bring you some spiritual ^dgift that will help you grow strong in the Lord. ¹²When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours.

¹³I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to visit you, but I was prevented until now. I want to work among you and see spiritual fruit, just as I have seen among other Gentiles. ¹⁴For I have a great sense of obligation to people in both the civilized world and the rest of the world, to the educated and uneducated

alike. ¹⁵So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach the Good News.

The Theme of the Letter: God's Good News

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of this ^eGood News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, ^fsaving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. ¹⁷This Good News tells us how God makes us ^gright in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by ^hfaith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through ^hfaith that a righteous person has life.”

2. THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL:

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (1:18–4:25)

All Persons are Accountable to God for Sin (1:18-32)

¹⁸But God shows his ⁱanger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. ¹⁹They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. ²⁰For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

1:9 When Paul uses the phrase *with all my heart* (or *in my spirit*), he might be describing the influence of God's Holy Spirit on his own inner person. The word *spirit* also refers to the deepest part of a person, which the phrase *all my heart* expresses well.

1:11 *some spiritual gift*: Paul is probably referring to the spiritual benefit that he hopes his ministry will *bring* to the Roman Christians.

1:13 *brothers and sisters* (literally *brothers*): This Greek word (*adelphoi*) describes people who are in a familial relationship. Paul and other NT writers use this word to indicate that Christians are so intimately tied to one another in Christ that they are family. The word refers to both male and female Christians. • *I was prevented until now*: Paul wrote this letter when he was in Corinth toward the end of his third missionary journey (see Acts 20:2-4; cp. Rom 16:21-23). The need to plant and nourish churches in the eastern Mediterranean had occupied Paul up to this point. Before he could visit the Roman Christians, he first needed to return to Jerusalem to deliver a gift of money collected from the Gentile churches for the impoverished Jewish Christians (15:23-29).

1:14 *to people in both the civilized world and the rest of the world* (literally *to Greeks and barbarians*): The Greeks prided themselves on being sophisticated and cultured,

while regarding people from other cultures as inferior. They mocked other peoples' poorly spoken Greek, claiming that they could only say “bar bar,” a nonsense phrase from which our word *barbarian* comes. Paul uses this cultural divide to emphasize his intention to preach the Good News to all kinds of people.

1:16 Paul consistently emphasizes that the Good News is for *everyone*. He also insists that God *first* chose the Jews to be his people, made promises to them, and gave them a unique place in the continuing plan of God (3:1-8; 9:1-5). They have a special responsibility to respond to the Good News and will be judged first if they turn away (2:9-10). • *also the Gentile*: Literally *also the Greek*.

1:17 *how God makes us right in his sight* (literally *the righteousness of God*): This key phrase appears eight times in Romans (see also 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3; the only other occurrence in Paul's writings is 2 Cor 5:21). The expression has OT roots, where God's righteousness refers to his character (as holy or faithful) or to an act of declaring his people sinless and perfect in his eyes (see especially Isa 46:13; 51:5-8). Paul uses the second meaning in this verse. The Good News has the power to save because it is the fulfillment of God's promise to vindicate his people. • The phrase *makes us right* comes from the law court. It does not mean

“makes us good people”; it means “puts us in right standing before God.” • “*It is through faith that a righteous person has life*” (or “*The righteous will live by faith*” Hab 2:4): The prophet Habakkuk had struggled to understand how God could use pagan nations to judge his own people Israel. God reminded Habakkuk that his true people—the *righteous*—need to live by faith. In chs 1-4, Paul repeatedly insists that only through faith can human beings be made right in God's sight.

1:18–3:20 Paul delays exploring the theme of righteousness through faith (see 3:21) until he first teaches about universal sinfulness. Gentiles (1:18-32) and Jews (2:1–3:8) are equally under sin's power and cannot find favor with God by any action of their own (3:9-20).

1:18 God's *anger* is not a spontaneous emotional outburst, but the holy God's necessary response to sin. The OT often depicts God's anger (Exod 32:10-12; Num 11:1; Jer 21:3-7) and predicts a decisive outpouring of God's wrath on human sin at the end of history. While Paul usually depicts God's anger as occurring in the end times (2:5, 8; 5:9; Col 3:6; 1 Thes 1:10), the present tense of *shows* refers to God's expressions of anger throughout human history. • *who suppress the truth by their wickedness*: Or *who, by their wickedness, prevent the truth from being known*.

²¹Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. ²²Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. ²³And instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. ²⁵They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. ²⁶That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. ²⁷And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

²⁸Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. ²⁹Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. ³⁰They

are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. ³¹They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. ³²They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

Jews are Accountable to God for Sin

(2:1–3:8)

The Jews and the Judgment of God

2You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. ²And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. ³Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? ⁴Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

⁵But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶He will judge everyone according to what they have

1:21
2 Kgs 17:15
Eph 4:17-18

1:22
Jer 10:14
1 Cor 1:20

1:23
Deut 4:15-19
Ps 106:20

1:24
Acts 14:16

1:26
1 Thes 4:5

1:27
Lev 18:22; 20:13
1 Cor 6:9

1:30
2 Tim 3:2

1:31
2 Tim 3:3

1:32
Rom 6:23

2:1
Matt 7:1

2:4
Rom 9:22
2 Pet 3:9, 15
metanoia (3341)
• 2 Tim 2:25

2:5
Ps 110:5
orgē (3709)
• Rom 2:8

2:6
²Ps 62:12
Matt 16:27

2:7
Matt 25:46
2 Tim 4:14

1:21 To *know God* in Scripture usually means to have an intimate, saving relationship with him (see 2 Cor 5:16; Gal 4:9; Phil 3:8, 10). Here, however, *they knew God* means that people knew about God. All people have some understanding of God through creation, yet they do not do what is right based on that knowledge. Rather than learn more about God, they worship gods of their own making.

1:24 When human beings exchanged the living God for idols, God *abandoned them*, a point Paul makes twice more in this paragraph (1:26, 28). The word *abandon* includes a sense of “handing over,” suggesting that God actively consigns people to the consequences of their sin.

1:26 *women turned against the natural way*: In this context, *natural way* refers to the nature of the world as God made it. As in the OT, Paul singles out homosexuality as a key illustration of how people have fallen away from worship of the true God (see Gen 19:1-28; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Deut 23:17-18). God created human beings as male and female,

and engaging in homosexual activity is a violation of God's creative intention.

1:27 *suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved*: When people abandon the Creator's intentions, they are judged for their actions. This judgment can take many different forms, but the ultimate consequence is spiritual death (see 1:32).

1:28 *thought it foolish*: Sin affects our actions and even our thoughts. One of the serious consequences of turning away from God is an unsound mind; people can no longer use their minds as God intended.

1:29-31 This list of sins follows a popular Hellenistic literary form called a *vice list*. While not exhaustive, it reminds readers of various forms that evil might take.

1:32 To *encourage others* to sin is *worse* than sinning oneself (Jas 3:1; cp. *Testament of Asher* 6:2: “The two-faced are doubly punished because they both practice evil and approve of others who practice it; they imitate the spirits of error and join in the struggle against mankind”).

2:1-5 *You* is singular in the Greek. Here, the *you* is a hypothetical complacent Jew, who feels superior to Gentiles and in no danger of judgment. Paul adopts a popular Hellenistic style called a *diatribe*, in which a writer tries to win over an audience to his views by portraying a debate between himself and a hypothetical opponent. • *these very same things*: Paul's point is that Jews, like Gentiles, turn from God's revelation to go their own way.

2:4 *Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?* Behind Paul's question are Jewish passages (e.g., *Wisdom of Solomon* 12–15; cp. Jer 7:1-5; Amos 5:18-27) that portray a prevalent Jewish complacency toward judgment. Many Jews thought that because they were God's people, they did not need to worry about judgment, for their sins would not be punished as the sins of Gentiles would be. Paul emphasizes that God's grace was intended to turn the Jews from their sin, not to condone a sinful lifestyle.

2:6-11 Paul uses a *chiasm* (“X” arrangement) to make his point:

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

Translation Philosophy and Methodology

English Bible translations tend to be governed by one of two general translation theories. The first theory has been called “formal-equivalence,” “literal,” or “word-for-word” translation. According to this theory, the translator attempts to render each word of the original language into English and seeks to preserve the original syntax and sentence structure as much as possible in translation. The second theory has been called “dynamic-equivalence,” “functional-equivalence,” or “thought-for-thought” translation. The goal of this translation theory is to produce in English the closest natural equivalent of the message expressed by the original-language text, both in meaning and in style.

Both of these translation theories have their strengths. A formal-equivalence translation preserves aspects of the original text—including ancient idioms, term consistency, and original-language syntax—that are valuable for scholars and professional study. It allows a reader to trace formal elements of the original-language text through the English translation. A dynamic-equivalence translation, on the other hand, focuses on translating the message of the original-language text. It ensures that the meaning of the text is readily apparent to the contemporary reader. This allows the message to come through with immediacy, without requiring the reader to struggle with foreign idioms and awkward syntax. It also facilitates serious study of the text’s message and clarity in both devotional and public reading.

The pure application of either of these translation philosophies would create translations at oppo-

site ends of the translation spectrum. But in reality, all translations contain a mixture of these two philosophies. A purely formal-equivalence translation would be unintelligible in English, and a purely dynamic-equivalence translation would risk being unfaithful to the original. That is why translations shaped by dynamic-equivalence theory are usually quite literal when the original text is relatively clear, and the translations shaped by formal-equivalence theory are sometimes quite dynamic when the original text is obscure.

The translators of the New Living Translation set out to render the message of the original texts of Scripture into clear, contemporary English. As they did so, they kept the concerns of both formal-equivalence and dynamic-equivalence in mind. On the one hand, they translated as simply and literally as possible when that approach yielded an accurate, clear, and natural English text. Many words and phrases were rendered literally and consistently into English, preserving essential literary and rhetorical devices, ancient metaphors, and word choices that give structure to the text and provide echoes of meaning from one passage to the next.

On the other hand, the translators rendered the message more dynamically when the literal rendering was hard to understand, was misleading, or yielded archaic or foreign wording. They clarified difficult metaphors and terms to aid in the reader’s understanding. The translators first struggled with the meaning of the words and phrases in the ancient context; then they rendered the message into clear, natural English. Their goal was to be both faithful to the ancient texts

and eminently readable. The result is a translation that is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful.

Translation Process and Team

To produce an accurate translation of the Bible into contemporary English, the translation team needed the skills necessary to enter into the thought patterns of the ancient authors and then to render their ideas, connotations, and effects into clear, contemporary English. To begin this process, qualified biblical scholars were needed to interpret the meaning of the original text and to check it against our base English translation. In order to guard against personal and theological biases, the scholars needed to represent a diverse group of evangelicals who would employ the best exegetical tools. Then to work alongside the scholars, skilled English stylists were needed to shape the text into clear, contemporary English.

With these concerns in mind, the Bible Translation Committee recruited teams of scholars that represented a broad spectrum of denominations, theological perspectives, and backgrounds within the worldwide evangelical community. (These scholars are listed at the end of this introduction.) Each book of the Bible was assigned to three different scholars with proven expertise in the book or group of books to be reviewed. Each of these scholars made a thorough review of a base translation and submitted suggested revisions to the appropriate Senior Translator. The Senior Translator then reviewed and summarized these suggestions and proposed a first-draft revision of the base text. This draft served as the basis for several additional phases of exegetical and

stylistic committee review. Then the Bible Translation Committee jointly reviewed and approved every verse of the final translation.

Throughout the translation and editing process, the Senior Translators and their scholar teams were given a chance to review the editing done by the team of stylists. This ensured that exegetical errors would not be introduced late in the process and that the entire Bible Translation Committee was happy with the final result. By choosing a team of qualified scholars and skilled stylists and by setting up a process that allowed their interaction throughout the process, the New Living Translation has been refined to preserve the essential formal elements of the original biblical texts, while also creating a clear, understandable English text.

The New Living Translation was first published in 1996. Shortly after its initial publication, the Bible Translation Committee began a process of further committee review and translation refinement. The purpose of this continued revision was to increase the level of precision without sacrificing the text's easy-to-understand quality. This second-edition text was completed in 2004, and an additional update with minor changes was subsequently introduced in 2007. This printing of the New Living Translation reflects the updated 2007 text.

Written to Be Read Aloud

It is evident in Scripture that the biblical documents were written to be read aloud, often in public worship (see Nehemiah 8; Luke 4:16-20; 1 Timothy 4:13; Revelation 1:3). It is still the case today that more people will hear the Bible read aloud in church than are likely to read it for themselves. Therefore, a new translation must communicate with clarity and power when it is read publicly. Clarity was a primary goal for the NLT translators, not only to facilitate private reading and understanding, but also to ensure that it would be excellent for public reading and make an immediate and powerful impact on any listener.

The Texts behind the New Living Translation

The Old Testament translators used the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew

Bible as represented in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977), with its extensive system of textual notes; this is an update of Rudolf Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart, 1937). The translators also further compared the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint and other Greek manuscripts, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and any other versions or manuscripts that shed light on the meaning of difficult passages.

The New Testament translators used the two standard editions of the Greek New Testament: the *Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies (UBS, fourth revised edition, 1993), and *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Nestle and Aland (NA, twenty-seventh edition, 1993). These two editions, which have the same text but differ in punctuation and textual notes, represent, for the most part, the best in modern textual scholarship. However, in cases where strong textual or other scholarly evidence supported the decision, the translators sometimes chose to differ from the UBS and NA Greek texts and followed variant readings found in other ancient witnesses. Significant textual variants of this sort are always noted in the textual notes of the New Living Translation.

Translation Issues

The translators have made a conscious effort to provide a text that can be easily understood by the typical reader of modern English. To this end, we sought to use only vocabulary and language structures in common use today. We avoided using language likely to become quickly dated or that reflects only a narrow subdialect of English, with the goal of making the New Living Translation as broadly useful and timeless as possible.

But our concern for readability goes beyond the concerns of vocabulary and sentence structure. We are also concerned about historical and cultural barriers to understanding the Bible, and we have sought to translate terms shrouded in history and culture in ways that can be immediately understood. To this end:

- We have converted ancient weights and measures (for

example, "ephah" [a unit of dry volume] or "cubit" [a unit of length]) to modern English (American) equivalents, since the ancient measures are not generally meaningful to today's readers. Then in the textual footnotes we offer the literal Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek measures, along with modern metric equivalents.

- Instead of translating ancient currency values literally, we have expressed them in common terms that communicate the message. For example, in the Old Testament, "ten shekels of silver" becomes "ten pieces of silver" to convey the intended message. In the New Testament, we have often translated the "denarius" as "the normal daily wage" to facilitate understanding. Then a footnote offers: "Greek a *denarius*, the payment for a full day's wage." In general, we give a clear English rendering and then state the literal Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek in a textual footnote.
- Since the names of Hebrew months are unknown to most contemporary readers, and since the Hebrew lunar calendar fluctuates from year to year in relation to the solar calendar used today, we have looked for clear ways to communicate the time of year the Hebrew months (such as Abib) refer to. When an expanded or interpretive rendering is given in the text, a textual note gives the literal rendering. Where it is possible to define a specific ancient date in terms of our modern calendar, we use modern dates in the text. A textual footnote then gives the literal Hebrew date and states the rationale for our rendering. For example, Ezra 6:15 pinpoints the date when the postexilic Temple was completed in Jerusalem: "the third day of the month Adar." This was during the sixth year of King Darius's reign (that is, 515 B.C.). We have translated that date as March 12, with a footnote giving the Hebrew and identifying the year as 515 B.C.
- Since ancient references to the time of day differ from our modern methods of denoting time, we have used renderings that are instantly understandable to the

modern reader. Accordingly, we have rendered specific times of day by using approximate equivalents in terms of our common “o’clock” system. On occasion, translations such as “at dawn the next morning” or “as the sun was setting” have been used when the biblical reference is more general.

- When the meaning of a proper name (or a wordplay inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the message of the text, its meaning is often illuminated with a textual footnote. For example, in Exodus 2:10 the text reads: “The princess named him Moses, for she explained, ‘I lifted him out of the water.’” The accompanying footnote reads: “*Moses* sounds like a Hebrew term that means ‘to lift out.’”

Sometimes, when the actual meaning of a name is clear, that meaning is included in parentheses within the text itself. For example, the text at Genesis 16:11 reads: “You are to name him Ishmael (*which means ‘God hears’*), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress.” Since the original hearers and readers would have instantly understood the meaning of the name “Ishmael,” we have provided modern readers with the same information so they can experience the text in a similar way.

- Many words and phrases carry a great deal of cultural meaning that was obvious to the original readers but needs explanation in our own culture. For example, the phrase “they beat their breasts” (Luke 23:48) in ancient times meant that people were very upset, often in mourning. In our translation we chose to translate this phrase dynamically for clarity: “They went home *in deep sorrow*.” Then we included a footnote with the literal Greek, which reads: “Greek *went home beating their breasts*.” In other similar cases, however, we have sometimes chosen to illuminate the existing literal expression to make it immediately understandable. For example, here we might have expanded the literal Greek phrase to read: “They went home beating their breasts *in sorrow*.” If we had done this,

we would not have included a textual footnote, since the literal Greek clearly appears in translation.

- Metaphorical language is sometimes difficult for contemporary readers to understand, so at times we have chosen to translate or illuminate the meaning of a metaphor. For example, the ancient poet writes, “Your neck is *like* the tower of David” (Song of Songs 4:4). We have rendered it “Your neck is *as beautiful as* the tower of David” to clarify the intended positive meaning of the simile. Another example comes in Ecclesiastes 12:3, which can be literally rendered: “Remember him . . . when the grinding women cease because they are few, and the women who look through the windows see dimly.” We have rendered it: “Remember him before your teeth—your few remaining servants—stop grinding; and before your eyes—the women looking through the windows—see dimly.” We clarified such metaphors only when we believed a typical reader might be confused by the literal text.
- When the content of the original language text is poetic in character, we have rendered it in English poetic form. We sought to break lines in ways that clarify and highlight the relationships between phrases of the text. Hebrew poetry often uses parallelism, a literary form where a second phrase (or in some instances a third or fourth) echoes the initial phrase in some way. In Hebrew parallelism, the subsequent parallel phrases continue, while also furthering and sharpening, the thought expressed in the initial line or phrase. Whenever possible, we sought to represent these parallel phrases in natural poetic English.
- The Greek term *hoi Ioudaioi* is literally translated “the Jews” in many English translations. In the Gospel of John, however, this term doesn’t always refer to the Jewish people generally. In some contexts, it refers more particularly to the Jewish religious leaders. We have attempted to capture the meaning in these different contexts by using terms such as “the people” (with a

footnote: Greek *the Jewish people*) or “the religious leaders,” where appropriate.

- One challenge we faced was how to translate accurately the ancient biblical text that was originally written in a context where male-oriented terms were used to refer to humanity generally. We needed to respect the nature of the ancient context while also trying to make the translation clear to a modern audience that tends to read male-oriented language as applying only to males. Often the original text, though using masculine nouns and pronouns, clearly intends that the message be applied to both men and women. A typical example is found in the New Testament letters, where the believers are called “brothers” (*adelphoi*). Yet it is clear from the content of these letters that they were addressed to all the believers—male and female. Thus, we have usually translated this Greek word as “brothers and sisters” in order to represent the historical situation more accurately.

We have also been sensitive to passages where the text applies generally to human beings or to the human condition. In some instances we have used plural pronouns (they, them) in place of the masculine singular (he, him). For example, a traditional rendering of Proverbs 22:6 is: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” We have rendered it: “Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.” At times, we have also replaced third person pronouns with the second person to ensure clarity. A traditional rendering of Proverbs 26:27 is: “He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.” We have rendered it: “If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead.”

We should emphasize, however, that all masculine nouns and pronouns used to represent God (for example, “Father”) have been maintained without

exception. All decisions of this kind have been driven by the concern to reflect accurately the intended meaning of the original texts of Scripture.

Lexical Consistency in Terminology

For the sake of clarity, we have translated certain original-language terms consistently, especially within synoptic passages and for commonly repeated rhetorical phrases, and within certain word categories such as divine names and non-theological technical terminology (e.g., liturgical, legal, cultural, zoological, and botanical terms). For theological terms, we have allowed a greater semantic range of acceptable English words or phrases for a single Hebrew or Greek word. We have avoided some theological terms that are not readily understood by many modern readers. For example, we avoided using words such as “justification” and “sanctification,” which are carryovers from Latin translations. In place of these words, we have provided renderings such as “made right with God” and “made holy.”

The Spelling of Proper Names

Many individuals in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, are known by more than one name (e.g., Uzziah/Azariah). For the sake of clarity, we have tried to use a single spelling for any one individual, footnoting the literal spelling whenever we differ from it. This is especially helpful in delineating the kings of Israel and Judah. King Joash/Jehoash of Israel has been consistently called Jehoash, while King Joash/Jehoash of Judah is called Joash. A similar distinction has been used to distinguish between Joram/Jehoram of Israel and Joram/Jehoram of Judah. All such decisions were made with the goal of clarifying the text for the reader. When the ancient biblical writers clearly had a theological purpose in their choice of a variant name (e.g., Esh-baal/Ishbosheth), the different names have been maintained with an explanatory footnote.

For the names Jacob and Israel, which are used interchangeably for both the individual patriarch and the nation, we generally render it

“Israel” when it refers to the nation and “Jacob” when it refers to the individual. When our rendering of the name differs from the underlying Hebrew text, we provide a textual footnote, which includes this explanation: “The names ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’ are often interchanged throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch and sometimes to the nation.”

The Rendering of Divine Names

All appearances of *’el*, *’elohim*, or *’eloah* have been translated “God,” except where the context demands the translation “god(s).” We have generally rendered the tetragrammaton (YHWH) consistently as “the LORD,” utilizing a form with small capitals that is common among English translations. This will distinguish it from the name *’adonai*, which we render “Lord.” When *’adonai* and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it “Sovereign LORD.” This also distinguishes *’adonai* YHWH from cases where YHWH appears with *’elohim*, which is rendered “LORD God.” When YH (the short form of YHWH) and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it “LORD GOD.” When YHWH appears with the term *tseba’oth*, we have rendered it “LORD of Heaven’s Armies” to translate the meaning of the name. In a few cases, we have utilized the transliteration, *Yahweh*, when the personal character of the name is being invoked in contrast to another divine name or the name of some other god (for example, see Exodus 3:15; 6:2-3).

In the New Testament, the Greek word *christos* has been translated as “Messiah” when the context assumes a Jewish audience. When a Gentile audience can be assumed, *christos* has been translated as “Christ.” The Greek word *kurios* is consistently translated “Lord,” except that it is translated “LORD” wherever the New Testament text explicitly quotes from the Old Testament, and the text there has it in small capitals.

Textual Footnotes

The New Living Translation provides several kinds of textual footnotes, all included within the study notes in this edition:

- When for the sake of clarity the NLT renders a difficult or potentially confusing phrase dynamically, we generally give the literal rendering in a textual footnote. This allows the reader to see the literal source of our dynamic rendering and how our translation relates to other more literal translations. These notes are prefaced with “literally.” For example, in Acts 2:42 we translated the literal “breaking of bread” (from the Greek) as “the Lord’s Supper” to clarify that this verse refers to the ceremonial practice of the church rather than just an ordinary meal. Then we attached a footnote to “the Lord’s Supper,” which reads: “Literally *the breaking of bread*.”
- Textual footnotes are also used to show alternative renderings, prefaced with the word “Or.” These normally occur for passages where an aspect of the meaning is debated. On occasion, we also provide notes on words or phrases that represent a departure from long-standing tradition. These notes are prefaced with “Traditionally rendered.” For example, the footnote to the translation “serious skin disease” at Leviticus 13:2 says: “Traditionally rendered *leprosy*. The Hebrew word used throughout this passage is used to describe various skin diseases.”
- When our translators follow a textual variant that differs significantly from our standard Hebrew or Greek texts (listed earlier), we document that difference with a footnote. We also footnote cases when the NLT excludes a passage that is included in the Greek text known as the *Textus Receptus* (and familiar to readers through its translation in the King James Version). In such cases, we offer a translation of the excluded text in a footnote, even though it is generally recognized as a later addition to the Greek text and not part of the original Greek New Testament.
- All Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament are identified by a textual footnote at the New Testament location. When the New Testament clearly quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament,

and when it differs significantly in wording from the Hebrew text, we also place a textual footnote at the Old Testament location.

This note includes a rendering of the Greek version, along with a cross-reference to the New Testament passage(s) where it is cited (for example, see notes on Proverbs 3:12; Psalms 8:2; 53:3).

- Some textual footnotes provide cultural and historical information on places, things, and people in the Bible that are probably obscure to modern readers. Such notes should aid the reader in understanding the message of the text. For example, in Acts 12:1, "King Herod" is named in this translation as "King Herod Agrippa" and is identified in a footnote as being "the nephew of Herod Antipas and a grandson of Herod the Great."
- When the meaning of a proper name (or a wordplay inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the meaning of the text, it is either illuminated with a textual footnote or included within parentheses in the text itself. For example, the footnote concerning the name "Eve" at Genesis

3:20 reads: "Eve sounds like a Hebrew term that means 'to give life.' " This wordplay in the Hebrew illuminates the meaning of the text, which goes on to say that Eve "would be the mother of all who live."

Cross-References

There are a number of different cross-referencing tools that appear in New Living Translation Bibles, and they offer different levels of help in this regard. All straight-text Bibles include the standard set of textual footnotes that include cross-references connecting New Testament texts to their related Old Testament sources. (See more on this above.)

Many NLT Bibles include an additional short cross-reference system that sets key cross-references at the end of paragraphs and then marks the associated verses with a cross symbol. This space-efficient system, while not being obtrusive, offers many important key connections between passages. Larger study editions include a full-column cross-reference system. This system allows space for a more comprehensive listing of cross-references.

AS WE SUBMIT this translation for publication, we recognize that any translation of the Scriptures is subject to limitations and imperfections. Anyone who has attempted to communicate the richness of God's Word into another language will realize it is impossible to make a perfect translation. Recognizing these limitations, we sought God's guidance and wisdom throughout this project. Now we pray that he will accept our efforts and use this translation for the benefit of the church and of all people.

We pray that the New Living Translation will overcome some of the barriers of history, culture, and language that have kept people from reading and understanding God's Word. We hope that readers unfamiliar with the Bible will find the words clear and easy to understand and that readers well versed in the Scriptures will gain a fresh perspective. We pray that readers will gain insight and wisdom for living, but most of all that they will meet the God of the Bible and be forever changed by knowing him.

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