

Paul's Mission – the Gospel Would Be Taken to the Gentiles - Including Rome.

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. 1 Timothy 1:16 (KJV)

Paul thought he was serving God by murdering believers in Christ. Instead, he was fighting the very Person from whom he could find mercy – Jesus Christ the Son of God. The Roman church was not founded by Paul nor was it founded by Peter. Rather, it was the result of the wildfire started by persecuting the early church by men like Saul to whom was committed the Message of a merciful God. Persecuted Christians were dispersed throughout the Roman empire including the city of Rome.

Things were different now. Saul – make that Paul – had met the Lord Jesus Christ and his life was changed forever. Paul was now committed to the spreading of the Good News – that Message had been carried all the way to Rome. It was to these believers that Paul longed to have fellowship with. There was so much that Paul wanted to share with the Roman church. He wanted be an encouragement to these believers. The missionary vision was that the Gospel was to be carried to all nations and what better place to build up the base that was already in place – the Roman church. Rome was not only a strategic center of the Roman empire but it was uniquely suited as it represented a vast cross section of Gentiles to whom Paul was committed to preaching the Gospel. Let's take a look at the introduction – briefly and then go to this masterful presentation of not only the predicament of all sinners but the solution of this question of the salvation of all men.

The Good News.

² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. ⁶ And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 1:2-7 (NIV).

Verse 2 – The Good News promised. We can consider this the “good news – bad news.” introduction to the epistle to the Romans. The good news was that those to whom Paul was writing was already the recipients of God's grace *and* peace. We will see much more of this later. I just need to point out here that God had a plan from the beginning of time to save man from his sinful condition and destiny as the result of that sin.¹ This Gospel was defined and promised not only to Israel but to all nations. Way

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back when I was a student at the New England School of Theology in Boston, my English professor shared – almost incidentally a passage from Genesis that she called the first promise that God would take the Gospel to the Gentile nations – the first missionary passage if-you-please.

²⁶ And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. ²⁷ God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. Genesis 9:26-27 (KJV)

Just a brief backgrounder. Noah had fallen asleep with no cloths on and one of his sons Ham discovered it. He told his brothers Shem and Japheth about it, supposedly making light of the situation. Shem and Japheth took a garment, put it on their shoulders and backed into Noah's tent and covered their father. When Noah awoke from his sleep and discovered what had happened he pronounced both a cursing and a blessing upon his sons.



1. Shem (the father of all Jews) would be blessed by Jehovah.
2. Japheth (the father of all Gentiles, specifically those who migrated to Europe) would

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live graciously as a guest in the tents of Shem.

3. Canaan (the father of all Canaanites) would be subservient to Shem. In this case the land of Canaan would be taken from them and given to the Hebrews – the descendants of Shem.

Let's focus on points 1 & 2. It was Abram a descendant of Shem. He was called out of Ur to a land that the LORD would show him. We all know the rest of this account – how that the nations were to be blessed through Abram's faith in Jehovah. Japheth was to be the father of the Gentiles. These people would eventually inhabit Galatia and Europe (for our study this includes the churches of Galatia and Rome). The picture painted by Genesis 9:27 was that the sons of Japheth would enjoy prosperity and great possessions but that they would live in grace within the tents of Shem. This may all seem a bit cryptic but essentially the focus of the Gospel would be first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles and eventually to all nations.

Verses 3, 4. The Good News Declared. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He was no mere human but the very Son of God who was as once forever associated with mankind through His Jewish parentage but also: **"...was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead:..."** Romans 1:4b. This association is very important. Jesus Christ is to be *our Lord*. That is to say that Paul is building a masterful case for the redemption of mankind. The "Executive Summary" if-you-please is that we are NOT consigned to an eternal damnation because of our sin but are to be forever associated with Jesus Christ, our blood-brother, as our Lord (see [Hebrews 2:6-18](#) on this). I fear we forget easily after our conversion the path we were rescued from in our sin. We forget too easily the eternal relationship we have with our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Grand Declaration that is preceding the indictment on fallen man – that in spite of the overwhelming condemnation man faces in his sin – that our loving Father had already put in motion the Plan of Salvation. I've said this before: I have read the last chapter in God's plan for man – WE WIN! See [Revelation 21](#) on this.

Verse 5 The Scope of the Good News. Paul understood the plan of God for inclusion of the Gentiles into the preaching of the Gospel. Paul had been very much involved in these Gentile churches. It was now to be his focus – especially during his captivity – to minister to the Roman church(es). Finally we should never consign verse 7 to a church ritualistic benediction – this is the real thing! God intends to extend Grace and Peace to all nations – those nations who as sinners are the very enemies of God.¹

¹ See [ch 5:5-10](#) on this.

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Paul's missionary statement.

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. Romans 1:14 (KJV).

This is an all inclusive missionary statement.² Paul meant to carry the Gospel to everyone who crossed his path – indeed, he was to deliberately make his path to those people. Greeks and Barbarians was more a language distinction than a race. He was in fact writing to the Roman church but that was not the end of his plans. He intended to have the Gospel carried to the enemies of Rome – the Barbarians – those outside the Greco-Roman civilization. The wise and unwise? All social classes were to be included in the preaching.

“...I am debtor ... Lenski says that **“...Paul's apostolic debt is immense...”** There was no limitation to the scope of Paul's debt. When he was called to the mission field, Jesus Christ place on him a considerable debt – to preach the Gospel to **“... the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”** Acts 9:15 (NIV). The debt was to the Lord and the Lord alone.

There was little time for Paul to carry out his mission – he longed to see the Romans and hence to have a vantage of possible missionary opportunity to even the Barbarians – a people outside the iron fist of the Roman empire. How this was to be done will be covered in the passage to follow. Although the debt to carry the Gospel to all nations – the means to accomplish that was the very Power – Omnipotence of the Lord Himself.

The Power of the Gospel.

¹⁵ **So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.** ¹⁶ **For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.** Romans 1:15-16 (KJV).

As we come to the end of this exciting passage we need to understand the tremendous dangers and impediments that faced Paul in carrying out his mission. Many of the details were left out in the mind of Paul. But he knew his mission – his debt. And he was willing to carry it out even if it meant imprisonment or death.

Paul knew that it wasn't up to his own strength but that the Lord had invested His Omnipotence in the preaching of the Gospel and so, the Gospel in the hands of Paul and the Power of God would succeed in the world of sin.

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Beginning of Endnotes:

1. *The gospel, which originated with God, was not a divine afterthought, nor was it first taught in the New Testament. It does not reflect a late change in God's plan or a revision of His strategy. It was promised by God beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, that is, in what we now call the Old Testament. —The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. See also Lenski on this.*

2. *"Paul's apostolic debt is immense. It extends to Greeks and barbarians, to educated and uneducated among all the nations, with Rome representing one nation to which "the rest" must be added. Exercising exact care to attain precision in expression, Paul does not say that he is debtor to the nations but to the two classes found "among" the nations. He is planting the gospel in each nation. Acts shows how he worked in the central cities and also how from these centers the gospel spread into each surrounding province; note Acts 19:26, and how in II Cor. 11:10 Paul speaks of "the regions of Achaia."*

The expression τὰ ἔθνη should not be translated "Gentiles." Paul is not distinguishing between Gentiles and Jews but is referring to the great classes found in each nation as a nation. In the Roman Empire the political grouping was made according to provinces and subject kingdoms. The inhabitants of any one of these groups he calls an ἔθνος or "nation." The great distinction that prevailed at that time was that between Ἕλληνες and βάρβαροι, "Greeks and barbarians," a division that included all men irrespective of their racial extraction. "Greeks" includes all those possessing Greek culture; "barbarians," the natives who lacked this prized advantage. Greeks of this type were found everywhere, and also barbarians of this type. The former looked down on the latter, the latter envied the former, and all aspired to the higher standing."

—Lenski New Testament Commentary