

Romans 1:1

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rom/rom-1/romans-11/>

Paul starts out his letter by giving his credentials and explaining his purpose in ministry.

The Apostle *Paul* writes this letter to the believers in Rome at the height of the power of the Roman Empire. There was no higher authority in the world than Rome. "All roads lead to Rome" was literal as well as figurative. The highest authorities on earth representing Jesus were the Apostles. Paul establishes his authority as an *apostle* but also makes clear that his authority called him to be a *bond-servant of Christ Jesus*:

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God (vs 1),

A *bond-servant* was a servant who chose to stay bound to his master for life. The Mosaic law required that Hebrew servants be released to freedom after six years of service (Exodus 21:2). But if the servant desired to remain a servant, they could be bound for life (Exodus 21:5-6). The translators apparently presume that *bond-servant* is Paul's meaning here, since Paul is clearly committed to serving Jesus for his entire life. However, the Greek word translated *bond-servant* is "doulos" which is often just translated "servant."

Whether servant or *bond-servant*, Paul is asserting that regardless of his apostolic authority, he is fully under the authority of Jesus. Jesus *called* Paul and *set* him *apart* to proclaim *the gospel* about Jesus and what Jesus provides for humankind. Paul chose to accept the invitation and made a lifelong commitment to follow Jesus regardless of the cost.

Paul was appointed to be an *apostle, set apart for the gospel*. In making this assertion, Paul likely claims equal authority to Jesus's twelve apostles, whom He appointed to be *set apart for the gospel* (Acts 1:26).

The term *apostle* can also mean "sent one" as is apparently the case with Barnabas, who was sent as a missionary along with Paul (Acts 14:14). In his other letters, Paul certainly asserts that his apostleship is equal to that of any other (2 Corinthians 12:11). However, although Paul asserts his apostleship here, his emphasis in this epistle will be on persuasion rather than authority.

This assertion that Paul is an *apostle* makes Paul the thirteenth apostle, which might be a parallel with the tribes of Israel. There were twelve tribes from twelve sons (Genesis 49:28), but when the tribes were positioned in military order, Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh were each appointed a portion around the perimeter of the camp ([see commentary on Numbers 2:1-2](#)). This made twelve tribes appointed for military service, while the tribe of Levi was set apart unto God in the middle, with Levi being a thirteenth tribe. This same pattern was followed in the allotment of land in Israel (Joshua 18:7).

Further, in Revelation, the tribes of Ephraim and Dan are omitted from the order of the twelve tribes, being replaced with Joseph and Manasseh. This might fit the pattern of Judas being replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:26)—twelve tribes with one appointed for special service and one omitted. In this case it seems reasonable to consider Paul as being appointed for special service, as an apostle to the Gentiles (2 Timothy 1:11). It makes sense for the apostles to fit the same

pattern as the tribes, since Jesus said that the apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

The term *gospel* translates the Greek word “euangelion,” which means “good tidings.” In this letter to the believers in Rome, Paul will tell of many “good tidings” associated with being in God’s family through faith in Him, as well as the “good tidings” associated with choosing to walk in obedience to His ways. The theme of Paul’s letter will be that the “good tidings” include power to live a life by faith, which will lead to our greatest fulfillment. Living by faith is the true way to experience a life of righteousness.

In this manner, Paul will present a new, spiritual understanding of God’s covenant with Israel. God made clear to Israel that if they followed His ways, they would be blessed (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). Much of this was due to the natural consequences God built in to His creation—the cause-effect reality of the moral universe.

If a society or human organization loves one another, tells the truth, and honors and respects one another, fulfilling God’s law, then it will naturally follow that such a society or organization will flourish. Gentiles who believe on Jesus are now grafted into Israel (Romans 11:17) and have their hearts circumcised by God’s Spirit (Romans 2:29).

Paul will assert in this letter that the true fountainhead for such flourishing is in the heart, rather than in the law.

Biblical Text

1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,