

OpenTheo

August 17th: 2 Samuel 5 & Romans 16

August 17, 2020



Alastair Roberts

David becomes king of Israel. Paul's greetings to the Christians in Rome.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

2 Samuel chapter 5. Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, You shall be shepherd of My people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.

So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off, thinking, David cannot come in here. Nevertheless David took the stronghold of

Zion, that is, the city of David. And David said on that day, Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, who are hated by David's soul.

Therefore it is said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house. And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the millow inward.

And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him. And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons, who built David a house. And David knew that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, and more sons and daughters were born to David. And these are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem. Shamua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Iphar, Elishua, Nepheg, Jephiah, Elishema, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. But David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the valley of Rephaim.

And David inquired of the Lord, Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand? And the Lord said to David, Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand. And David came to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. And he said, The Lord has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood, therefore the name of that place is called Baal-perazim.

And the Philistines left their idols there, and David and his men carried them away. And the Philistines came up yet again and spread out in the valley of Rephaim. And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, You shall not go up, go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees.

And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then rouse yourself, for then the Lord has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines. And David did as the Lord commanded him, and struck down the Philistines from Geba to Giza. In 1st Samuel chapter 5, David finally becomes king of Israel.

The people address him as their bone and flesh. They're declaring that David is their brother. There's a similar claim made in Judges chapter 9 verse 2, as Abimelech addresses the leaders of Shechem.

The people recognise that David has been an effective military leader of Israel during the reign of Saul. Also, that God has made a promise to him, which had clearly become wider knowledge among the people. In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 14 to 15, Israel was

given instructions concerning their king.

When you come to the land that the Lord your God has given you, and you possess it and dwell in it, and then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me, you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother.

David is the king who is chosen by God, and also someone who they recognise to be their brother. He is to be the shepherd of the people. The patriarchs were shepherds, the Israelites were shepherds, which is why they lived in the land of Goshen away from the Egyptians, and Moses was a shepherd.

He delivered Israel with a shepherd's staff. The nation are described as a flock. Joshua, when he's set up as the leader of the people in Numbers chapter 27 verses 16 to 17, is described as performing the role of a shepherd over sheep.

Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be his sheep that have no shepherd. We can see very similar language there that is used of David in this chapter. Shepherds are rulers and leaders of the flock.

This can be seen in passages such as Ezekiel chapter 34. However, shepherds are supposed to serve the flocks that they are ministering to, not to lord over them. The shepherd is not so much in Scripture the young man tending sheep in bucolic pasture land, but a guardian in dangerous terrain, protecting the flock from bandits, wild beasts, and other dangers of the wilderness.

The shepherd also provides for them in inhospitable environments. The elders of Israel come to the king. We need to remember that David is already king at this point, but he is only the king of Judah.

But now a leader of Judah is finally becoming king over all of Israel. This is a fulfillment of Genesis chapter 49 verses 8 to 10, and the blessing of Judah by his father Jacob. Judah your brother shall praise you, your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies, your father's son shall bow down before you.

Judah is a lion's cub, from the prey my son you have gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as a lioness who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. David becomes king at the age of 30.

30 was the age at which priests and Levites seemed to have entered into the main service of the tabernacle or temple, something that we see in Numbers chapter 4. In

Genesis chapter 41 verse 46, Joseph enters into the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, at the age of 30. Jesus starts his ministry with the baptism of John at around the age of 30 in Luke chapter 3 verse 23. In scripture age is often seen to matter.

People may exhibit great talent and skill for their age, but there is something about growth in wisdom that simply takes time, and even the wisest and most advanced youth for his age needs to pass through various seasons of life before he is ready to occupy particular offices or to perform specific roles. Elders in the church, for instance, should be older, probably ideally in their 50s or above. Why might this be the case? In passing through various seasons of life, for instance, seasons of sowing and reaping, you grow into a deeper understanding, even of truths that you already know on some level.

There are seasons of life that are seasons of transitions, periods of life where we are reaping what we have sown in previous years and discovering the true character of our previous choices. On account of the seasonal character of human life, people will often experience crises at specific junctures. Even the smartest youth is callow by comparison with the person who has truly weathered a midlife crisis and successfully navigated the straits that will lead into a new stage and season of their lives.

David, before he was ever fit to rule as king, had to learn faithfulness as a son and as a suffering prince. The period of his life spent on the run and in the wilderness and in exile was a crucial part of his preparation for the rule that he has now entered into. Jerusalem had first been captured back in Judges 1, verse 8, and the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.

But later in that chapter, in verse 21, we read, But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. Jerusalem has a number of different hills and the Jebusites presumably control the chief stronghold there, the high city. However, it seems likely that the Jews were living in the other parts of the city at this time.

The Jebusites believed that their stronghold was so secure that even the blind and the lame among them would be able to hold David's forces at bay and defend it. David uses the expression blind and lame to refer to the Jebusites as the Jebusites have identified themselves with the blind and the lame. The lame and the blind don't come into the house and that is presumably a reference to the Jebusites.

It isn't about the exclusion of those who are actually physically blind and lame. Mephibosheth, for instance, is lame, but he will still come into the house. Rather, it is an ironic reference to the Jebusites themselves.

The likely significance of the water shaft is that David's men cut off the water supplied to the city. In particular, from what we read in 1 Chronicles 11, verses 5-7, Joab seems to

have been the one who led this assault. The inhabitants of Jebus said to David, You will not come in here.

Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. David said, Whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander. And Joab, the son of Zeorah, went up first, so he became chief.

And David lived in the stronghold. Therefore it was called the city of David. The New Testament narrative alludes back to this, I believe, in Matthew chapter 21, verses 10-14.

As David's greater son enters the city of Jerusalem and heals the lame and the blind in the temple. And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, Who is this? And the crowd said, This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple.

And he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer. But you make it a den of robbers.

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. Miller was a fortress that guarded one of the ascents to the city. The city has a central stronghold and a surrounding area.

David makes Jerusalem his capital. The first time that we encounter the city of Jerusalem in scripture is in Genesis chapter 14, where we meet Melchizedek, who's the king of Salem. David deals wisely with surrounding peoples.

He defeats the Jebusites and the Philistines, but he forms an alliance with Hiram, king of Tyre. Hiram's assistance to David and to Solomon, his son, is a sign of the riches of the Gentiles coming into God's people. James Jordan suggests that we have a victory house building pattern here, a pattern that we see on several occasions in scripture, and a pattern that explains in part why events in this chapter are recorded out of chronological sequence.

David wins a victory over the Jebusites, and then his palace and his household are established. Another victory house building pattern follows this, as David wins victories over the Philistines and works towards the establishment of the temple. At this point, David is taking even more wives.

As we've seen before, taking wives was probably in large part a ploy to forge strategic alliances with leading families and surrounding peoples. The inclusion of Solomon here, for instance, should also alert us to the fact that these verses are covering a lot more time than merely the initial years of David's reign. The Philistines come up to attack when they hear that David has become king.

This occurs, presumably, before David captures Jerusalem, just when David has become king. He goes down to the stronghold, rather than up to Jerusalem. The Philistines are spread over the valley of Rephaim, which is associated with giants.

Perhaps to this point, David has still been considered a sort of vassal by the Philistines. But the prospect of a united Israel is a threatening one to them, and they go out to battle against David and Israel. David inquires of the Lord, and following the Lord's instructions, wins a great victory over them.

The capture of the Philistines' idols is an important detail. The Philistines had earlier captured the Ark of the Covenant, back in chapter 4 of 1 Samuel. They had also declared the good news of Saul's defeat in the houses of their idols, seven years previously.

Now the Philistine idols are captured, and they are humiliated. There is a sort of repetition of the original attack at the end of the chapter, as the Philistines again come up, and again spread out over the valley of Rephaim. This time, after inquiring of the Lord again, David defeats them as he follows a divine sign, the sound of marching in the top of the balsam trees.

Perhaps a sign of God's marching ahead of Israel. David attacks the Philistines from the rear, and he wins a decisive victory over them at this point. The Philistines, we must remember, had crippled Israel since Israel's loss at the Battle of Gilboa.

This victory, in the victory house-building pattern, will be followed by David's attempt to build a house for the Lord. A question to consider. Why do you think that David made Jerusalem his capital? Romans chapter 16 Greetings to my beloved Apinatus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ.

Greet those who belong to the family of the Rustubulus. Greet my kinsmen Herodium. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.

Greet those workers in the Lord, Triphina and Triphosa. Greet the beloved Persus, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.

Greet Esencritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Petrobust, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nerus and his sister, and Olympus and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ greet you. I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. Avoid them.

For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, as do Lucius and Jason and Socipiter, my kinsmen.

Aetertius, who wrote this letter, greets you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Cortus greet you.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed, and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the Eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ. Amen. Romans chapter 16, after the immensely rich theology of the letter, might seem a little anticlimactic.

However, examined more closely, we may find several aspects of it that will reward our attention. The most immediate thing that might jump out at the reader of the chapter is the sheer number of the names that are mentioned. By my count, 26 people in Rome are mentioned by name.

A few others are mentioned without being mentioned by name, such as the members of various households, or the mother of Rufus. It seems astonishing that Paul would know so many Christians in a church that he had yet to visit. T. W. Manson suggested that Romans 16 was a letter to Ephesus, attached to the epistle to the Romans, so that the letter could be sent on to them.

However, there are a number of problems or weaknesses with that position, several of which are identified by Peter Lamp in an article, The Roman Christians of Romans chapter 16. He notes that it would have been likely that Paul would have had many more co-workers to address in Ephesus. Having such an attached letter would also be without precedent in Paul's writing.

A letter composed entirely of greetings would be remarkable for Paul, who couldn't resist getting into theology. A number of the names in this chapter also aren't found in many of

the thousands of inscriptions that we have from Ephesus, although they are found in Rome. And then besides the fact that the manuscripts of Romans that we have don't end with Romans chapter 15, there is also the fact that Romans 15 would be a very unnatural ending to the book.

Nowhere else in Paul's letters does Paul address quite so many people. Yet Rome was different. Rome was a church that Paul had not yet visited.

Perhaps this is precisely why Paul can greet such a long list of people personally. Greeting so many people in other churches would seem to single out people in a way that might fuel rivalries and status conflicts. However, when Paul has yet to visit, he is freer to single out people that he already knows.

These people that Paul already knew in Rome were an important initial connection that he had with the congregation, which he would be able to build upon over time. Along with the names in this list of greetings, Paul often adds a brief statement describing his relationship to them, or saying something about their character or their service. Especially in the case of the people mentioned who have worked alongside Paul in the past, such as Prisca and Aquila, Epinatus, or Andronicus and Junia, these were obvious character references for Paul.

These people could commend him to the Roman church. This is another reason why the chapter makes most sense as one addressed to Rome, along with the rest of the letter. Paul would not require such references for almost every other church to which he wrote.

Interestingly, Paul does not greet these people directly, but instructs the recipients of the letter to convey his greetings to the people in question. Perhaps this suggests that, in the first instance, this would not have been read to an entire gathered congregation of Roman Christians. Before moving to consider any of the names in particular, we should consider the fact that there are so many of them, and what this might suggest about the character of the early church, and of the church in Rome more particularly.

It seems as though many of the Christians in the church in Rome were migrants from the East. Then there is the fact that some Romans would have spent some time living away from the capital. In Acts chapter 18, we discover another reason why Paul might have encountered so many Roman Christians.

In verses 2 to 3, we learn of Paul's first acquaintance with Priscilla, or Prisca as she is here called, and Aquila. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.

A number of Roman Jews had been expelled from the city by Claudius, before returning

later. As Paul had been teaching in synagogues all around the East during this period, he doubtless would have met many of them, including many who would have returned at a later point, perhaps after being converted through his ministry. There is also the possibility that some of the names on the list Paul knew, not by personal acquaintance, but by reputation.

Besides this, there is the amount of travel that people could undertake in the 1st century Roman world. As Lamp observes, from the biblical details given concerning him alone, we know that Aquila had moved from Pontus to Rome, to Corinth and to Ephesus, and then probably back to Rome again. It would not be at all surprising if he had moved back to Rome by the time that Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans.

There is also the possibility that some of the persons mentioned might have been associated with each other. Epinatus, for instance, mentioned immediately after Prisca and Aquila, may have travelled back to Rome with them. Especially if, like Paul, several of the people mentioned had done missionary work as well, we should not be surprised if their paths would have crossed with Paul's elsewhere.

This does give us a sense of how cosmopolitan the early church could be, and how extensively networked. This should be a source of confidence for us as Christians when we consider the greater strength, spread and possibility of confirming eyewitness testimony in such an environment, along with the greater coordination of the message of the churches across vast regions. The chapter begins by commending Phoebe to the Romans.

Phoebe is presumably the one who bears the letter to Rome. She is a servant of the church at Cenchreia, someone noted for her ministry. Cenchreia was in the region of Corinth, the eastern port of the Corinthian Isthmus.

She was most likely a businesswoman, whose own affairs gave her reason to travel to Rome, and who was sufficiently known to and trusted by Paul that he could send an epistle of such great importance with her. She is described as a servant of the church in Cenchreia. She is an emissary of, or a respected envoy for, her church in this instance, and the Romans should receive her with honour as one who acts on behalf of her congregation in various ways.

More particularly, Phoebe is described as a patroness of many, including Paul himself, in the verse that follows. The role of patrons was very important in the early church, and it seems that a culturally disproportionate number of these patrons of the church were women. They presumably funded the ministries and the ministers of the church, and hosted their assemblies.

A wealthy businesswoman like Phoebe likely hosted the Cenchreian church in her house, and showed hospitality to missionaries like Paul who passed through the city. This is also

something that was true of Jesus' ministry, as witnessed in Luke chapter 8 verses 1-3. Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God, and the twelve were with him.

Also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Cusa, Herod's household manager, and Susanna and many others who provided for them out of their means. Such persons would have been of considerable importance to the early church, and likely enjoyed considerable honour in their congregations. Phoebe is the first of a number of women mentioned in this chapter.

There are 26 names mentioned in verses 3-16, 9 women and 17 men. However, as Lamp remarks, of those especially praised for their service, six or seven are women, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Trifina, Trifosa, Persis, and perhaps also Rufus' mother, while only five or three are men. Such a list implies that women were active, prominent, and honoured in many quarters of the life of the early church.

Prisca and Aquila, a couple we first met in Corinth in Acts chapter 18, come first in the list of the Christians in Rome. They were some of Paul's dearest friends who had risked much for him, and to whom the wider church owed a considerable debt. They host a congregation in their house, probably one of several such congregations in the city.

Perhaps the most controversial name on the list is that of Junia, whose name has often been translated as Junias, a male name. While technically possible, this is almost certainly a mistranslation. In the early church, Junia was identified rightly, I believe, as a woman, by people who clearly opposed women in pastoral ministry, something which many modern readers of Romans have used her name to support.

Andronicus and Junia were most likely a married couple, or perhaps a brother and sister who travelled together. We have description of such situations in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 5. Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord in Cephas? They are described as Paul's kinsmen. This may mean that they were relatives of Paul, or simply, perhaps more likely, that they were Jews.

They also seem to have been in prison alongside Paul at some point, maybe in Ephesus. The detail that has particularly made Junia a figure of much prominence in debate is the description of the couple as outstanding or well-known among the apostles. While the ESV's translation, well-known to the apostles, is possible, it is much more likely that Andronicus and Junia are included among the apostles in some sense.

They clearly aren't members of the Twelve, but they are possibly apostles in the sense suggested in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 1, as witnesses of the resurrected Christ, maybe among the 500 persons who saw the risen Christ at one time. Going further than this

becomes speculative very quickly, but considering how prominent and widespread debates concerning them are, there are some points that we should make concerning Junia, and the ways that other women in this list are used in contemporary debates about women in pastoral ministry. We should, at the very outset, notice the presence of a number of prominent women in the list.

Whatever positions we hold concerning pastoral ministry, we should note the prominence of the various ministries of women more generally, and the honour that Paul held such women in. We have much clearer teaching on these matters elsewhere in the New Testament, and we shouldn't need to rely on speculation about such passages. Making questions of women in pastoral ministry hang upon the uses of particular words and phraseology in such passages is stretching the evidence far further than it can actually support.

In debates on such matters, it is telling how often the word leadership is focused upon. Romans 16 clearly shows women being prominent figures in their churches, being key workers, and being honoured for their faithful service. However, the need to make a case for women in pastoral ministry leads to a focus upon these women as so-called leaders, which is a category that seems to be a rather clumsily fitted one, unsuited to the service that the women here are actually performing.

Perhaps one of the lessons we should learn from this passage is that leadership should not have such a monopoly on honour, and that other forms of service in the life of the church should receive much more recognition. We should beware of importing our modern assumptions about individuals filling essentially gender-neutral roles for which their sex is a matter of indifference, assumptions that arise in no small part from our modern economic order. In most societies across history and cultures, a person's sex colours the way that the roles they perform are perceived, and how those roles function, even when the roles they perform are nominally the same as roles the other sex can perform.

A number of the women mentioned here are also mentioned alongside their husbands, their children, or their siblings. Rather than individuals performing gender-neutral roles, in many of these situations we seem to have husband-wife teams, or families who were known for their service. Clement of Alexandria, writing around the year 200 AD, speaks of the apostles making their wives fellow-workers alongside them, with the wives focusing on ministering to women, to which the apostles themselves would not have had such ready access.

In the case of Rufus's mother, Paul describes a woman performing an explicitly gendered role of service, acting as a mother to him. The domestic setting for many of the ministries that Paul addresses here, in house churches, as married missionary couples, as families, etc., naturally allowed for women to enjoy much more prominence as the

face of their communities, sometimes because there were relatively few male converts around. As the church assumed a growing public profile, and the informality of house churches was replaced with more formal offices and ordered communities, the ministry of male leaders naturally assumed much greater prominence on the broader stages that the church was moving into, a development that could strengthen the entire church in certain ways.

Nevertheless, in local communities, the more domestic and communally grounded ministries of women would still have enjoyed considerable honour and prominence, even though their ministries would not have been as prominent on the broader stages. Looking through the names, there are some scattered clues to social status, to the regions of origin that people come from. Most of them were probably born outside Rome.

Slave-born and free-born identities are sometimes hinted at, and in the case of Andronicus and Junia, their Jewish origin. It seems likely that the majority of the Roman church were slaves or freedmen or women. Throughout this list, Paul often uses the words In the Lord, or In Christ, speaking for instance of Andronicus and Junia as being In Christ before him.

Christ is the new realm of his people's existence, and the source of their identity. Before sending his companions greetings and signing off the letter, Paul gives an exhortation. He is concerned that the Romans watch out for the type of people who cause divisions and set up obstacles.

Such people are not motivated by the truth and the love and service of Christ, but are just in it for their own appetites. However, they can lead many naive people astray. Paul writes very positively about the Romans themselves, but he wants them to be wise in discerning what is good, and completely averse to that which is evil, alluding to the promise of Genesis 3, verse 15.

He promises that God will crush Satan under their feet shortly. The serpent will be attacking them in various ways, but Paul is assured that they will prove victorious. In verses 21 to 24, Paul conveys greetings from his fellow workers, and his amanuensis, Tertius, conveys his.

Timothy is described as Paul's fellow worker, presumably something already well known by Christians in the eastern Mediterranean region. The references to Gaius and Erastus suggest the possibility that Paul was writing from Corinth. Also, Erastus' public office is evidence of individuals with higher social status among the early Christians.

The book ends with a grand doxology, summing up the meaning of the Gospel. In the fullness of time, according to his eternal purpose, and in fulfilment of prophetic promise, Jesus the Messiah is being proclaimed as the world's true Lord, and the one in whom the reign of God is established. This message is being proclaimed throughout the nations, so

that all nations might submit to him with the obedience of faith.

This is the Gospel. This God, who has established his glorious kingdom in his son Jesus Christ, is also able to establish his people, secure in the strength of the kingdom that he is making known at this present time. A question to consider.

Putting together various clues that we get in this chapter and elsewhere, what might we imagine the Roman church in the late 50s AD was like?