



Romans

The Gospel of Salvation

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Romans: The Gospel of Salvation is a resource of *The Great Adventure* Catholic Bible Study Program.

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CONTENTS

Welcome to <i>The Great Adventure</i>	v
About <i>Romans: The Gospel of Salvation</i>	vii

QUESTIONS AND TALK NOTES

Session One – Introduction	1
Session Two – Romans 1–2: Paul’s Gospel and the Universality of Sin	9
Session Three – Romans 3–4: Faith, Works, and Justification	15
Session Four – Romans 5–6: Entering into the Paschal Mystery	23
Session Five – Romans 7–8: The Logic of the Covenant, the Gravity of Sin, and the Gift of the Spirit	31
Session Six – Romans 9–11: God Fathers His Family	39
Session Seven – Romans 12–13: Making Our Lives a Living Sacrifice	47
Session Eight – Romans 14–16: The End of the Story	55

RESPONSES TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

How to Use These Responses	63
Session One Responses – Introduction	65
Session Two Responses – Romans 1–2: Paul’s Gospel and the Universality of Sin	67
Session Three Responses – Romans 3–4: Faith, Works, and Justification	71
Session Four Responses – Romans 5–6: Entering into the Paschal Mystery	75
Session Five Responses – Romans 7–8: The Logic of the Covenant, the Gravity of Sin, and the Gift of the Spirit	79
Session Six Responses – Romans 9–11: God Fathers His Family	83
Session Seven Responses – Romans 12–13: Making Our Lives a Living Sacrifice	87
Session Eight Responses – Romans 14–16: The End of the Story	91
What’s Next?	97

Welcome to *The Great Adventure*™



“To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances; to seek him, the greatest adventure.”
– St. Augustine of Hippo

The Bible is at the heart of our Catholic Faith—and our relationship with God. It is the living Word of God, where our Father meets with us and lovingly speaks to us. Reading the Bible should bring us closer to Christ, but understanding it is not always easy. Many people tell us they have tried time and again to prayerfully read Scripture, but they get frustrated because they “just don’t get it.”

The Great Adventure is designed so that anyone can make sense of the Bible and experience the life-changing power of God’s Word. At the core of *The Great Adventure* is the concept that there is a story running through the seventy-three books of the Bible that ties all of Scripture together and makes sense not just of the Bible, but of our lives as well.

That story is God’s plan as it has unfolded throughout salvation history and continues to unfold today. Once we grasp this “big picture,” the readings at Mass begin to make more sense, our Scripture reading and study come to life, and we see how our lives fit into God’s loving plan.

Hundreds of thousands of participants have discovered the riches of Scripture by experiencing one or more *Great Adventure* Bible studies. It is our prayer that you will gain a newfound understanding of God’s Word that will transform your life and bring you closer to Christ.

Jeff Cavins, creator and president, *The Great Adventure*
Sarah Christmyer, co-developer and author, *The Great Adventure*

About *The Great Adventure* Catholic Bible Study Program

At the core of *The Great Adventure* is *The Bible Timeline*™ Learning System: a simple way to get the “big picture” of the Bible by focusing on the story that runs throughout Sacred Scripture. *The Great Adventure* Bible studies explore the biblical narrative in light of Catholic teaching and the historical, cultural, and literary context of the Scriptures to discover what Scripture reveals about God’s plan and our place within it. Studies of individual books of the Bible are supplemented by thematic and “life application” studies.

Every *Great Adventure* study is designed to foster:

- Familiarity with the Bible and ease of reading it
- Bible study habits consistent with the guidelines of the Catholic Church
- Personal engagement in the Word of God
- Faith-sharing based on the Word of God
- Growth in knowledge about Scripture and the Catholic Faith

Not for Duplication

About *Romans: The Gospel of Salvation*



Paul's letter to the Romans has been at the center of reflection, conversion, and controversy from the very beginning. *Romans: The Gospel of Salvation* provides an authentically Catholic, comprehensive, yet simple way to understand the overarching theme of Romans. *Romans: The Gospel of Salvation* reveals the way in which the gospel of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's hope, which leads to the universal, "catholic" family of God.

Materials

Materials for *Romans: The Gospel of Salvation* include

- **Workbook:** contains session summaries, home reading assignments, engaging study questions, responses to the questions, and talk notes for the video presentations. (You will need one workbook for every participant, study leader, and small-group facilitator.)
- **Video Presentations** (eight 30-minute sessions): presented by Andrew Swafford and Jeff Cavins, these eight video presentations provide comprehensive teaching and commentary on Romans. (You will need one DVD set.)

In addition, every participant, leader, and small-group facilitator should have a Catholic Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. For this study, we recommend *The Great Adventure Catholic Bible*, an RSV-2CE Bible that incorporates the same color-coded *Bible Timeline* Learning System that is used throughout *The Great Adventure Catholic Bible* studies.

How the Study Works

Every *Great Adventure* study includes four essential steps, which are designed to fit together and build upon each other. Following these steps in order will help you to get the most out of each session.



STEP ONE: HOME PREPARATION

NOTE: There is no home preparation required for Session One.

Each session begins with personal study that involves reading Scripture and answering a series of questions that will help you understand and think more deeply about what you have read. Some questions will include additional reading from other parts of the Bible or from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to help you consider the passage in light of the bigger picture of salvation history and Catholic teaching.

We recommend that you allow at least 90 minutes to complete the reading and answer the questions for each session. We also suggest that home preparation be done in several sittings over the course of a week. This will help you create a habit of daily Bible reading and prayerful meditation.

STEP TWO: SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

The small-group discussion is one of the most rewarding components of a *Great Adventure* Bible study. During this discussion, members of your small group will have an opportunity to share their insights into the Scripture reading. The goal of the small-group discussion is to help participants obtain a richer understanding of the readings and apply them to their lives. Trained facilitators guide the small-group discussion and keep it on track. To learn how to facilitate a small-group discussion, visit ascensionpress.com. Be sure to follow the “Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion” on page xi.

STEP THREE: VIDEO PRESENTATION

Andrew Swafford and Jeff Cavins wrap up each session with a video presentation that offers unique insights and profound connections to help you gain a deeper understanding of the Bible and its relationship to the Catholic Faith, with a special emphasis on ways to apply what you have learned to your life.

STEP FOUR: REVIEW OF RESPONSES

The final step—reviewing the responses at the back of this workbook—is done at home prior to beginning the reading for the next session. These responses will help you read the Scripture passages for the next session in the proper context.

For the most effective study experience, complete these steps in the following order: (1) Read and answer the questions, (2) discuss them in your small group, (3) view the video presentation, and (4) review the responses. During the discussion, your small-group facilitator will incorporate points found in the responses, but the richness that comes from individual insights can be lost when participants view the responses prior to the discussion.

For more information about how to plan and promote a Bible study and how to facilitate a small-group discussion, visit ascensionpress.com or call 1-800-376-0520.

Session Outline and Reading Guide

Each session in this workbook has the following sections.

1. Session Questions (used during Step 1: Home Preparation and Step 2: Small-Group Discussion)

- A. Establish the Context
- B. Read the Story
- C. Take a Deeper Look
- D. Application

2. Session Talk Notes (used during Step 3: Video Presentation)

3. Session Responses (used during Step 4: Review of Responses)

The following chart offers an overview of the home preparation readings assigned in each session of the study. The main reading is provided in **section B, Read the Story**, and should be read before you answer the session questions. Additional Bible readings and *Catechism* readings are provided in **section C, Take a Deeper Look**, and should be read as you answer the study questions for each session.

Session	Main Reading	Additional Bible Readings	Catechism (CCC) Readings
1. Introduction	—	—	—
2. Romans 1–2: Paul’s Gospel and the Universality of Sin	Romans 1–2	Deuteronomy 6:4–7, 30:6; Psalm 22:27–28; Mark 15:39; Colossians 3:5	159, 1718–1719
3. Romans 3–4: Faith, Works, and Justification	Romans 3–4	Psalm 119:1, 119:72, 119:77, 119:97, 119:127, 119:131, 119:141–142; Hebrews 11:8–12	654
4. Romans 5–6: Entering into the Paschal Mystery	Romans 5–6	—	37–38, 387, 405, 407, 654, 1010, 1855
5. Romans 7–8: The Logic of the Covenant, the Gravity of Sin, and the Gift of the Spirit	Romans 7–8	Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:24–28; John 15:13; Acts 7:54–60; Acts 9:4–5, 9:15–16, 14:22; 2 Corinthians 11:24–25, 12:9; Colossians 1:24; Hebrews 5:8	—
6. Romans 9–11: God Fathers His Family	Romans 9–11	Genesis 50:20; Deuteronomy 30:6, 30:11–14; Isaiah 2:2–3; Jeremiah 18:1–11	—
7. Romans 12–13: Making Our Lives a Living Sacrifice	Romans 12–13	Acts 9:3, 9:5; 1 Corinthians 12:26; Colossians 3:5	1213, 1324, 1368, 1391, 1396–1397
8. Romans 14–16: The End of the Story	Romans 14–16	Matthew 5:48, 19:26; Mark 8:34, 15:21; Acts 26:8–12, 27:1, 28:11–16; 1 Corinthians 8:12–13; Galatians 5:6	—

What to Do for Each Session

1. Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

2. Small-Group Discussion (40 minutes)

Note to Study Leaders: There is a short small-group discussion for the first week. Use the extra time to divide participants into small groups of eight to twelve people, ensure that everyone has the study materials, and explain how the study works. Each small group should be led by a trained facilitator.

3. Video Presentation (30 minutes)

4. Closing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Getting the Most out of This Study

This study will help you understand the Bible in a new way. The “head knowledge” you gain will help you grow in “heart knowledge” as you follow up on what you have learned. The Bible will always remain a mystery, though, and that is part of the beauty of it: We can never exhaust the treasures of Scripture. Fortunately for us, the Bible is not a subject to master; it is a place to encounter the living Word of God.

Whenever you open your Bible to read, *start with prayer*, and place yourself in God’s presence. You might take Samuel’s prayer as your own: “Speak, LORD, for your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:9). When you read, adopt an attitude of listening. Try not to treat Scripture as a text but as a personal message from God. What is he saying? What does it mean? What does it mean for my life? If you come to the Word focused on having an encounter with the Lord, he will speak to your heart, and you will be transformed.

An Important Note About the Responses to the Study Questions

Responses to the study questions are provided in the back of this workbook. These responses do not exhaust the meaning that can be found in the Scripture reading. People will have unique insights. The responses have two important functions:

1. The first purpose of the responses is to provide participants with a review of each session, which will help establish a context for the reading and questions in the following session. The best time to read the responses is just before starting on the next session.

2. The second purpose of the responses is to provide guidelines for the small-group facilitators.

Facilitators: Complete the Scripture reading and answer the questions on your own before reading the responses in preparation for facilitating the small-group discussion.

Participants should not review the responses for each session until after the session is completed. Although it might be tempting to look at these responses in advance, it is important to wait for the following reasons:

1. Bible study is not about simply watching a video presentation or reading a Bible commentary. It is just as important to immerse yourself in the Word of God itself and engage it with your heart and mind. The questions in *The Great Adventure* studies are designed to draw you into the Scriptures so that the Word of God will be planted and grow in your heart. Reading a response written by someone else may satisfy your mind for a moment, but it will not result in the kind of growth that will occur if you attempt to answer the question on your own first.

2. The success of a small group depends on a good discussion. A group of participants who have spent time pondering the Scripture passages on their own will have more varied insights to discuss.

For these reasons, please wait to read the responses until after the session. When you follow the steps of this study as intended, you will explore the Word of God in different ways—in the reading, the small-group discussion, the video presentation, and, finally, in the responses. Follow these steps over time, and you will be more than fed—you will learn to feed yourself.

Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion

1. Enjoy yourself!
2. Speak with respect and charity.
3. Do not ridicule or dismiss what others say. Keep comments positive.
4. Come prepared.
5. If you were not able to prepare, let others speak first.
6. Stick to the topic and questions at hand.
7. Start and end on time.
8. Allow silence. Give people a chance to think.
9. Listen to others without interrupting.
10. Keep personal matters within the group.

Adapted from Thomas Smith's original "10 Commandments of a Small Group."

Session One

Introduction

Piazza del Colosseo, Rome

A. Establish the Context

Romans has been at the center of reflection, conversion, and controversy from the beginning. In fact, the accolade of “greatest theologian of the early Church” would be a toss-up between St. Paul and St. John—and Paul’s letter to the Romans is, no doubt, his crown jewel.

Get ready—we are sure to find Romans both difficult and rewarding.

St. Peter famously says of Paul’s letters, “There are some things in them hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16). Some scholars believe Peter is referring specifically to Romans. If this is your first time through, Romans can be tough going. Rest assured: there is an inner logic at work—the logic of the covenant God made with his people going all the way back to Abraham and David. Once we begin to understand the inner workings of Paul’s thought, we too will feel the “scales” lifted from our eyes, just as Paul did when he was still Saul (see Acts 9:18). So in the spirit of St. John Paul II, “Be not afraid!” As with most things really worth pursuing in life, this one is worth the effort.

WHO IS ST. PAUL?

The author of this letter is “Paul,” formerly known as Saul and a virulent persecutor of the early Church (see Acts 7:54–8:3). Saul was trained by the famous Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Gamaliel was representative of the Hillel school, one of the two great schools of Pharisaic thought in Jesus’ day (the other being Shammai). Hillel was known for being more lenient, as is manifest in Gamaliel’s cautioning against the persecution of Christians (see Acts 5:33–38). However, Saul departs from his master in this regard through his zeal for persecuting Christians, showing more affinity with the rival school of Shammai. Biblical scholar N.T. Wright puts the matter this way:

There were notable Hillelites during the period, among whom we may note Gamaliel, who is described briefly in Acts 5:34–39. He argues precisely for the live-and-let-live position: if this new movement (Christianity) is not from God, it will fall by its own weight; but if it is from God, you had better not oppose it. ... The Gamaliel of Acts 5 would not have approved of the stoning of Stephen. He would never have dreamed of riding off to Damascus to haul Christians into prison and to death. Saul may have learned a lot from Gamaliel, but he did not share his particular position.¹

¹ N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 28–31.

The trajectory of Paul's life changes dramatically when he encounters the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Saul falls to the ground, hearing a mysterious voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Paul loses his eyesight until he is baptized by Ananias (see Acts 9:10-19). Here the Lord refers to Paul as a "chosen instrument" who will "carry my name before the *Gentiles* and kings *and the sons of Israel*; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:15-16, emphasis added)—a statement that foreshadows Paul's mission and the suffering through which it would come to fruition (see Acts 14:22).

It is important to note that Paul does not see himself as changing religions; rather, he comes to see Jesus Christ, especially Christ's death and resurrection, as the culmination and fulfillment of the story of Israel. In other words, this encounter with the risen Jesus will set Paul on three missionary journeys where he will share the gospel of Jesus Christ with both Jews and Gentiles. But for St. Paul, even his mission to the Gentiles is fulfilling the deepest aspects of *Israel's* story and vocation. For this reason, Paul will insist that he has not changed religions, but rather has found the fulfillment—albeit in an unexpected way—of the faith of his childhood.

Paul's first missionary journey (AD 46–49) takes him through Asia Minor (contemporary southern and central Turkey; see Acts 13:1–14:28). His second missionary journey (AD 50–52) revisits this area and pushes into Greece (e.g., Athens and Corinth; see Acts 15:36–18:22), while his third missionary journey (AD 53–58) revisits these same areas (see Acts 18:23–20:38). St. Paul writes his letter to the Romans toward the end of this third trip, in late AD 57 or early 58, just before he departs for Jerusalem, seeking to arrive by Pentecost (see Acts 20:16) with aid for the church there (see Romans 15:25-26; Acts 20:1-3). He writes this letter from Corinth (or its nearby port of Cenchreae; see Romans 16:1).

Paul's First Missionary Journey



Paul's Second Missionary Journey



Paul's Third Missionary Journey



REASONS FOR WRITING ROMANS

St. Paul's zeal for the gospel took him all over the known world. In Romans, Paul expresses his desire to take the gospel west, all the way to Spain (see Romans 15:24). By writing to the church in Rome, Paul is probably seeking to establish a base from which he can launch this western mission.

In addition, as Paul writes this letter he is preparing to bring aid collected from the Gentile churches to the Christians in Jerusalem, who are experiencing famine. He is probably hoping the Roman Christians will join this effort. As Paul teaches, because the Gentiles have come to share in the *spiritual* blessings of Israel, they should respond with *material* assistance for the Christians in Jerusalem (see Romans 15:25-27)—an act which demonstrates the newfound spiritual unity between Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ.

Finally, Paul seeks to heal Jewish-Gentile relations. The Roman emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49 because of disputes over a certain “Chrestus”—a reference to Christ (see Acts 18:2). This expulsion would have removed Jewish Christians as well (since at this point Christians were often perceived as a sect within Judaism). This decree expired with Claudius' death in AD 54, allowing Jews and Jewish Christians to return to Rome. Thus, Paul's letter addresses tensions stemming from this demographic shift: namely, a move toward a predominantly *Gentile* Christian church in Rome after Claudius' expulsion of the Jews, and the resultant tensions when Christians of a Jewish background returned to Rome after Claudius' death. For this reason, Paul specifically addresses Jewish-Gentile relations by dealing with the place of Jewish ritual concerns, such as food laws and calendar observances, in the New Covenant (see Romans 14:1–15:13; see also Acts 15:1-11).

The overarching theme of Romans is salvation in Christ—offered to both Jews and Gentiles (see especially Romans 5–8), who have become one in Christ. The letter to the Ephesians describes this same “mystery” of Christ (Ephesians 3:3): “Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6). Romans brings this teaching full circle, showing that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's hope, rooted in the Abrahamic and Davidic promises. This fulfillment leads to the universal, catholic family of God—where Jews and Gentiles are united in Christ Jesus.

B. Read the Story

Here we are introducing Saul-turned-Paul and his missionary endeavors to prepare ourselves for a study of Romans. For more background, read Acts 7:54–8:3; 9:1-19. As Paul processed his own encounter with the risen Jesus, he may well have thought back to the awe-inspiring revelations of God to the prophets, scenes he had probably meditated upon since childhood (see Isaiah 6:1-5; Ezekiel 1:4-28). Paul comes to see that—in Jesus—God has definitively returned to his people and manifested his presence in a new and unexpected way.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will draw you into the heart of Paul's message. If you do not understand something, make a note of it to bring up in the discussion.

1. Paul wrote Romans toward the end of his third missionary tour in AD 57–58. Knowing this, how important is Romans in terms of its expression of Paul's theology? Do you think Paul had been preaching these themes for a long time at this point?

2. One of the major themes in Romans is salvation. Before we begin, what, in your view, is salvation? What does it mean to be saved? What are we saved from, and what are we saved for?

3. Did Paul convert to a new religion? How does the way we answer this question affect how we view the relationship between the Old and New Testaments?

4. Paul was a passionate preacher with a zeal for God. How do we use the word “zeal” today? Is it good or bad for a Christian? Explain.

D. Application

The following exercises will help you apply one or more of the key themes of the session to your life.

REFLECT

When Paul encountered Christ, all his plans and ambitions were altered. When he came face-to-face with the truth, he changed his life. How difficult is this? Have you ever had a time when you knew what the right thing to do was but still had trouble following through with it? What makes it hard to change, especially in the midst of people who already know you? Is it fear? Have you ever encountered God in a way that resonated deeply within you? Did this conviction last, or did it fade as time went by? How can we more often remember (and intentionally recall) what God has done for us in the past to keep it fresh in our minds and hearts?

COMMIT

The prophet Jeremiah writes, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). Sometimes we feel God’s presence, and sometimes we struggle to connect with God. In moments of desolation, we are often tempted to forget or dismiss our past encounters with God, and we are tempted to believe that our present desolation will become permanent. Instead, especially in times of desolation (and also in consolation), we should seek to recall those times when God has brought us through dark moments. Meditating upon God’s faithfulness in this way will give us confidence that God can and will do the same in the present and the future. By making this a regular practice, it will fortify our spiritual energies in preparation for times of spiritual difficulty and dryness, which are sure to come our way.

PRAY

Do we take seriously how much God loves us and believe that God truly has a plan for our lives? On what do we set our ultimate hope? Let's make this our prayer: *Lord, give me the wisdom to know your will and the strength to follow it through.*

Pray the following prayer from St. Ignatius of Loyola, which is about trust in times of darkness:

O Christ Jesus, when all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness, give us the sense of your presence, your love, and your strength. Help us to have perfect trust in your protecting love and strengthening power, so that nothing may frighten or worry us; for, living close to you, we shall see your hand, your purpose, and your will through all things.

Not for Duplication

SESSION ONE TALK NOTES

Introduction

- I. Saul—A Harvard-Educated Jew**
- II. From Zealous Persecutor to Missionary Apostle**
- III. Gathering the Gentiles—A Part of *Israel's* Story (the Importance of Abraham and David)**
- IV. Three Main Reasons for Writing Romans**
 - A.** Western mission
 - B.** Aid for Christians in Jerusalem
 - C.** Jewish and Gentile relations
- V. Catholic Church as Fulfillment of Israel's Story**
- VI. Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of the Gospel**

Not for Duplication