

Introduction

When I think about the Bible, I find myself dividing it into sections. First, there is the Old Testament with the revelation that there is a living God. This is followed by the history of the “chosen” people, the Hebrews, who are the descendants of Abraham. God’s covenant with Abraham is the key to the rest of the Bible. In that covenant first declared in Genesis 12:2,3, God says to Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” This covenant is still in effect today.

Following the writings of the Old Testament is 400 years of silence from God. Finally, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant appears in the form of a baby born in a stable in Bethlehem. The life and teachings of Jesus begin the next section of the Bible for me. In other words, the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. After them is the story of the early church in the book of Acts. This book introduces Paul, a militant, passionate Jew who was transformed to be the greatest Christian evangelist of all time. This brings us to the next section which is the epistles or letters. Most of the epistles are written by Paul to the early churches that he established in the pagan or Gentile parts of the known world. The book of Revelation stands alone in my mind as what the future holds for God’s world.

The gospels are arguably the most important of the books for Christians because they contain the very words of Jesus Christ. But God in his wisdom knew there would be questions and perhaps confusion about certain doctrine. He provided the epistles to answer some of those questions and to solidify the words of Jesus Christ.

So why study Romans? John Stott says this about Romans: “It remains a timeless manifesto, a manifesto of freedom through Jesus Christ. It is the fullest, plainest and grandest statement of the gospel in the New Testament.”

Ray Stedman declared this about Romans: “The Epistle of Paul to the Romans is undoubtedly the most powerful human document that has ever been written. It is pure gold from beginning to end. This is the book

that lit the fire in Martin Luther’s heart and brought about the Protestant Reformation, changing the history of Europe, as well as the world. This is the book that struck home as John Wesley sat in a little chapel in London listening to Luther’s Prelude to the Epistle to the Romans. Wesley said his heart was strangely warmed as he heard the truths of Romans set forth. There followed, through him, the great evangelical awakening that saved England from the fate of France and arrested the decay of English life, completely altering the history of the world again.

This is the epistle that burned in the heart of Karl Barth, who in our day set forth some of the mighty truths of this letter and thus captured the theological world, calling it back from the crass, empty liberalism of the nineteenth century, restoring much truth to the churches of Europe. The lives of millions of people who have read the letter to the Romans have been drastically altered.”

This last fall we studied Nehemiah which tells a story. Romans is about doctrine. The theme of Romans is the righteousness of God. In the world we live in today, it is sometimes difficult to see how God is working, how his righteousness is winning. The coronavirus, the global tumult, our nations divisive attitudes, the rise of crime, all of these can contribute to fear, doubt, and unrest. This can lead us to question the power of God and the plan of God. Romans addresses these thoughts head on. God does not want us to despair but to prepare.

Where Nehemiah taught us how to rebuild our faith, church, and nation, Romans addresses our heart and our faith walk. If this 16-chapter letter to the Romans can change the heart of our historical giants of faith, then it can change our hearts too. If Romans can be the catalyst for a faith awakening like it was in England, then it can do it again in our world today.

So, let’s go deep, hold on tight, buckle your seat belts and be ready to be transformed by the “renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2) as we journey through Romans together.

You won’t regret it...

—Meg Rice