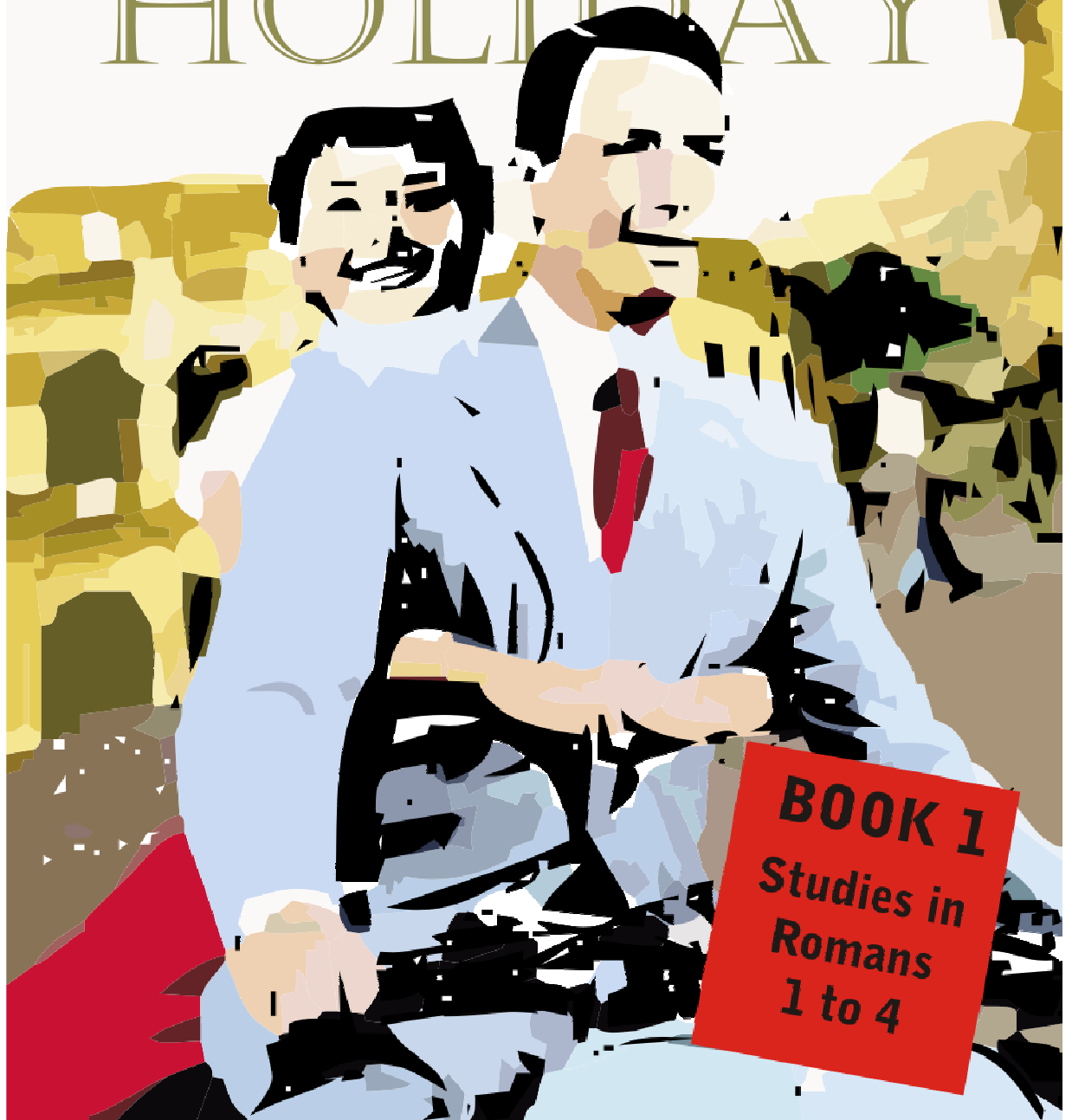


# ROMAN HOLIDAY



PACK YOUR BAG AND JOIN US IN ROMANS

# All Roads Lead to Rome...

Funny, isn't it – relics from the glory days of the Roman Empire still litter our language. These days, "*All Roads lead to Rome*" is just an expression, but when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, it was a fact. Sure "*Rome wasn't built in a day*"; how could it be? It was a sprawling city, at the very centre of the world empire ruled by the Emperor Nero. Maybe "*When in Rome, do as the Romans do*" was more than just a polite suggestion!

The Romans invented sealed roads, and a commercial and military transport system connected Rome with the rest of the empire; soldiers could be dispatched to trouble spots in record time. Rome's power and prestige were incredible. And Emperor Nero placed himself right at the very centre of it all. Nero was satisfied with nothing less than *worship* from his loyal citizens, and called himself a "son of god."

With Christianity in its infancy, there was already a church established in Rome, most probably by Peter. Already, there's been trouble – eight years or so before Paul writes, the Jews have been exiled from Rome for rioting; many Jewish Christians were thrown out with them. They've recently been allowed back to their homes – but tensions and suspicions remain... even among the Christians themselves. Awkwardly, too, the claims of King Jesus, the true resurrected Son of God are obviously at odds with the grand claims of Caesar. It's a difficult time and place to be a Christian!

It's into this environment that Paul writes his famous letter. Some time soon, he's planning a Roman Holiday... and he wants them to be ready for him. It's a letter that sweeps wide across Christian doctrines – often complex, but always formative in the life of the church. Be warned – some of these studies are long. It's a good discipline to prepare a little each day. And just a hint – make sure your group agrees on a finishing time for the studies, and do what you can in the agreed time. Romans may be tough work; but the rewards will be huge.

Phil Campbell  
May 2006



### WHAT IS PAUL'S MESSAGE?

Sometimes, Christian jargon is unavoidable. There are some terms in the bible we just have to grapple with and try to understand, even though they're not a common part of our everyday language. There's a term like that in this passage. It's the word ...

gospel GOSPEL *gospel* GOSPEL goSPEL GOspel

Gospel originally meant "good announcement" or "good news". It was often used of Royal announcements, such as the proclamation of the reign of a new king.

We call the first four books of the New Testament "the gospels", because they *contain* this "good news" about Jesus. But Paul uses the term in a slightly more technical way. His *gospel* is **the very essence or heart of the message he preaches**.

3. How many times does Paul use the term "gospel" in verses 1 to 17?

4. Make a brief note of everything Paul says about this gospel.

5. Now try to summarise these points in a simple statement of the gospel:-

<b>THE GOOD NEWS IS ....</b>
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6. Some important points to note:-

a. Paul's gospel isn't just something he made up! Who does it come from? (v1)

b. Likewise, the gospel has a specific content and focus. Who is it about? (v3).

7. In a misguided effort to be "relevant", many Christians - and whole churches - have completely lost touch with this gospel. Instead of the focus of their message being Jesus, they pursue all sorts of other things. Can you think of some examples?

a. Why is the gospel so important? (v16)

b. Why might we be tempted to "be ashamed of the gospel"?

Have you ever felt this way? What aspects of the gospel would have seemed most ridiculous to the ancient world? What about today?

What aspects of this ambassador's announcement would have been most "politically incorrect" in Rome?

8. How does our world today react to the proclamation of the "rule of King Jesus"?

### **THE RIGHT RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL**

Paul gives a number of hints in this passage as to the right response to the gospel. Read through the passage one last time, and take note of the way the Romans have responded, and what it is the gospel calls us to.

Paul says his gospel calls people from everywhere - Jew and Gentile - to the "obedience that comes from faith." (v5) Notice that FAITH comes before our works - we are not saved by our good deeds, but that our good deeds, or obedience, follows along after our faith.

9. Read verse 17. The rest of the letter to the Romans expands on this verse. Notice where our "righteousness" comes from, and how we become righteous.

10. The Romans have responded to the gospel in exactly the right way, and everyone's talking about it - see verse 8.

Can we expect to see the same response from people today? How, and why?

What stops us from calling people to the OBEDIENCE that comes from our faith?

11. Notice Paul's longing to visit the Roman Christians in verses 8 to 13. He wants to encourage them in their faith, and be encouraged by them. Do you share this desire to encourage and be encouraged? How can we better do that for one another?

Notice too Paul's passion for the gospel. Read aloud the verses that show this most clearly. Do you have this same passion for the gospel? Why, or why not?

How can we maintain our passion for the gospel?

Can you give an example of obedience that comes from faith in your own life?