

# Paul The Man

by  
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When discussing Paul the man there is many things we could say taken from extra biblical source literature. One such book is Bruce Metzger's "Introduction to the Apocrypha"<sup>(1)</sup> where Paul's companion Onesiphorus, an Ephesian, hears that Paul is coming down the road from Lystra to Iconium and goes to meet him for the first time taking his wife and two sons. He describes Paul thus;

*"A man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, and in a good state of body. With eyebrows meeting and a large hooked nose, full of grace; for though he appeared like a man he had the face like an angel."* (2)

Modern scholars try to paint a verbal picture of Paul as the consummate Western scholar which could not be further from the truth, Paul was Jewish through and through. They furthermore try to show that there was a division between his doctrine and that of Messiah Yeshua. This has been further realised by the only Jewish scholar to have gained a global reputation, Professor Joseph Klausner (1874-1958) who wrote two major works 'Israel's Messianic Idea' and 'Jesus of Nazareth' these took him 15 years to research and write.

The Curriculum Vitae of Paul's life was drummed into him during his education, which included Greek culture and the teachings of the Rabbis. In the economy of God our preparation is often begun long before we are called into service, and was also very true of Paul. God had begun His work long before the incident on the Damascus road, and on meeting with Jesus it was as if all that he was seeking and questioning had clicked into place.

In the world of Paul education and teaching had already been prepared from family to society. Therefore Paul had received the building of his life both at home and at school.

Teaching was free in the Jewish community, Rabbi Gamaliel we read of in the book of Acts, often said that everyone should provide himself with a teacher, because it prepared him for the life to come. Teaching at first was restricted to religious issues and so we see Paul informing us of himself;

*"I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. I was circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the Law a Pharisee, I have been a Roman citizen since I was born. The Jews all knew how I have lived since I was a child from the beginning of my life in my own country and also in Jerusalem. I was taught at the feet of Gamaliel"*

Paul's home was in the South East of Asia Minor and its culture exercised great influence over little Paul. In late spring the snow covered the Taurus mountains which were three thousand meters in height, and still they framed the Northern landscape around Tarsus. To the south there was the blue Mediterranean and in the east and west was the Amanus mountains. Once the snow had melted it was possible to reach the lush northern plateau from the gates of Cilicia. The engineers from Tarsus had cut through this mountain pass and so caravans could travel by land and from the Euphrates river as far as Ephesus and Rome. From summer till Autumn the wealth of seabound trade with its merchants travelled to Syria. Through his city flowed the river Cydnus which on its way formed mighty water falls before settling down and becoming navigable towards the sea. So the young Paul knew what it was to be "in danger on waters or rivers".

1) Introduction to the Apocrypha P 253 NY 1969 2) New Testament Apocrypha London 1965 p353

According to tradition recorded by Jerome, both of Paul's parents came from Gischala in Galilee. His father was of the tribe of Benjamin and had a leather factory or weaving mill. There they manufactured the famous Cilician textiles which were made of hair from goats bred on the Cilician plateau. This warm clothing was very popular with soldiers and seamen. It was hard work with goat hair which often made their workers hands bleed. The church fathers called Paul a tanner or tentmaker. The primary responsibility for education of sons belonged to the father, who taught him set prayers which would have to be learnt by heart. They would also have learnt the Psalms, some young Jewish boys today can recite the book of Psalms from memory. In the Talmud there is a saying;

*“Do not take pupils under six years of age, and do not force knowledge into him as into an ox.”*<sup>(3)</sup>

It was the custom to send boys to be taught in the synagogue by the Hazan or cantor. It was there that they also learned the bible by reciting it. It was the custom that some might even live with the Cantor to learn good behaviour or 'derek heretz' in Hebrew. These children were called *“tinoqot shel beit ha-knesit”* or 'Little synagogue children', this was a kind of kindergarten called the vineyard. In rich families of the day a slave pedagogue took the children to the school room and carried their writing utensils, iron stylus and wax tablets. At the age of ten they began to learn the oral law along with the so called 'fence of the law' the *sayag ha-Torah* with the numerous purification rules. Paul would have received his strict teaching the Pharisees aimed at teaching rational solutions or following the 'voice of reason'. It was perhaps at this stage that the young Paul learned that this Torah *“that was intended to bring life, actually brought death”*(Rom 7:10).

The organised schools originated in connection with the synagogue and usually had a *“beit ha sefer”* or house of the book. The subject of their teaching was the Bible, here they would concentrate on learning the traditions of the fathers. One teacher was entrusted with 25 pupils but if they rose to 40 he was given an assistant. In this way Israel remained the people of the book. The teaching of Philosophy or Greek thought was shunned, and languages concentrated on Hebrew. Girls were given guidance in Greek language and poetry, mothers were responsible for teaching them household management, weaving and cookery.

Paul was to develop into a child of prayer, his Hebrew name being Sh'aul came from king Saul as it was the custom to be named after someone from your tribe, which in his case was Benjamin. Saul of course was *“a head tallest in his tribe”* however Paul was a sickly child and small so they called him Paulus because it means 'tiny'. Roman citizens usually had three names, the fore name of which only the initial was generally used, second was the family name, and third his additional name. So for instance (Gaius) Julius Caesar would mean that he would be called by the name of Caesar. Tarsus was also named Juliopolis after Julius Caesar. Previously Roman citizenship could be applied for if one was a member of a respected family, at the time of Paul it could be bought for five hundred drakhmas and Paul may well have got his citizenship from his father or grandfather. The Roman conqueror of the city at the time of Paul was L. Aemilius Paulus and Paul's Roman name may well have been named after him.

In Paul's home, Greek philosophy was shunned however in Tarsus there was a renowned University and the famous Greek geographer called Strabo who considered it better than either Athens or Alexandria. Shortly before Paul's time there the Stoic philosopher Athendorus was one of the most eminent residents of Tarsus. Paul would have been very familiar with his teachings, one of which is *“Everyman's conscience is his god”*, Another was *“Live with men as if God sees it, and speak with men as if God hears it.”*

Paul was evidently influenced greatly by Stoicism, this can be deduced by his discipline and self denial in his missionary work. Just as he was greatly influenced by the scholars of his day. In his Areiopagus speech he shows that he knew of the poet Epimenides who was from Crete and who lived five hundred years earlier who Paul quoted in 1 Titus 1:12 "*Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons*" also Aratus from Celicia (315-245BC) also the Athenian writer Menander(343-291 BC) who said in a play called 'Thais' "*Bad company ruins good manners*"(4) who Paul quoted in 1Cor 15:33.

The port of Tarsus was widely known for its vice and so the young Paul did not grow up in a narrow Jewish ghetto, but perhaps it was a combination of his Jewish upbringing and his Stoic background that kept his moral backbone intact. Paul in later life became a student of *Rabban Gamliel ha-zagen* (The Old One) who was president of the great council and the spiritual leader of the people during the last decades before the destruction of the Temple in 70 BC. In Rabbinic literature there are as many as six scholars named Gamaliel, and Jewish sources speak of 'old Gamaliel who was the teacher of Saul of Tarsus and the first of the presidents of the great council to be called 'rabban' or 'rabbi', he was also the grandson of the famous Rabbi Hillel. He formed his own school which dominated the more lenient trends of Pharisaism for over 450 years. It was also interesting to know that Hillel was from the same tribe as Paul which was Benjamin and belonged to the house of David.

According to Jewish tradition, boys should learn to read the Torah from the age of five, and be introduced to the oral tradition by the age of ten. They were direct to more profound doctrinal questions by the time they were fifteen, and it was good to come under the huppah (wedding canopy) by the time they were eighteen. *At twenty he is ready for war, and by the time he reached thirty he is at the peak of his strength, at forty he grows in understanding, and by the time he is fifty he is regarded as mature enough to give council. At sixty he begins to grow old. It is not acceptable to be unmarried according to the Talmud at twenty for if he does not marry he is not a complete man.*(5) Now Paul's father was wealthy enough to send his gifted son to sit for learning at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. This would most likely have happened when the youngster was fifteen years of age and it would have lasted at least 3-5 years around c20-25, so assuming Paul was born around year 5 Jesus would not as yet, have begun his public ministry.

The rabbinical way of teaching was based on discussion and debate, and Gamaliel's influence on Paul is clearly seen in the first instance through Hillel, who had come from Babylonia to Palestine in which he encountered the contemporary Gentile world. Hence he consoled Gentiles by doing social work among them and ministering to them in their sorrow, something continued by Gamaliel and would have been taught to the young Paul. He would also engage in vigorous missionary work. Gamaliel tells of his home "*In my fathers home it was the custom to give white clothes to foreigners three days before sabbath so they could share out sabbath meal*"(6). This Paul also learned, and was to be put in to practice in later life.

Secondly, Gamaliel had a principle and so emphasized, the significance of correspondence in creating contacts, especially in the Greek language which enlarged his contact base significantly. This also became Paul's way of making contact with many people and churches throughout the diaspora. Thirdly it was noteworthy that Gamaliel aimed to make easier the interpretation of the Law in the spirit of Hillel. He drew up some applications to improve the position of women. This included if a husband had divorced his wife, he now had the right to refuse her marital intensions in another court. If a woman's spouse had died she could now present one witness instead of two, to confirm she was 'free for a second marriage' as the bill of divorcement always stated. In this he created individual freedoms from individual precepts of the Law.

4) Joseph Holsner 'Paul of Tarsus the influence of Greece'

5) Pirquei Abot 5:21

6) Guiseppe Riccotti 'Paul The Apostle' Bruce p64-80 Milwaukee 1853

It was a point in fact that Galileans were much more tolerant towards women than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea. This now raises the question which inevitably comes up, was Paul ever married. Since it was taught by the rabbis that at eighteen one should come under the 'hupar' it is most likely that he was married whilst he was in Jerusalem. It was required of Great Council members that they be married, and in his advice of 1Cor7 and Eph 5 he states that he give the advice by 'concession, not as a command' and that believers were not under any compulsion.(7) Paul spoke of love with great compassion perhaps as one who had loved and lost, but he clearly intended that this issue should not be so important as to stumble believers away from the faith or love of the Lord. I say loved and lost, because only such a man could give such sensitive advice on such sensitive a subject. Perhaps Paul's marriage lasted from years 25-30 which he spent in Tarsus.

It was emphasized by Jewish scholars that one should find oneself a reliable rabbi so as to escape from suspicions, similarly the Torah should be enduring and one should make many disciples so that they transmit the Torah to their pupils.(8) Both Josephus and Philo estimated that before the destruction of the Temple the number of Pharisees was a modest six thousand and the number of Essenes four thousand. It was known that Hillel had eighty disciples, Gamaliel the elder had five hundred in Jerusalem, and Gamaliel the younger as many as one thousand pupils in Yavnia, of whom five hundred studied Torah and five hundred the Greek language and culture.(9) Jesus had twelve disciples so called because of the twelve tribes of Israel. He also sent out seventy additional disciples into the surrounding villages because that number symbolised the seventy Gentile peoples. In contrast, Paul's missionary and literary activity was spreading the same discipleship to the whole contemporary world. He also applied the rules to midrashim in his synagogue sermons. However in his new post messianic situation he quoted from nothing but scripture, his inner world values had changed and this also became the way of his disciples.

Having attended the Gamaliel academy the young Paul returned home to the city of Tarsus. It is thought that he may well have taken part in his local synagogue as was the custom of the day. In Galatians chapter one Paul tells of himself "*I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers*" and later he states he lived "*according to the strictest sect of our religion, as a Pharisee*". Although he was educated by the conciliatory Gamaliel it may well be he derived a liking for the interpretations of the stricter Shammai, which is clearly seen by the stance he took later.

In the city of David in Jerusalem, to the south of the Temple, several synagogues were built with school rooms and one of them served the Jews of Cilicia. It would appear a natural step that Paul received whilst in his thirties an invitation to take on the post of rabbi of the Cilician synagogue in the city of David. It was perhaps at this time he first met Christians, Acts chapters 6 and 7 informs us about this in great detail. The preaching and teaching of Stephen and his eventual death shook Paul to the core along with his doctrinal views. In Acts 22 and the whole of chapter 26 describe Paul's personnel testimony to the people gathered in the Antonia fortress in Jerusalem along with his testimony to King Agrippa in Ceasarea. We can also see in Acts chapter 8 Paul almost mentions Stephen, saying that when his blood was shed "*I too was present, I approved of it and looked after the clothes of his killers*".(10)

There was strict regulations about stoning and its witnesses, In Jerusalem it had to take place in a specially arranged place outside the city walls. First a herald would walk in front of the procession to announce the accused persons name, then the witnesses would follow him. The place of stoning was usually a high rocky slope descending from the city wall from which the condemned person was thrown down. Before the place of stoning the accused was asked to confess his sin, which guarantees a place in the life to come.

7) 1Cor 7:6-11, 20, 24-26, 37-40.

8) Eliezer Levi 'Pirquei Abot Meforashim', Abot 1, 5-6 p18-19

9) Sutta 49b and Baba Qamma 83a

10) 'Eusebius Ecclesiastical History' 11,23:3

Men were stoned naked, women fully dressed, and stood four cubits from the place to be stoned. They were undressed and handed their clothes to one of the witnesses, which is where Paul comes in as he was the witness in Acts 7:58. First the witness throws the criminal down and if he remains alive the second witness kills him with a large stone, if this does not produce the desired result the third witness takes over. They used very large stones which may require two people to lift, then the two witnesses used it to crush the condemned person which was based on Deut 17:7. After the stoning had taken place the relatives had to meet the judge and the witnesses to indicate that the sentence was justified and they held no grudge against them. In this case Stephen himself asked God to forgive them and Paul also gave his approval.

This was a very important event in the life of the church as well as in the life of Paul it must have haunted him for years. In Jerusalem in the Spring 30AD there began a remarkable awakening as Acts tells of Peters sermon, culminating in three thousand being saved and added to the church that day. The believers continued to share their message resulting in another five thousand salvations. This led to a crisis among the people and spiritual leaders. Rabbi Gamaliel urged them to leave them alone, saying and “if its of God it will stand.”

In spite of their floggings the believers continued with their message, speaking day after day in the Temple Courts and from house to house. The church came under great persecution after the death of Stephen, at this point Paul was around 28 years old, the scripture describes him as a 'young man' the Greek used here is the word '*Neanias*' which informs us he was around twenty eight years of age. He was not old enough for to hold the more responsible office in the synagogue including being a member of the great council.

It is thought that Paul acted as rabbi of the Cilician synagogue and Stephen was active from the Hellenistic synagogue. It is also thought that he would have had a position in the Great Council which was a seventy one council in a semi-circular arrangement. The judges sat on benches and in front of them were students which sat on the ground in three rows. The most distinguished sat in the front row, in the second row the most experienced, and in the third the new students. Paul informs us in Gal 1:14 that “*he had advanced in Judaism beyond many in his age*” Which infers he had attained to the front row of the Sanhedrin, which also explains why he was a witness to the stoning of Stephen. He had therefore been given charge of leading the disciplinary measures that would stifle the Christian awakening.

*“Then Paul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any that were in the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1-2)*

It can not be over stated the zeal led vehemence that consumed Paul as he went about his dastardly business. He persecuted the churches in two stages, first he went from house to house dragging off men and women and putting them in prison. In Jerusalem alone it is estimated there was approximately four hundred and eighty synagogues of which many by this time would have been used by Jewish Christians. Everywhere one could guarantee getting ten men to make a minyan, then a room was booked and used as a synagogue. This number 10 is based on Gen 18:32, according to which Abraham heard God would spare Sodom if 'ten were righteous'. Paul by this stage had received his authorisation from the Great Council.

The synagogue had in use three forms of punishment;

- 1) '*Nezifah*' or a reprimand when no one was allowed to keep company with this person.
- 2) “*Nidui*” or eviction when the culprit was banished for one month from the synagogue.
- 3) “*Herem*” or total ban when the person was finally expelled from the Jewish community.

Paul says in Rom 9:3 that he could wish to be cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers he is referring to this most severe punishment of the synagogue. The synagogues used corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure even in the diaspora.

In the Second stage, described at the beginning of Acts 9, it is as if Paul had forgotten the moderate education he had received from Gamaliel school. Here *“Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the disciples.”* This type of language tells of a man that was obsessed with an uncontrollable hatred, in Hebrew there is a word for it *'sinat hinnam'* which is hatred without a cause. Paul now had expressed his hatred by going to the chief priest for letters of permission to drive Christians out of the synagogues like rats from ones dwelling. Jews in the diaspora did not fall under the jurisdiction of the high priest and that is why he required the letters from him. The Jews had some kind of gentlemen's agreement with the presiding powers that they only would look after their own affairs. So Paul would now be able to bring them bound to Jerusalem back into the high priests domain.

Damascus is one of the oldest cities in the world, the Bible speaks of Kedorlaomer's military incursion in which he captured Abrahams nephew Lot along with the other kings of the East. Abraham chased them as far as Hobah which is North of Damascus. On his route to Damascus Paul was encompassed by a great bright light, his companions stood there speechless and they heard the voice but saw no one. Acts chapter 9 tells of the voice from Heaven saying in the Hebrew language; *“Saul!! Saul!! why do you persecute me?” Then I asked who are you Lord? I am Jesus whom you are persecuting it is hard to kick against the goads, the Lord replied. Now arise and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.”*

This chapter 9 also of the revelation which the disciple Ananias who lived in Damascus, received about Paul. Paul got up from the ground but on opening his eyes he could not see, so they led him by hand to Damascus. For three days he was blind and did eat nor drank nothing Ananias was petrified, he had heard of Paul's reputation and was sent to the street called straight in Tarsus to minister to Paul. He placed his hands on Paul and said ,brother Saul Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here has sent me so you can see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately the scales fell from his eyes and he could see again.He then got up and was baptised and after taking some food he regained his strength and he spent several days with the disciples there. The consequences of Paul's conversion are immediately evident as he continues to preach in the synagogues, but this time Paul did not preach theology or philosophy- he preached the person of Jesus, he was consumed by Jesus.

In all his travels on his missionary journey on reaching a new town he looked for a chance to preach Jesus the Messiah, and he always preach to the Jew first. So he first went to the synagogues to share with Jews, then after if that did not get a response he went to the Gentiles. It became so intense for him that the brethren in Damascus had to lower him over a wall in a basket to get away from the baying mob. He next went to Jerusalem and proclaimed Jesus, as he debated with the Hellenists, but they tried to kill him. The brethren noticed just how hard it was becoming for him and so they took him to Caesarea and from there to Tarsus. Paul immediately began preaching in Syria and Celicia. It was to be fourteen years before Paul would go back to Jerusalem, to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed 15 days. It was in 47AD when he made his first missionary journey.

Paul stayed in Arabia for three years, at that time this kingdom was ruled by King Aretas IV who had married his daughter to Herod Antipas, and when he fell in love with his brother Philip's wife Herodias, there began a long guerrilla war. Josephus explains Herod's defeat by saying that God was punishing him for taking the head of John the Baptist. Aretas ruled the area now known as Jordan and Syria from 9BC to 40AD and this area was undoubtedly the place that Paul had stayed a long time. During these intermediate years Paul was undoubtedly was making himself known around the churches, although most at first were very scared of him. The most important time during these years was the Autumn of 44AD when the Olympic games took place. The festival would have affected the whole of the Greek empire and surrounding districts with trade and cultural promotion. Acts 11:19-20 informs us that during the persecution after the death of Stephen, believers scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch telling of the good news of Jesus.

So Paul had already got a base understanding in the people of these places before his missionary journeys began. When we study the apostle Paul we can see that his upbringing was what made

him, what he eventually became, that plus the Holy Spirit in his life. Paul was not of course the only scholar who travelled around, the contemporary Jewish centers of the diaspora. Rabbi Aqiba was one of the most important rabbis of his time who visited the areas of Arabia, Sicily, Cappadocia, Phrygia and Galatia, but went around trying to get support for the revolt against the Romans. In contrast Paul did three missionary journeys first with Barnabas, then with Silvanus or Silas, finally he took Luke as his companion who was to document all that happened along the way which we can read in Acts of the Apostles.

Luke joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy at Troas around AD50 and remained part of Paul's company on and off till his death in AD 90. Luke was originally a native from Antioch in Syria and he was known as the beloved physician.

Paul was arrested at Jerusalem and taken by ship to Rome where he was to spend a few years in prison. However by the time they had arrived there the Centurion who was his guard so trusted Paul that he was allowed his freedom till the case could be heard. Prior to arriving he had written to Christians in Rome from Judea to inform them of the accusations against him, and that he had personally appealed to Caesar since he had that right as a Roman citizen. During this time he did lots of preaching and teaching. For two whole years he remained there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to him.

Whilst in Rome Paul wrote his so called 'Prison Letters' Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, and Philippians, and Tychicus was the courier. Paul was eventually set free but in AD64 he arrived back in Rome at a time when a great fire broke out and the Roman emperor Nero blamed it on the Christians. It is the time it is believed when Paul's last prison time had begun. His letters to Timothy and Titus may have been his last will and Testament to the church he so loved and gave himself for. In it he instructs Timothy how to set up ministries. Next he enters into eschatological teachings such as 1 & 2 Thessalonians concerning the end times. It was finally here in Rome he suffered a martyr's death, he writes;

*“I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure . I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith finally there is a laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the Righteous judge will give to me on that day.”*

This second imprisonment would have begun in spring AD64 and ended in AD67 when he was accused of high treason against Caesar and beheaded.