

PEOPLE

Paul

Paul was probably born three or four years after Jesus was born. He is a contemporary of Jesus. He probably had heard about Jesus in some way or another. He certainly knew about the Christian movement because he was at the stoning of Stephen.

Saul is clearly a Jewish name. And Paul, as a Jew from Tarsus, would have been given this name at his birth, at his circumcision, just like John was named at his circumcision. Paul is a Roman name and it's clearly the name that Paul is called after his conversion. And perhaps Saul/Paul is a way in which Paul was able to maintain both his Jewish heritage, his Roman citizenship, and his ability to have access to a Gentile community.

Paul is not from Judea, he is not from Jerusalem. He didn't grow up in what we now today call Israel or Palestine. Paul is from Tarsus which is in Cilicia which is a part of Asia Minor, what we would call now today Turkey. He grew up in a town that was a significant in the Roman Empire. It had a university. And was a center of commerce. It was a sophisticated city. It was a place in which the culture and art of Rome would have flourished.

Now, what is most significant about Paul is that he was a Roman citizen. His father was clearly a Roman citizen. Maybe even his grandfather. And we don't know why or how that happened. Being a Jew and a Roman citizen gave him perspectives and opportunities.

In Paul's early education, probably to the time in which he was what we would call today Bar Mitzvah, to the time in which he became a man, 13 or 14, Paul received a very rigorous Hellenistic education. That means that he was brought up in the Greek schooling of the time which included rhetoric, languages, mathematics and science.

We have a pretty good idea that some time at an early age, 13 or 14, Paul was sent by his father to Jerusalem to study to become a Pharisee. Paul was a student in the Pharisaical school of Gamaliel, which was like the Yale or Harvard at the time. He was the top of his class. I would like to say that he was the one who broke the curve. He was a significant presence in that place. And from the age 13, 14, 15 until the time of our Lord's death and resurrection, Paul was studying the Scriptures in Jerusalem. Now we can't say this for sure, but certainly in reading the New Testament we can say that Paul was a fine biblical scholar. I don't think it's a stretch to say that he could have been perhaps the finest biblical scholar in the world at that time. Paul was a brilliant man. And he was a very fierce, passionate man about the law and what it meant to be a Jew.

Paul is a Pharisee. That is a very important thing to understand. Jesus was most closely associated with the Pharisees during his ministry. The Pharisees were the conservative biblical scholars. They operated outside of Jerusalem.

This means that they were the ones who took care of the synagogues and the liturgy of the synagogues. They were teachers. Teachers of the law. Rabbis. They were the ones who opened up the Scriptures to people outside of Jerusalem. The other major party is the Sadducean party. And the chief priests came from this party. These Sadducees weren't as conservative as the Pharisees. They didn't believe in the resurrection. They didn't believe in angels. They didn't really accept most of the Old Testament canon except for the first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. And they were centered in Jerusalem because they were in charge of the liturgy of the temple.

Paul was such a fierce persecutor of the church. He persecutes the church because he sees it as a fundamentally theologically different vision of what he reads in the Old Testament. Although we find no direct Scriptural evidence that Paul ever physically put any Christians to death, there were many Christians who died in the early period because of Paul's instigations.

When you see the persecution, the first persecution in which Stephen is martyred, the chief priests who are Sadducees are the ones leading the persecution. And they have hired Paul the Pharisee to carry out this persecution. Now, here you can see to a certain extent of Paul compromising himself by aligning himself with people he doesn't agree. Yet his hatred of Christians was so great that he was willing to suspend his difficulties with the Sadducees in order to accomplish a greater goal.

There was a picture in the Roman world of what kind of the perfect human specimen was like. These were very well built men. Men who clearly were handsome in appearance. And these were considered almost gods. Paul was not a great human specimen. We believe that he:

- Was a short man, small of stature
- Was supposedly bald
- Had a hook nose
- Had a very thin neck
- Had a very large head (A large head indicated great intelligence.)
- Had large bulging eyes
- Did not have a winsome voice (Very shrill, not a radio voice)

Paul would not have been considered in our culture to be a nice guy. Paul was a hard man. Paul took no prisoners when it came to the truth.

Much if not all of the above information has been gleaned from Dr. Arthur Just Jr. notes on Galatians.