

The Early Years Of Saul Of Tarsus



"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law..." (Acts 22:3)

David Padfield

The Early Years Of Saul Of Tarsus

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Abbreviations

Primary Sources

Antiq.	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
Apion	<i>Against Apion</i>
AvodaZ.	Tractate <i>Avodazara</i>
b.	<i>Babylonian Talmud</i>
Flaccus	<i>Against Flaccus</i>
Gaius	<i>Embassy to Gaius</i>
Hagig.	Tractate <i>Hagiga</i>
m.	<i>Mishnah</i>
Meg.	Tractate <i>Megillah</i>
Mid.	Tractate <i>Middot</i>
Ned.	Tractate <i>Nedarim</i>
Nid.	Tractate <i>Niddah</i>
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
Pesa.	Tractate <i>Pesahim</i>
Saab.	Tractate <i>Shabbat</i>
Sanh.	Tractate <i>Sanhedrin</i>
t.	<i>Tosefta</i>
War	<i>Jewish War</i>
y.	<i>Jerusalem Talmud</i>

Translations of the Bible

CJB	Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
ESV	English Standard Version (2011)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible (2003)
NET	New English Translation (2005)
NAS20	New American Standard Bible (2020)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)

As much as possible, I have followed the guidelines from the Society of Biblical Literature, as given in *The SBL Handbook of Style*. However, this handbook has yet to keep up with electronic media sources, so I have adopted a system where serious students can find my citations without too much trouble. In addition, SBL often ignores the rules of modern typography, so I have bent a few of their guidelines for the sake of clean graphic design.

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Jews Of The Dispersion

Introduction

- I. Pentecost was one of three annual pilgrimage festivals where all Jewish men were required to “appear before the Lord” at the sanctuary in Jerusalem (Exod 34:22–23).
 - A. Pentecost, known in Judaism as *Shavuot* (lit., *weeks*), came fifty days after the Passover feast and celebrated the end of the wheat harvest (Lev 23:15–16).
 - B. Greek-speaking Jews called it *Pentecost* because of these fifty days (e.g., 2 Macc 12:32; Philo, *Laws* 2:176; Josephus, *Antiq.* 3:252).
 - C. Pentecost was a feast of joy and thanksgiving for the completion of the harvest season.
 - D. The feast was proclaimed as a “holy convocation” on which “no customary work” was to be done (Lev 23:21).
- II. On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ from the grave, Jews from throughout the Greco-Roman world traveled to Jerusalem to worship God (Acts 2:5–11).
 - A. The list of nations Luke gives was not based on language but on geography and illustrates how widespread the Dispersion (*Diaspora*) of the Jews was in the first century.
 - B. By the first century AD, Jews had settled in almost every country of the civilized world.
 - C. The fifteen different geographic regions mentioned by Luke all had significant Jewish populations.
 - D. “Strabo, speaking of the time of Sulla, says (about 85 BC), that the Jewish people had already come into every city, and that it was not easy to find a place in the world which had not received this race, and was not occupied by them.” (Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, 2nd Div., 2.221–222)
 - E. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC–c. AD 50), a well-educated Jewish scholar who lived in Egypt during the time of Christ, said Jews could be found in “every region of the habitable world, in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa, on the continent, in the islands, on the coasts, and in the inland parts.” (Philo, *Gaius* 283)

Discussion

I. Geographic Regions Present On Pentecost (Acts 2:9–11)

- A. The Eastern or Babylonian region represented portions of the old Persian Empire.
 1. These were the lands of the earliest dispersion of the Jews, as the Assyrians and Chaldeans carried away exiles from the ten northern tribes.
 2. Later, Nebuchadnezzar carried many Jews away to Babylon.
 3. Even when the Persians gave a royal decree that allowed the Jews to go back to their homeland, many of them decided to stay.
 4. In the first century, the number of Jews in this region ran well into the millions.
 5. *Parthians* were the inhabitants of the territory from the Tigris River to India; Iran now occupies most of this area.
 6. *Medes* were the inhabitants of Media, a country northwest of Persia and south-southwest of the Caspian Sea.

7. *Elamites* were from Elam, located north of the Persian Gulf and south of the Caspian Sea.
 8. *Mesopotamia* means “between the rivers” and is the region between the Euphrates River and Tigris River; Iraq now occupies most of this area.
- B. The Syrian.
1. *Galileans* (Acts 2:7) were proverbially ignorant, rude, uncivilized (John 1:46), and used a peculiar dialect, which distinguished them from the inhabitants of Judea (Mark 14:70).
 2. *Judea* is a reference to *Eretz Israel* (“the Promised Land”) that was held to stretch from the Euphrates to the Egyptian border.
 3. *Cappadocia* was a region of Asia Minor and was bounded on the east by Armenia, on the north by Pontus, west by Lycaonia, and south by Cilicia.
 4. *Pontus* was another province of Asia Minor, originally a part of Cappadocia.
 5. *Asia* is used here to denote the regions or provinces to the west that are not explicitly named (cf. Acts 6:9; 16:6; 20:16).
 6. *Phrygia* was surrounded by Galatia, Cappadocia, and Pisidia.
 - a) Antiochus III deported 2,000 Jewish families to this region in the second century BC (Josephus, *Antiq.* 12:149).
 - b) The apostle Paul would later travel through this region (Acts 16:6).
 7. *Pamphylia* was on the Mediterranean coast and was bounded on the north by Pisidia; Paul had preached here during this first evangelistic journey (Acts 13:13).
 8. There were large Jewish populations in “Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,” and the middle part of the book of Acts centers on Paul’s evangelistic journeys to this area (Acts 13–19).
- C. The Egyptian.
1. *Egypt*, in the first century AD, would see Jews comprise two-fifths of the population of Alexandria.
 - a) “...before the Babylonian Captivity, an Egyptian king set up a military colony of Judaeans mercenary soldiers at Elephantine, on the upper Nile near modern Aswan, to keep out the Kushites.” (de Camp, *Great Cities of the Ancient World*, 51)
 - b) In the time of the prophet Jeremiah, a large number of Jews went to Egypt for fear of the king of Babylon and in opposition to the words of the prophet himself (Jer 42:13–17).
 - c) Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenized Jew (c. AD 38), claimed that “not less than a million” Jews lived in Egypt (Philo, *Flaccus* 43).
 - d) In Alexandria, the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, was translated from Hebrew to Greek between the third and first centuries BC.
 2. *Libya* was west of Egypt and Ethiopia; among the Greeks, it was a general name for Africa.
 3. *Cyrene* was the capital of the North African Roman province of Cyrenaica (modern Libya) and was populated by many Jews.
 - a) The Greeks settled it in the seventh century BC.
 - b) It came under Roman control in 96 BC.

D. The Roman.

1. *Jews*—either native-born Jews or descendants of Jewish families.
2. *Proselytes* were those Gentiles who had been converted to Judaism.
3. “When Pompey conquered Palestine in the first century before Christ, he carried many Jews as slaves to Rome. Afterwards they were liberated, and formed a large Jewish colony at the capital of the empire.” (Machen, *The Literature and History of the New Testament*, 29)
4. There were at least seven Jewish synagogues in ancient Rome.

E. *Cretans* and *Arabs* are added to this list.

1. Crete is an island to itself in the Mediterranean.
2. In the New Testament, Arabia refers to the kingdom of the Nabataean Arabs living east of Syria and Palestine; their capital was Petra.
3. Though not mentioned by Luke, there were also Jews in Greece and “in almost all of the islands of the Grecian Archipelago and the Mediterranean Sea, and in some of these in large numbers” (Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, 2nd Div., 2:232)

F. “For these were the Jews of the Diaspora: a people scattered throughout the Roman cities in small, well-organized colonies. Commercially adroit and religiously aloof, their presence was something of an irritation to the administration, though on the whole, they were tolerated and, in some places, even afforded certain privileges and exemptions. Their ranks, as we have said, had been strengthened by the accession of a certain number of converts, fugitives from the bewilderment of a restless age who sought consolation in the exalted monotheism of the Jewish synagogue. Their number has been estimated at approximately seven percent of the whole population of the Empire.” (Lloyd, *Ancient Turkey*, 218–219)

II. Anti-Semitism Flourished

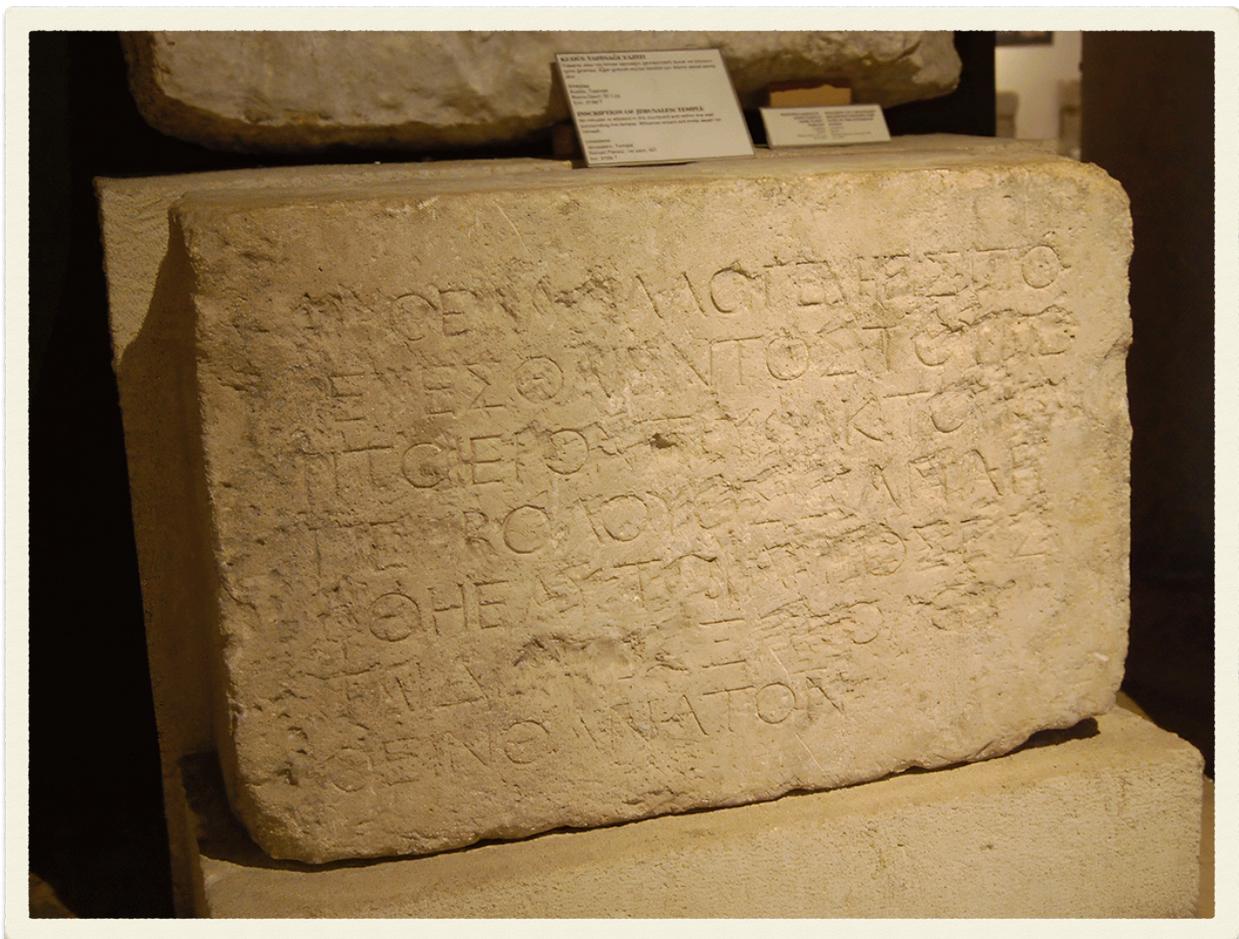
- A. While Jews were found in every nation throughout the Greco-Roman world, anti-Semitism flourished.
- B. No nation was ever hated as much as Israel among the countries of antiquity.
- C. Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56–c. 120), a Roman historian and politician, summarized his understanding of the origin of the “cult” of Judaism and described why they were so hated in the Roman world.
- D. “Whatever their origin, these rites are sanctioned by their antiquity. Their other customs are perverted and abominable, and owe their prevalence to their depravity. All the most worthless rascals, renouncing their national cults, started showering them with offerings and tribute. This is one cause of Jewish prosperity. Another is that they are obstinately loyal to each other and always ready to show compassion, whereas they feel nothing but hatred and enmity for the rest of the world. They separate themselves from others both in meals and in bed: though immoderate in sexual indulgence, they refrain from intercourse with foreign women: among themselves, anything is allowed. They have introduced circumcision to distinguish themselves from other people. Those who are converted to their customs adopt the same practice, and the first lessons they learn are to despise the gods, to renounce their country, and to regard parents, children, and brethren as worthless.” (Tacitus, *The Histories* 5:5)

- E. Flavius Josephus (c. AD 37–c. 100), a Jewish priest, historian, and military leader, wrote *Against Apion* in the late first or early second century AD.
1. In this book, he refuted the antisemitic arguments of Apion, an Egyptian writer, and a few other Egyptian and Greek authors.
 2. Josephus wanted to demonstrate Judaism's antiquity and ethical superiority over paganism.
 3. In his effort to set the record straight concerning Judaism, he refers to the pagan claim that Jewish ceremonies began with catching "a Greek foreigner, and fatten him thus up every year, and then lead him to a certain wood, and kill him, and sacrifice with their accustomed solemnities, and taste of his entrails, and take an oath upon this sacrificing a Greek, that they would ever be at enmity with the Greeks; and that then they threw the remaining parts of the miserable wretch into a certain pit." (Josephus, *Apion* 2:95).
 4. Tales like this caused many in the ancient world to despise the Jews.



Model of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem

- F. When Herod the Great rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem, it became one of the most magnificent buildings in the world.
1. No pagan could enter the Temple, for it was fenced off, and a “middle wall of separation” stood between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:14-16).
 2. Surrounding the Temple was a boundary wall called the *soreg*, which separated the court of Israel from the court of the Gentiles.
 3. The Mishnah describes this wall as “a latticed railing, ten handbreadths high” (m. *Mid.* 2:3); a “handbreadth” is between 2.5 and 4 inches, which means the wall was about 40 inches tall.
 4. The wall had signs, written in Greek and Latin, “which forbade any foreigner to go in, under pain of death” (Josephus, *Antiq.* 15:417; *War* 5:193-194; 6:124-126).



The Temple Inscription. Istanbul Archaeological Museum.

5. As a Jewish priest, Josephus must have seen this warning hundreds of times as he entered the temple precincts.
6. Archaeologists have discovered two of these warning inscriptions.
 - a) The one on display in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum in Turkey is an intact limestone block discovered by archaeologists in Israel in 1871.
 - b) The inscription reads: “No intruder is allowed in the courtyard and within the wall surrounding the temple. Whoever enters will invite death for himself.”
 - c) The second inscription was discovered in 1936 and, while not as well preserved, is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.



The Temple Inscription. The Israel Museum.

7. Albert Barnes wrote: “The idea is, that the ceremonial law of the Jews, on which they so much prided themselves, was the cause of the hostility existing between them. That made them different people, and laid the foundation for the alienation which existed between them. They had different laws; different institutions; a different, religion. The Jews looked upon themselves as the favorites of Heaven, and as in possession of the knowledge of the only way of salvation; the Gentiles regarded their laws with contempt, and looked upon the peculiar institutions with scorn.” (Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, comments on Ephesians 2:15)

Conclusion

- I. If Christianity were ever going to conquer the world, then someone would have to bridge the gap between Jews and Gentiles.
 - A. It would be hard to find such a remarkable individual.
 - B. In the providence of God, a young man named Saul, a well-educated rabbi from Tarsus of Cilicia, was selected (Acts 9:15; 26:12–18).
- II. Tertullian (c. AD 155–c. 220) was an early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa.
 - A. He was one of the “Church Fathers” and a tremendous defender of the faith.
 - B. In his treatise *An Answer to the Jews*, written around the beginning of the second century AD, he spoke about the remarkable spread of Christianity.
 - C. “For upon whom else have the universal nations believed, but upon the Christ who is already come? For whom have the nations believed,—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and they who inhabit Mesopotamia, Armenia, Phrygia, Cappadocia, and they who dwell in Pontus, and Asia, and Pamphylia, tarriers in Egypt, and inhabitants of the region of Africa which is beyond Cyrene, Romans and sojourners, yes, and in Jerusalem Jews, and all other nations; as, for instance, by this time, the varied races of the Gaetulians, and manifold confines of the Moors, all the limits of the Spains, and the diverse nations of the Gauls, and the haunts of the Britons—inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ, and of the Sarmatians, and Dacians, and Germans, and Scythians, and of many remote nations, and of provinces and islands many, to us unknown, and which we can scarce enumerate? In all which places the name of the Christ who is already come reigns, as of Him before whom the gates of all cities have been opened, and to whom none are closed, before whom iron bars have been crumbled, and brazen gates opened.” (Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 7)
 - D. It was only through the work of men like Saul of Tarsus that this remarkable feat was accomplished.

Born In Tarsus Of Cilicia

Introduction

- I. In Luke's first mention of the most infamous persecutor of the early church, he is referred to as "a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58).
 - A. Later, Luke informs us that he was also known as Paul (Acts 13:9).
 - B. This young rabbi from Tarsus was called both Saul and Paul from birth.
 - C. In this series, we will use the names *Saul* and *Paul* interchangeably.
 - D. *Saul* would have been the name he was called in his Hebrew home.
 1. His parents may have named him in honor of the first king of Israel (1 Sam 9:1-2).
 2. King Saul, like the young persecutor from Tarsus, was also from the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5).
 - E. *Paul* was the name by which he was known among the Gentiles.
 1. *Paulos* is a Roman name.
 2. In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul mentions two of his relatives, Junia and Lucius, who both had Roman names (Rom 16:7, 21).
 - F. "Though some writers and Bible teachers unfamiliar with Jewish customs offer the notion that Saul was the 'unregenerate' name of the Apostle, Paul did not exchange one name for another after his conversion. On the contrary, every Jew of the diaspora was traditionally named according to the formula, 'And his name shall be named among the Jews as _____, but among the Gentiles he shall be called _____.' Saul possessed both names from the time of his parent's naming ceremony." (Smith, *Paul's Response to the Roman World*, 104-105)
 - G. If "Saint" Jerome (c. AD 347- 419/420) is correct, Paul's parents were from Gischala (Giscalis) in Upper Galilee (today the Christian-Arab village of Jish).
 - H. "Paul, formerly called Saul, an apostle outside the number of the twelve apostles, was of the tribe of Benjamin and the town of Giscalis in Judea. When this was taken by the Romans he removed with his parents to Tarsus in Cilicia. Sent by them to Jerusalem to study law he was educated by Gamaliel a most learned man whom Luke mentions." (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men* 5, NPNF III)
- II. In the ancient apocryphal book, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Paul is described as "a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, well-built, with eyebrows meeting, rather long-nosed, full of grace. For sometimes he seemed like a man, and sometimes he had the countenance of an angel" (ANF 8:n.p.).
- III. After meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul was led by the hand to the city and "was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank" (Acts 9:9).
 - A. In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias, whom the Lord appeared to in a vision (Acts 9:10).
 - B. In the Lord's command to Ananias, Saul was called "Saul of Tarsus" (Acts 9:11).
 - C. On four other occasions, Luke mentions Tarsus of Cilicia in connection with the life and work of the apostle Paul (Acts 9:30; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3).
 - D. Like most people, Saul's hometown played a significant role in his education, development, and view of the outside world.

Discussion

I. Tarsus Was “No Mean City”

- A. In Paul’s “Sermon on the Stairs,” he referred to Tarsus as “no mean city” (Acts 21:39).
 1. “A citizen of an important city” (Acts 21:39 HCSB, NET, CJB).
 2. “A citizen of no obscure city” (Acts 21:39 ESV).
 3. “A citizen of no insignificant city” (Acts 21:39 NAS20).
- B. The city of Tarsus has existed since before 4,000 BC.
 1. In the second millennium BC, it was an important Hittite town.
 2. In 860 BC, Shalmaneser of Assyria listed Tarsus among his conquests.
 3. The city was captured and sacked by Sennacherib of Assyria in 696 BC.
 4. In 333 BC, Alexander the Great bathed in the ice-cold waters of the Cydnus River in Tarsus and suffered “some kind of bronchial infection, which now quickly turned into acute pneumonia” (Green, *Alexander of Macedon*, 220).
 5. After the death of Alexander the Great, the Egyptians conquered Tarsus.
 6. The Hellenic city of Tarsus was founded in 171 BC.
 7. In 67 BC, Pompey the Great occupied Tarsus during his campaign against the pirates in the Mediterranean.



“Cleopatra’s Gate” in Tarsus

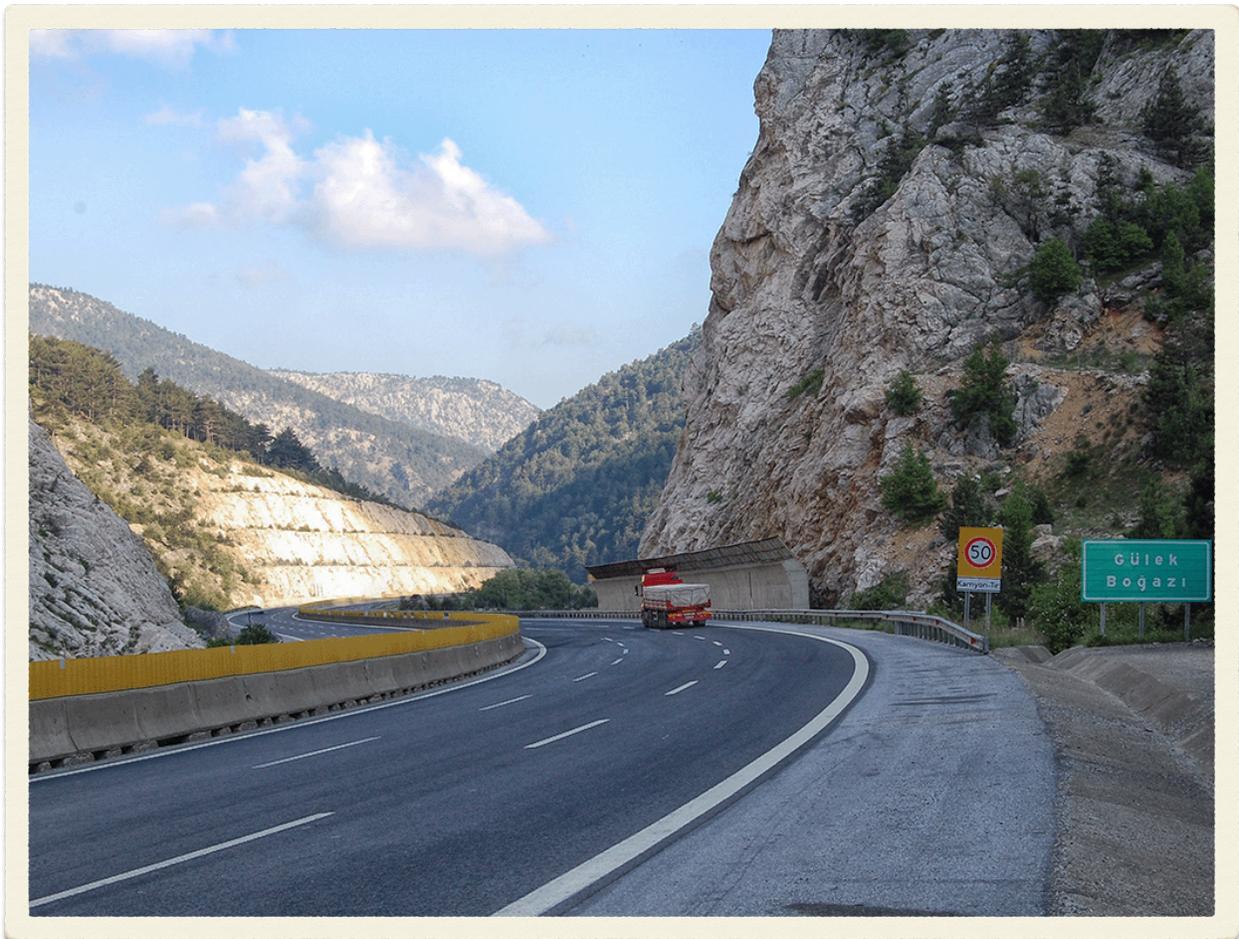
- C. In 66 BC, the government of Cilicia, including its capital, Tarsus, passed into the control of Rome.
1. Mark Antony made it a city free of taxes.
 2. Tarsus also witnessed one of Cleopatra's most famous exploits.
 3. Mark Antony was in Tarsus preparing for war against the distant Parthians on the far eastern borders of the Roman Republic.
 4. He suspected Cleopatra of plotting against him with his opponent Cassius and summoned her to appear before him.



The Cyndus River in Tarsus

5. “Though she received many letters of summons both from Antony himself and from his friends, she so despised and laughed the man to scorn as to sail up the river Cydnus in a barge with gilded poop, its sails spread purple, its rowers urging it on with silver oars to the sound of the flute blended with pipes and lutes. She herself reclined beneath a canopy spangled with gold, adorned like Venus in a painting, while boys like Loves in paintings stood on either side and fanned her. Likewise also the fairest of her serving-maidens, attired like Nereids and Graces, were stationed, some at the rudder-sweeps, and others at the reefing-ropes. Wondrous odors from countless incense-offerings diffused themselves along the river-banks. Of the inhabitants, some accompanied her on either bank of the river from its very mouth, while others went down from the city to behold the sight. The throng in the market-place gradually streamed away, until at last Antony himself, seated on his tribunal, was left alone. And a rumor spread on every hand that Venus was come to revel with Bacchus for the good of Asia.” (Plutarch, *Antony* XXVI)

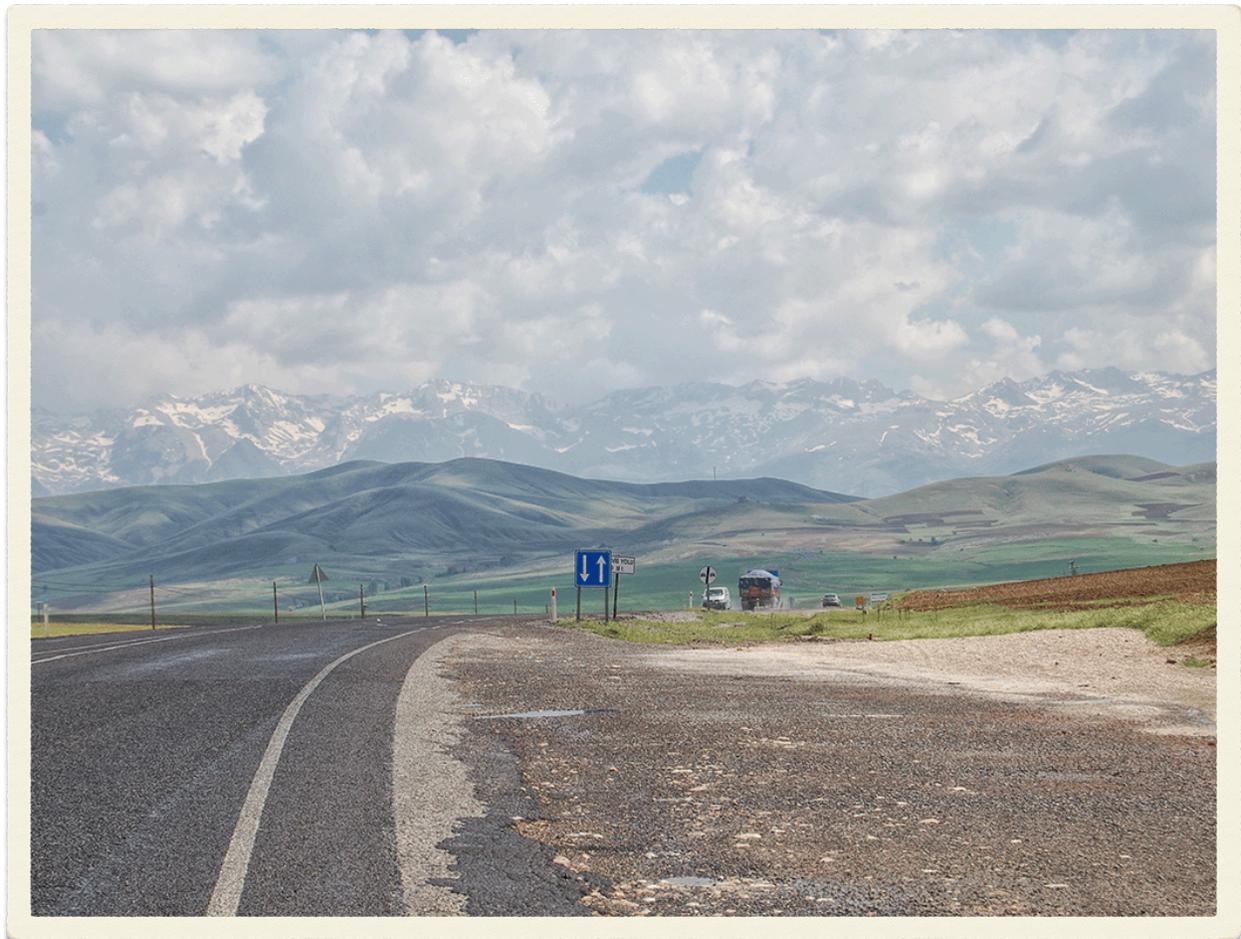
D. In the first century, Tarsus had a sizable Jewish population.



Third Pass through the Taurus Mountains

II. The Capital Of Cilicia

- A. Tarsus was the capital in the province of Cilicia and was one of the great centers at which the trade of the Mediterranean and the hinterland of Asia Minor converged.
- B. It was famous for manufacturing goats' hair felt, from which tent cloth, blankets, clothing, belts, and saddles were made.
 - 1. In addition to his religious instruction, every Jewish boy was taught a manual trade.
 - 2. Young Saul of Tarsus was taught the tent-making trade (Acts 18:3).
- C. The Cydnus River, 200 feet wide, ran through the center of Tarsus.
 - 1. However, Tarsus was ten miles inland from the mouth of the river.
 - 2. Halfway between Tarsus and the Mediterranean Sea, the river broadened into a lagoon called Lake Rhegma.
 - 3. It was to this lake that Cleopatra came.
 - 4. The Tarsians had lined three sides of that lake with harbors and docks, and the ships of the Mediterranean sailed fully loaded into and out of that harbor.
 - 5. In those days when piracy was unchecked, a sheltered and easily defended harbor was a precious possession.



The Taurus Mountains

III. The Taurus Mountains

- A. Thirty miles inland from Tarsus stand the massive Taurus Mountains.
 - 1. Some peaks rise to around 12,000 feet above sea level.
 - 2. There were few or no roads across it.
- B. Tarsus controlled the world-famous Cilician Gates, the strategic pass through the mountains.
 - 1. Sometime in the distant past, men from Tarsus had chiseled out a pathway in a narrow gorge, and on that road, the prosperous trade of Asia Minor and Syria passed through.
 - 2. Through the Cilician Gates passed some of the most famous leaders in world history, such as Xerxes, Darius, Cyrus the Younger, Alexander the Great, and the Crusaders.

IV. A University Town

- A. The university in Tarsus was less distinguished than the universities of some of the older cities in the Ancient Near East.
- B. However, Strabo, the Greek historian, geographer, and philosopher, described Tarsus as having surpassed “Athens, Alexandria, or any other place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures of philosophers” (Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo* 14.5.13).
 - 1. Strabo also said, “Tarsus has all kinds of schools of rhetoric.”
 - 2. Strabo “praises highly the zeal for philosophy and the whole range of education which characterized the people of Tarsus in his time. In this respect they surpassed Athens and Alexandria and every other seat of learning, for they not merely formed the entire audience in their own University (to which no students ever came from outside), but also sought to complete their education by resorting to foreign Universities; and those who educated themselves in that way were glad to remain abroad and few of them returned home.” (Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul*, 232)
 - 3. Tarsus was famous for their philosophers, especially those of the Stoic school.
 - 4. Strabo names five famous Stoics born in Tarsus: Antipater, Archedemus, Nestor, Athenodorus Cordylion, and Athenodorus, the son of Sandon.
 - 5. Athenodorus Cordylion was head of the university when Saul was a child and had been a friend and an adviser to Emperor Augustus.
 - 6. Chrysippus and Aratus, two of the greatest Stoic philosophers, were born in the nearby town of Soli.
- C. Although brought up in a strict Jewish home, Saul had a wealth of Greek literature and philosophy before him and obviously studied those writings.
 - 1. In his sermon to the philosophers on the Areopagus, Paul quoted the Greek poet Aratus of Soli (c. 315–245 BC), who was from Paul’s province of Cilicia, “We are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28).

- a) The only surviving work of Aratus is the *Phaenomena* (Appearances), a book describing the constellations and weather signs.
- b) In the second line of the book, while speaking of Zeus, Aratus wrote, “For we are also his offspring; and he in his kindness unto men giveth favorable signs and wakeneth the people to work, reminding them of livelihood.”
2. In Titus 1:12, Paul quotes from Epimenides of Crete (c. 600 BC), “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”
 - a) One of the early “Church Fathers,” Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–c. 215), identifies the “prophet” in Titus 1:12 as Epimenides (*Stromata* 1.14).
 - b) “Paul quotes Epimenides, a Cretan poet from the sixth century BC. In his poem *Cretica*, Epimenides accuses the Cretans of being liars and evil beasts because they claim to host a tomb of Zeus, the chief of the gods.” (Currid and Chapman, *ESV Archaeology Study Bible*, comments on Titus 1:12)
3. Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:33 that “evil company corrupts good habits” was from a line of poetry in Menander’s comedy, *Thais*.
 - a) Menander (c. 342/41–c. 290 BC) was one of the most admired poets in antiquity, but only a small fragment of this poem remains.
 - b) His original statement was, “Communion with the bad corrupts good character” (Menander, *The Principal Fragments*, 357).
4. “J. Rendel Harris claims that he finds allusions in Paul’s Epistles to Pindar, Aristophanes, and other Greek writers. There is no reason in the world why Paul should not have acquaintance with Greek literature, though one need not strain a point to prove it.” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 3.289)
- D. “Tarsus was a meeting place between East and West. Politically it had been part of the Persian Empire and was an eastern port. Later under the Seleucids it was associated with Syria and that mixture of oriental and Hellenistic cultures. As an important commercial center and seaport, Tarsus’s entire history was one of mixing East and West. With this blend of cultural environment, it is no wonder that Paul was able to bring together Jew and Gentile into one church and know the strengths and weaknesses of both.” (Blake and Edmonds, *Biblical Sites in Turkey*, 74)

V. Saul, A Roman Citizen

- A. After being seized by Roman soldiers on the Temple Mount, Paul declared his Roman citizenship to the centurion who was about to scourge him (Acts 22:22–28).
 1. The Roman commander, or tribune, confirmed Paul’s citizenship.
 2. This commander is later identified as Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26).
 3. Being born a citizen made one of higher status than one who acquired citizenship later.
 4. Thus, Claudius Lysias had a lower citizenship status than Paul.
 5. “The social position of Paul’s family in Tarsus must not be regarded as very humble; for according to the Book of Acts not only Paul himself, but his father before him, possessed the Roman citizenship, which in the provinces was still in the first century a highly prized privilege from which the great masses of the people were excluded.” (Machen, *The Origin of Paul’s Religion*, 45)

6. Roman citizens could only be scourged after a formal trial.
 7. When individuals claimed Roman citizenship, they had to be treated as citizens until that matter was verified.
 8. “Roman citizens were given a document *diploma civitas Romanae* recording their citizenship for purposes of identification. It was a hinged wooden tablet with two leaves (a *diptych*). It is not known whether Paul carried this document with him verifying his claim of Roman citizenship; yet, if he was found making a false claim, he could be punished by death.” (Arnold, *ZIBBCNT-5*, 2B.442)
 9. “Each legitimately born child of a Roman citizen had to be registered within thirty days (apparently) of birth. If he lived in the provinces, his father or some duly appointed agent made a declaration (*professio*) in the appropriate record office (*tabularium publicum*) to the effect that the child was a Roman citizen. This declaration was recorded in the official register (*album professionum*) and the father or his agent received a certified copy in the form of a diptych (folding tablets). This certificate was legal evidence that a man was a Roman citizen. It is conceivable that, on the occasions when Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship, he was able to produce this certificate in confirmation of his claim.” (Bruce, *New Testament History*, 235)
- B. Lucius Cassius Dio (c. AD 150–c. 235), also known as Dio Cassius, was a Roman senator and historian.
1. His history of Rome comprised 80 volumes, though not all of them survived.
 2. He claims that during the days of Claudius Caesar, a Lycian envoy had his Roman citizenship taken away because he did not speak Latin.
 3. The reasoning was that “it was not proper for a person to be a Roman who had no knowledge of Roman speech” (Dio, *Annals of Rome* 60.17).
 4. Dio also explained that while Roman citizenship was precious, unscrupulous men would often sell that “franchise” for small sums of cash.
- C. The value of being a Roman citizen cannot be underestimated.
1. “To be a Roman citizen was no small honor. In A.D. 47 the Emperor Claudius had a census taken of the whole empire. The officials recorded that there were just under 6,000,000 citizens out of a total population of something like 80,000,000. Quite apart from the privilege of the vote, citizenship also guaranteed that the holder could not be flogged without a fair trial. He was also protected by Roman law and, in the event of a grave charge being brought against him, he might take his appeal to the highest court of all—the judgment of the emperor. The dignity and majesty of Roman law were the foundations upon which the whole fabric of the empire rested, and it was unique in the ancient world.” (Bradford, *Paul the Traveller*, 12)
 2. When Paul stood before Festus, the Roman governor, at Caesarea Maritima, he exercised one of the most precious gifts of Roman citizenship, i.e., having his legal case heard before Caesar himself (Acts 25:10–11).

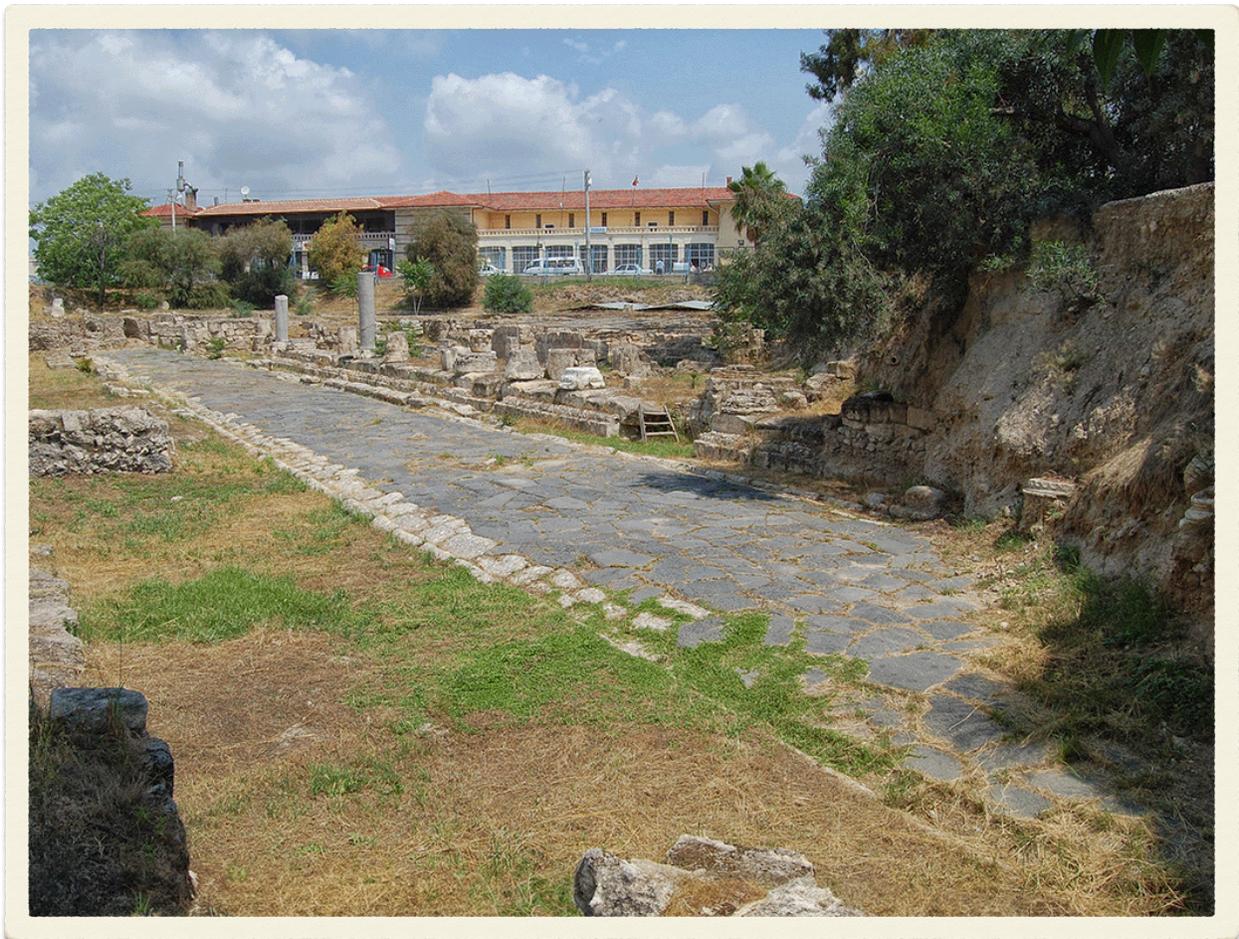
VI. Sites To See In Tarsus Today

- A. The Roman gate (Cleopatra's Gate, St. Paul's Gate) on the road to Mersin is the only one of the three original city gates to survive.
 1. This 20-foot-tall gate has no historical connection to either Cleopatra or Paul.
 2. This gate went from the city to the harbor on the Cydnus River.
- B. North of the Roman gate is "Saint Paul's Well."
 1. Tradition claims that it is located where Paul's house once stood.
 2. While this tradition is of dubious origin, the 60-foot-deep well dates back to Roman times and is surrounded by Roman houses and paving stones.
- C. At the north end of the city is the Makam Mosque (*Makam-ı Şerif*).
 1. *Makam* is a Turkish word that means "the resting place of an important person."
 2. Islamic legend claims that beside this mosque is the burial spot of the Old Testament prophet Daniel, though this story lacks historical veracity.
 3. Daniel is not included in the list of the 25 Islamic Prophets but is considered a holy figure in Islam.



"Saint Paul's Well" in Tarsus

4. A funerary monument on the east side of the mosque is supposedly Daniel's tomb.
 5. Under this mosque are the remains of two arches from a first century AD Roman bridge found during a renovation project.
- D. Near the Makam Mosque is a brick Roman bath.
- E. About 500 feet from St. Paul's Well, you can see the remains of an ancient street, likely built during the Seleucid period (second century BC).
1. This street was uncovered in 1993 during the excavations to reorganize the city square.
 2. This east-west street is 22 feet wide and was built of imported black basalt stones with gutters of white limestone.
 3. Beside this colonnaded street, the remains of a Roman house were found.
 4. A sewer system, one of the oldest in the ancient world, ran under the street.
 5. You can see the well-worn ruts made by wagon wheels in several places.



Ancient Roman Road in Tarsus

- F. Ten to twelve miles north of Tarsus, near the village of Saglikli, is a section of a paved Roman road (*Roma Yolu*) that led from Tarsus to the Cilician Gates.
1. The road is about 1.5 miles long and runs through a hilly and very barren landscape connecting Cilicia to Cappadocia in antiquity.
 2. This road stretches north from the Taurus Mountains and connects the Mediterranean to Central Anatolia.
 3. An arch from the time of Septimius Severus (AD 193–211) still spans the nearly ten-foot-wide road.
 4. A Latin inscription at the road's northern end states that it was repaired during the reign of Emperor Caracalla (AD 198–217).
 5. This was a major road in the first century, and Paul probably traveled on it during his second or third missionary journeys.



Ancient Roman Road near Saglikli, Turkey

Conclusion

- I. “Tarsus was the city of all the world best adapted for the youth of the Apostle to the Gentiles. In Tarsus was accomplished most perfectly that union between east and west that Alexander the Great attempted everywhere. The city remained Asiatic in character while it appropriated the Greek qualities.” (Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, 12)
- II. Growing up as a Jew in a Roman city far away from Israel, it is doubtful that Saul ever dreamed that his hometown would have such a profound influence over his life.
- III. This town on the Cyndus River allowed Saul to interact with learned individuals from all backgrounds of life—something he never could have developed in Israel.

Saul's True Jewish Roots

Introduction

- I. The church at Philippi knew Paul (Saul) was a Roman citizen since he had declared that after being imprisoned in their city (Acts 16:37-38).
- II. Although Paul enjoyed Roman citizenship and its privileges, his Jewish pedigree made him stand above most Jews in the ancient world!
- III. In the third chapter of Philippians, he warned about Judaizing teachers whom he called "dogs" (Phil 3:2-6).
 - A. His opposition to these "evil workers" was not based on ignorance of Judaism or a lack of Jewish pedigree.
 - B. He made a similar statement to the Corinthians, comparing himself to false teachers (2 Cor 11:22).
- IV. This lesson will focus on the first four areas of Paul's pedigree mentioned in Philippians 3:5.

Discussion

I. "Circumcised The Eighth Day"

- A. This was done in strict accordance with the Law (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3).
 1. Circumcision was of such great importance that it took precedence over customary Sabbath restrictions (John 7:22-23).
 2. Rabbi Yose said, "Great is circumcision, since it overrides the prohibitions of the Sabbath, which is subject to strict rules" (m. *Ned.* 3:11)
- B. Isaac was circumcised when he was eight days old (Gen 21:4).
- C. Josephus claims that Ishmaelites were circumcised at age thirteen.
 1. "But as for the Arabians, they circumcise after the thirteenth year, because Ismael, the founder of their nation, who was born to Abraham of the concubine, was circumcised at that age..." (Josephus, *Antiq.* 1:124).
 2. "And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin" (Gen 17:25).
- D. Gentile proselytes were circumcised as adults, though Jewish society usually considered proselytes to be of a lower status than those born Jewish.
- E. By claiming to have been circumcised on his eighth day of life, Paul demonstrated that he was neither a proselyte to Judaism nor an Ishmaelite.
- F. "The proudest claim is put first: he is a true-blooded Jew from the cradle, and nursed in the ancestral faith" (Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 150).

II. "Of The Stock Of Israel"

- A. Paul was specifically a member of the covenant nation; he was not of mixed stock like many Jews who dwelt in Palestine in his day.
- B. "This phrase means that he was of the *race of Israel*. The translation of *genos* as *people* does not adequately express the significance of this Greek word *genos*. The term denotes 'ancestral stock, common ancestry, nationality.' Paul is claiming genealogical purity; his blood is untainted by any Gentile blood." (Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 223)

- C. He was not a proselyte to Judaism but a descendant of the original *stock* of Israel.
- D. To be “of the stock of Israel” was to have absolute racial purity.

III. “Of The Tribe Of Benjamin”

- A. Paul mentioned his descent from the tribe Benjamin (Rom 11:1).
 - 1. Though the tribe is referred to as “little Benjamin” (Ps 68:27) due to its small size, being from this tribe was a matter of great pride to Paul.
 - 2. By the first century AD, many Jews could not trace their genealogy or were descended from proselytes.
 - 3. Paul was not from one of the “lost tribes” of Israel.
 - 4. Being from the tribe of Benjamin was a source of pride because they had a unique place in the history of Israel.
- B. Benjamin was the son of Jacob’s beloved wife, Rachael (Gen 35:16–19), and the only one of the patriarchs who had been born in the Promised Land.
- C. Benjamin was singled out as a tribe that was “beloved of the LORD” (Deut 33:12).
- D. When the armies of Israel went into battle, the tribe of Benjamin held the post of honor (Hos 5:8; cf. Judg 5:12–14).
- E. Saul, the first king of Israel, was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam 9:1–2).
- F. Jerusalem, the holy city of God and home of the Temple, was located within the borders of ancient Benjamin (Judg 1:21).
- G. When the tragic split of the kingdom came, Benjamin and Judah were the only two tribes who had remained faithful to God (1 Kgs 12:21).
- H. During the terrible days of Babylonian captivity, Mordecai, “a Benjamite,” saved the nation (Esth 2:5–6; cf. 8:15–17).
- I. The jasper stone, upon which the name of Benjamin was inscribed on the breastplate of the High Priest, was the first foundation stone in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:19; cf. Exod 28:17–21).
- J. “By Paul’s day, many Jews no longer knew what tribe they belonged to. Inter-marriage during the years of exile had blurred the tribal lines. But Paul’s family had remained pure Benjamites. That again elevated him above some of the Judaizers, who probably did not know their tribal descent.” (MacArthur, *Philippians*, 230)

IV. “A Hebrew Of The Hebrews”

- A. The *New Jerusalem Bible* translates this phrase in Philippians 3:5 as “a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents.”
- B. The *Complete Jewish Bible* translates it as “a Hebrew-speaker, with Hebrew-speaking parents.”
- C. “In the Old Testament the word ‘Hebrew’ is a distinctive national term; while in the New Testament it usually designates the Jew who retained his national language and way of life, in contrast to the ‘Hellenist,’ a Jew who generally spoke Greek and conformed to Gentile customs and cultures (Acts 6.1; 22.2). Thus the ‘Hebrew’ regarded himself as belonging to the elite of his race.” (Loh and Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, comments on Philippians 3:5)

- D. In the first century AD, a *Hebrew* was a Jew who could still speak Hebrew as opposed to the Jews of the Dispersion who had forsaken their native language for the Greek of their adopted countries.
1. “The expression implies characteristics of language and manners. He might be an Israelite and yet a child of Greek-speaking Jews: but his parents had retained their native tongue and customs, and he himself, while understanding and speaking Greek, also spoke in Hebrew on occasion.” (Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, 3.446)
 2. “In an age when 85% of the Jews in the world were living in the Diaspora, being a Hebrew-speaker would confer higher status as a Jew” (Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, comments on Phil 3:5).
 3. “It is true that the tradition of the language of the Jews had been broken, as the continuity of their political life had been rudely interrupted. The Hebrew of the time of Christ was not the oldest Hebrew of the Israelites; but it was a kindred dialect; and old enough to command a reverent affection. Though not the language of Moses and David, it was that of Ezra and Nehemiah.” (Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, 30)
- E. Paul’s accurate knowledge of the Hebrew language was probably acquired at the Rabbinical College in Jerusalem while sitting “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3).
- F. When the Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, Jesus spoke to him “in the Hebrew language” (Acts 26:14).
- G. However, Paul was also familiar with the *Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) from an early age, for when he quotes from the Old Testament in his epistles, he often uses the Septuagint.
- H. “Although many Jews in the first century saw the Christian gospel as antithetical to their faith, Paul regarded his message as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. His letters are therefore filled with OT references used to clarify and defend the gospel. This feature, unquestionably, is of central importance to understanding Paul’s teaching, but it also raises many questions. Sometimes we come across *textual* problems, caused in part by the fact that Paul, who was writing in Greek, naturally made use of the Septuagint (LXX), and this translation does not always correspond precisely with the Hebrew text.” (Silva, “Old Testament In Paul,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 630)

Conclusion

- I. If you searched the world, you could not find a purer Jew than Paul!
- II. In his youth, he probably had a great interest in what he would later call “endless genealogies” (1 Tim 1:4).
- III. After his conversion to Christ, all of the privileges Paul once had in Judaism, and all of the pride he once had in his Jewish heritage, he now “counted loss for Christ” (Phil 3:7).
- IV. In our next lesson, we will examine another aspect of his religious devotion: he was a member of the strictest sect of Judaism—the Pharisees (Phil 3:5; Acts 26:5).

The Son Of A Pharisee

Introduction

- I. Saul of Tarsus was not only a devout Jew with an impeccable pedigree but also a Pharisee, the largest and best-known sect of the Jews (Acts 23:6; 26:5; Phil 3:5).
- II. The Gospels frequently mention two main groups among the Jews: the Sadducees and the Pharisees.
 - A. The Sadducees were of the priestly family and lived in Jerusalem.
 - B. The Pharisees were scattered all over the earth and were usually the teachers in the synagogues.
 - C. The word *Pharisee* (Gr. Φαρισαῖος, *Farisaios*) means “a Pharisee, a follower of the sect of the Pharisees, a numerous and powerful sect of the Jews, distinguished for their ceremonial observances, and apparent sanctity of life, and for being rigid interpreters of the Mosaic law; but who frequently violated its spirit by their traditional interpretations and precepts, to which they ascribed nearly an equal authority with the OT Scriptures, Mt. 5:20; 12:2; 23:14.” (Mounce, *Mounce Greek Dictionary*)
- III. The Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, the Jewish equivalent of the United States Supreme Court, was composed of Pharisees and Sadducees.
 - A. The Prince (*Nasi*), or president of the Sanhedrin, until after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, was usually a Sadducee, not a Pharisee.
 - B. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Sadducees and priests quickly lost their power and influence.

Discussion

I. The Origin Of The Pharisees

- A. About 600 years before Christ, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon deported practically all of the inhabitants of Judah over fifteen years.
 1. Amidst the turbulence of history, the Babylonians ravaged Solomon's Temple, despoiling its treasures and leaving Jerusalem's walls breached and its structures razed (2 Kgs 24:10-16).
 2. In the wake of this devastation, the once-proud city stood forlorn, its inhabitants scattered, and the future of the Jewish people hung in precarious balance.
 3. Yet, amidst the ruins, a faithful remnant, including figures like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, clung fiercely to their ancestral faith (Dan 1:3-8).
 4. Their unwavering resolve bore witness to a resilience anchored in the promise of restoration, even as they endured exile and displacement.
 5. Throughout this era of upheaval, a whisper of hope persisted among the faithful, echoing the prophetic visions of Isaiah (Isa 14:3-4).
 6. Decades of supplication culminated in divine intervention, as Cyrus, sovereign of Persia, issued a decree in 538 BC, permitting the Jews to return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4; cf. Jer 25:11-14).

7. Yet, the journey back to Jerusalem was not universally embraced, for some had established new lives in Babylon, lured by its prosperity and enticed by pagan beliefs (cf. Isa 46).
 8. Thus, the restoration of the Jewish nation emerged as a complex saga of faith, perseverance, and the enduring tension between the call of the homeland and the allure of foreign lands.
- B. The Pharisees claimed their history went back to the time of Ezra.
1. Ezra spoke of those who, after the Babylonian captivity, “separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel” (Ezra 6:21; 10:1-4).
 2. Nehemiah spoke of those of “Israelite lineage” who “separated themselves from all foreigners” (Neh 9:2).
 3. These devout men “entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law” (Neh 10:28-31).
 4. While the Pharisees claim that their brotherhood went back to the time of Ezra, most scholars will admit it cannot be traced farther back than to the time of the Maccabean conflicts.

II. Antiochus Epiphanes

- A. Antiochus IV Epiphanes (c. 215-164 BC) ascended to the Syrian throne in 175 BC.
1. His epithet, “Epiphanes,” meaning “god manifest,” signaled his audacious claim to embody the divine presence, akin to the Greek deity Zeus.
 2. As a ruler with a volatile temperament, he harbored a vehement disdain for Judaism, viewing it as an obstacle to his ambition of unifying his realm under the banner of Hellenism.
 3. Determined to obliterate Jewish religious identity, Antiochus embarked on a ruthless campaign to impose Greek customs, beliefs, and deities upon the people of Israel.
 4. In the autumn of 169 BC, Jerusalem fell victim to Antiochus’s aggression, as he ordered the slaughter of thousands of its inhabitants and stationed his forces within its walls.
 5. His objective was clear: to forcibly assimilate Judea into the Hellenistic fold, coercing its populace to abandon their traditions in favor of Greek culture and worship.
 6. The pinnacle of his sacrilege occurred when he defiled the sacred altar in Jerusalem by offering a swine in homage to the Olympian Zeus—an act of profanity that struck at the heart of Jewish faith and identity.
- B. The book of 1 Maccabees tells the story of Antiochus Epiphanes in detail.
1. A Jewish author wrote 1 Maccabees around 100 BC, after the restoration of an independent Jewish kingdom.
 - a) The book of 1 Maccabees and the other Deuterocanonical books have been included in the Catholic Bible since the Council of Trent (AD 1545-1563).
 - b) Most protestants and Jews regard this book as generally historically reliable but not a part of inspired Scripture.
 - c) Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, rejected this book as a part of the canon of the Bible.

2. “Our *First Book of Maccabees* itself gives a connected, minute and graphic narrative of the events that led to the Maccabean rising, then of the course of the rising itself, particularly of the exploits and fortunes of Judas Maccabaeus. It then proceeds to give the further history of the patriotic enterprises of the Jews, under the leadership of Jonathan, the brother of Judas, and of the institution of the Hasmonaean high priesthood and the founding of Jewish independence by the former. Then lastly we have an account of Simon, Jonathan’s brother and successor who, by establishing the combined office of priest and prince and making it hereditary in the family of the Hasmonaeans on the one hand, and by the complete emancipation of the Jewish people from Syrian supremacy on the other, completed on both its sides the work undertaken by Jonathan. The narrative is brought down to the death of Simon, so that altogether it embraces a period of forty years (175–135 B.C.).” (Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, 2nd Div., 3.7)
 3. “After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. Taking them all, he went into his own land. He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance. Israel mourned deeply in every community, rulers and elders groaned, young women and young men became faint, the beauty of the women faded.” (1 Macc 1:20–26 NRSV)
- C. Antiochus Epiphanes prohibited worship in the Temple, forbade circumcision on pain of death, sold thousands of Jewish families into slavery, destroyed all copies of Scripture that could be found, slaughtered everyone discovered in possession of such copies, and tortured Jews to force them to renounce their faith.
1. He ordered that sacrifices to pagan gods were to be made in every Judaeen town.
 2. Every month, Seleucid soldiers searched Jewish homes to discover whether or not any Jews possessed a copy of the Torah or had circumcised their children.
 3. The exploits of Antiochus Epiphanes had been foretold centuries before by the prophet Daniel (Dan 11:21–35, esp. vs. 31–35).
- D. Eventually, the Maccabean revolt, with the help of the Romans, forced the Syrians out of Palestine.
1. Though outnumbered six to one, in 165 BC, the Jews, under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, regained their freedom.
 2. Judas Maccabeus selected faithful priests, destroyed the altar of the Olympian Zeus, built a new one, and renovated the Temple.
 3. On December 14, 164 BC (Chislev 25), exactly three years after its desecration, the Temple with its altar was rededicated, and the daily sacrifices commenced.
 4. This was the beginning of Hanukkah, the Jewish Feast of Dedication or Lights, an eight-day festival celebrating this event.

5. “Antiochus tried to stamp out the Jewish religion by force. The result was a heroic uprising led by Mattathias and his sons, who are called the Maccabees. The tyranny of Antiochus had caused a mighty popular reaction against the Hellenizing party among the Jews. Devotion to the religion of Israel with exclusion of foreign influences was ever afterwards the dominant tendency in Jewish history.” (Machen, *The Literature and History of the New Testament*, 22)

III. Pharisees In The New Testament Age

- A. During the time of Christ, there were 25,000 to 30,000 inhabitants in Jerusalem.
 1. In the first century, there were more than 6,000 Pharisees in and around Jerusalem (Josephus, *Antiq.* 17:42).
 2. Most Pharisees were carpenters, fishermen, and storekeepers—average men of the day.
 3. Those who did not belong to the fraternity still admired them.
 4. The Pharisees were able to spread their philosophy in the 480 synagogues scattered throughout the countryside around Jerusalem.



Ruins of the Synagogue at Chorazin, Israel

5. Recorded in the *Jerusalem Talmud* is a saying of Rabbi Hoshaiah, quoted by Rabbi Phineas, “There were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem and every one of them had a schoolhouse and a house for learning, a schoolhouse for Scripture and a house of learning for Mishnah” (y. *Meg.* 3:1, 73d).
- B. In Second Temple Judaism, the Pharisees did most of the teaching in the synagogues.
1. In the language of our Lord, they sat “in Moses’ seat” (Matt 23:1–3).
 2. The phrase “in Moses’ seat” does not just refer to one who spoke with the *authority* of Moses, but rather, there was an *actual chair* from whence a rabbi or other speaker would sit and discuss the Torah readings of the day.
 3. The ruins of a large synagogue at Chorazin have been excavated, and the famous “seat (*cathedra*) of Moses” (cf. Matt 23:2) was discovered in the ruins.
 4. “In 1926, a unique stone seat was found near the southern wall of the Chorazin synagogue. Since then, it has been called the ‘Chair of Moses.’ The Chair of Moses is a special seat that is used in some synagogues, even today, on certain occasions, usually located near the most important wall, that which faces Jerusalem.” (Yeivin, “Ancient Chorazin Comes Back to Life,” n.p.)



The “Seat of Moses” from Chorazin, Israel

5. This “seat of Moses” from Chorazin is now displayed in The Israel Museum in Jerusalem.
 6. The disciples of the Pharisees are twice mentioned in the Gospels (Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33).
- C. The Pharisees deeply respected the Old Testament Scriptures and wanted to protect them so much that they started adding to them.
1. Their “helpful suggestions” soon were regarded as sacred law.
 2. To keep men from violating Torah law, the Pharisees put a *hedge* (Heb. *seyagim*; lit. *fences*) around it to maintain a safe distance between a man and the laws of God.
 3. God prohibited “work” on the Sabbath (Exod 20:8–11), so the Pharisees said you couldn’t even pick grain (to play it safe), and then said you can’t heal someone on the Sabbath because that might be a borderline case.
 4. “What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers; and concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude of their side...” (Josephus, *Antiq.* 13:297)
 5. Rabbi Eleazar the Modite claimed that anyone who interpreted the Scripture in such a way that it opposed Pharisaic tradition “will have no share in the world to come” (m. *Avot* 3:11).
- D. Josephus is an essential source of information about the Pharisees.
1. He claims that when he was around nineteen, he began to conduct himself “according to the rules of the sect of the Pharisees, which is of kin to the sect of the Stoics, as the Greeks call them” (Josephus, *Life* 12).
 2. “The Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. These ascribe all to fate [or providence], and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does cooperate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible; but that the souls of good men are only removed into other bodies,—but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment.” (Josephus, *War* 2:162–163)
- E. The Pharisees were easy to identify by their distinctive clothing (Matt 23:5)
1. Tassels with a blue cord were attached to the four corners of a man’s garment to remind him to obey God’s commandments and to lead a holy life (Num 15:37–40; Deut 22:12).
 2. Phylacteries were small cube-shaped cases made of leather, containing four passages of Scripture written on parchment (Exod 13:1–10; 13:11–16; Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21).
 3. The practice of wearing phylacteries on the left arm and forehead rose from a literal interpretation of a few Old Testament passages (Exod 13:9; Deut 6:8; 11:18).
 4. While ordinary Jews would only wear their phylacteries at prayer or on solemn occasions, the Pharisees wore them all day!

- F. How did Pharisees treat non-Pharisees?
1. “As an Israelite avoided as far as possible all contact with a heathen, lest he should thereby be defiled, so did the Pharisee avoid as far as possible contact with the non-Pharisee, because the latter was to him included in the notion of the unclean Am-Haaretz.” (Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 2nd Div., 2:24)
 2. This devotion to *separation* helps us to understand why the Pharisees were so appalled when Jesus ate with “tax collectors and sinners” (Mark 2:14-17).

Conclusion

- I. Many years after his conversion, when Paul appeared before the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, he said he was “a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6).
 - A. Paul did not say he “used to be a Pharisee.”
 - B. He meant that he still clung to most of the doctrine of the Pharisees.
 - C. “**I lived as a Parush**, a Pharisee. The Greek verb is in the aorist tense, which implies action accomplished in the past that has effects continuing into the present. Sha’ul lived as a Pharisee in the past, and he continued doing so after he became a believer...” (Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, comments on Acts 26:4-5)
- II. Paul’s understanding of the resurrection to come did not violate any central tenets of the Pharisees (cf. Gal 1:14).

Trained At The Feet Of Gamaliel

Introduction

- I. In his famous “Sermon on the Stairs,” recorded in Acts 22, the Apostle Paul sought to calm the Jewish mob below him by speaking to them in Hebrew (Acts 22:1–2).
 - A. Surrounded by Roman soldiers, he respectfully addressed his Jewish audience by citing his impeccable credentials.
 - B. The mob who, just a few minutes before, was ready to kill him, now listened with undivided attention as he announced, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city and trained at the feet of *Gamli’el* in every detail of the *Torah* of our forefathers. I was a zealot for God, as all of you are today” (Acts 22:3 CJB).
 - C. His religious education included not only the “Torah” given to Israel at Mount Sinai but also, as Josephus would call it, “the traditions of their forefathers” (Josephus, *Antiq.* 13:408).
- II. Saul probably lived in Tarsus of Cilicia until he was eleven or twelve since most Jewish parents put their sons into formal training at twelve.

Discussion

I. Education In The Jewish World

- A. According to Jewish tradition, a Jewish boy became responsible for observing the law when he was thirteen.
 1. “At the age of six or seven the child would be sent to the elementary school. This was connected with the local synagogue, and since the manual of instruction was the Book of the Law, it was known as ‘the House of the Book.’ The Aramaic vernacular would be the language of his home, and he spoke it in after days as freely as a native of Palestine; and he would learn also the ancient Hebrew, the original language of the Sacred Scriptures. But Greek was the language of a Hellenistic community, and it was the Septuagint version of the Scriptures that the Jews of Tarsus employed. It was the child’s lesson-book, and his lifelong familiarity with it is evidenced by his practice of quoting from it in after years.” (Smith, *The Life and Letters of St. Paul*, 22)
 2. “At the age of 6, the Jewish boys took up the study of the Pentateuch, writing, and arithmetic. At the age of 10, the Mishna was added to the curriculum. The Mishna was in oral form in Paul’s day, and the teacher would recite the lesson to the pupil; and then the pupil was to recite the lesson back to the teacher verbatim ... At the age of 15, *Gemara* was added. The *Gemara* was a still later and more extensive development of the Midrash which was a part of the Mishna: the *Gemara* contained the discussion of the rabbis down through the centuries.” (Reese, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 345–356)

3. “(1) At five to Scripture, (2) ten to Mishnah, (3) thirteen to religious duties, (4) fifteen to Talmud, (5) eighteen to the wedding canopy, (6) twenty to responsibility for providing for a family, (7) thirty to fullness of strength, (8) forty to understanding, (9) fifty to counsel, (10) sixty to old age, (11) seventy to ripe old age, (12) eighty to remarkable strength, (13) ninety to a bowed back, and (14) at a hundred—he is like a corpse who has already passed and gone from this world.” (m. *Avot* 5:21; cf. *Nid.* 5:6)
- B. The highlight of Saul’s religious education came when he was accepted as a student in a rabbinical college, “the House of Instruction,” in Jerusalem.
 1. In the first century, there were two prominent rabbinical colleges in Jerusalem.
 2. Young Saul of Tarsus was blessed to “sit at the feet” of Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, the most outstanding living teacher of the Law in the first century.

II. Rabban Gamaliel The Elder

- A. According to the Talmud (b. *Saab.* 15a), Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel the Elder, the founder of the more liberal of the two rabbinical schools in Jerusalem—the House of Hillel (Beit Hillel).
 1. The other was the strictly orthodox House of Shammai (Beit Shammai).
 2. One humorous difference between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai had to do with a bride on her wedding day (b. *Ketubot* 17a).
 - a) Should you tell an ugly bride that she is beautiful?
 - b) The House of Shammai said it was always wrong to lie.
 - c) The House of Hillel said all brides are beautiful on their wedding day.
 3. The man identified as Gamaliel in the New Testament is usually referred to in Jewish literature as Gamaliel the Elder.
 - a) He was the first of six men named Gamaliel.
 - b) “His son Simon also enjoyed extraordinary fame as a scribe” (Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, 2nd Div., 1.365).
 - c) Gamaliel the Elder had a grandson named Gamaliel II.
 4. Gamaliel was the Prince (*Nasi*) or president of the Great Sanhedrin (the Jewish council) after the death of his father, Simeon.
 5. Lightfoot claims Gamaliel was the 35th “receiver of the traditions” (Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, 4.52).
 6. “Gamaliel was one of the greatest teachers of Judaism. His grandfather, Hillel, founded the more liberal of the two main schools of the Pharisees, and Gamaliel was the first of seven leaders of the school of Hillel to be honored with the title Rabban, ‘Our Rabbi.’ Paul, while making his defense on the steps of the Fortress of Antonia after his arrest in the temple, stated that he had been brought up in Jerusalem and, under Gamaliel, ‘thoroughly trained in the law of our father’ (Ac 22:3). Paul, in other words, had received the best possible Jewish education of his day.” (Walton, *Archaeological Study Bible*, comments on Acts 22)
 7. “Gamaliel may have been one of the doctors in the midst of whom the boy Jesus had sat, hearing and asking questions (Luke 2:47)” (Furneaux, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 79).

8. “*Gamaliel I*, also known as Gamaliel Ha-Zaken (the Elder), who was the grandson of Hillel and the first to bear the title *Rabban* (master-teacher). He was held in high esteem and is mentioned with reverence in the New Testament. He was the author of many reforms ‘for the improvement of society,’ especially regulations designed to protect the rights of women.” (Bridger, *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, 159)
 9. “He was certainly one of the most influential men of his day, as well as one of the finest intellects. There were about 1,000 students in the House of Interpretation, or rabbinical college, during the period that Paul was studying.” (Bradford, *Paul the Traveller*, 35)
 10. “In Jesus’ day there were two rival schools within the sect of the Pharisees—the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai. The school of Hillel upheld the honor of tradition as even superior to the Law of Moses. The school of Shammai despised tradition when it clashed with Moses. The antagonism between these rival schools was so great that it was said that even ‘Elijah the Tishbite would never be able to reconcile the disciples of Hillel and Shammai.’ Of these two schools, that of Hillel was by far the more influential in its day; and its decisions have been held authoritative by the greater number of Rabbis.” (Reese, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts*, xi)
- B. Saul of Tarsus learned Jewish traditions and law “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3).
1. Some think this refers to the Jewish custom of the pupils sitting on benches or the floor while the rabbi taught from an elevated platform.
 2. “*The rabbis taught*: From the days of Moses until Rabban Gamaliel, they did not study Torah [in any posture] other than standing. After Rabban Gamaliel died, an infirmity descended into the world, and they used to study Torah sitting. *And that is as is taught*: After Rabban Gamaliel died, the honor of Torah was lost.” (b. *Meg* 21a)
- C. Gamaliel was a Jewish scholar who knew Greek literature and advised his students to study it.
1. Gamaliel rose above the prejudices of his party.
 2. Luke describes him as “a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people” (Acts 5:34).
 3. In the days of the Hasmonean dynasty, Jewish leaders had ruled, “It is forbidden for someone to raise pigs, and it is forbidden for anyone to teach Greek learning to his son” (b. *Sotah* 49b).
 4. However, the Talmud also declares, “The household of Rabban Gamaliel did they permit to study Greek learning, because they had a relationship to the government” (b. *Sotah* 49b).
 5. On one occasion, Gamaliel is said to have washed in a bathhouse where there was a statue of the Greek goddess Aphrodite.
 - a) He defended his practice because the statue was purely decorative and not dedicated to the goddess.
 - b) “I never came into her domain. She came into mine. They don’t say, ‘Let’s make a bathhouse as an ornament for Aphrodite.’ But they say, ‘Let’s make Aphrodite as an ornament for the bathhouse.’” (m. *AvodaZ*. 3:4)

- D. Gamaliel was one of only seven Rabbis in Jewish history to be called “Rabban.”
1. “He was one of the seven Rabbis to whom the Jews gave the highest title *Rabban* (our Rabbi). *Rabbi* (my teacher) was next, the lowest being *Rab* (teacher)” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 3:387).
 2. It is not an understatement to say that Gamaliel was the most distinguished and revered living rabbi during the early days of the New Testament church!
 3. Gamaliel died in AD 52, just 18 years before the destruction of Jerusalem.
 4. His son, Simeon, perished in the destruction of Jerusalem.
- E. The teachings of Rabban Gamaliel the Elder are still held in high regard.
1. He championed the cause of wives against unprincipled husbands and widows against greedy children.
 2. The Talmud summarizes Jewish oral law (traditions) that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages living in Palestine and Babylonia until the Middle Ages.
 3. The Talmud has two main components: the *Mishnah*, a book of law, and the rabbinical commentary on the Mishnah, known as the *Gemara*.
 4. “Rabban Gamaliel used to say: Whosoever has not said [the verses concerning] these three things at Passover has not fulfilled his obligation. And these are they: Passover, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs: ‘Passover’—because God passed over the house of our fathers in Egypt; ‘unleavened bread’—because our fathers were redeemed from Egypt; ‘bitter herbs’—because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt.” (m. *Pesa.* 10:5)
 5. “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died” (m. *Sotah* 9:15).

III. Rabbi Saul Of Tarsus

- A. Saul of Tarsus knew the Old Testament as only a trained rabbi would know it.
1. He knew the unique *traditions* (oral law) of the rabbis.
 2. Paul said the Law of Moses was given through angels (Gal 3:19; cf. Heb 2:2).
 - a) In the Old Testament, there is no mention of angels concerning the Law; in the Exodus account, God gave the Law directly to Moses.
 - b) Rabbinic tradition claimed that the Law came to men from God through the mediation of angels (1 Enoch 60:1 *OTP*).
 - c) This is also mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q216 4:6).
 - d) Paul knew that rabbinic tradition and sanctioned it by inspiration.
 3. Paul claimed the Law was given 430 years after Abraham (Gal 3:17; Exod 12:40).
 - a) This is a rabbinic addition to the Old Testament story (Josephus, *Antiq.* 2:318).
 - b) Again, by inspiration, Paul sanctions the rabbinic tradition.
 4. When writing about Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness, Paul spoke of “the rock that followed them” (1 Cor 10:4).
 - a) According to the traditions of the rabbis, the rock from which the children of Israel received water in the wilderness literally followed them throughout their journey.

- b) “And so the well which was with the Israelites in the wilderness was a rock, the size of a large round vessel, surging and gurgling upward, as from the mouth of this little flask, rising with them up onto the mountains, and going down with them into the valleys. Wherever the Israelites would encamp, it made camp with them, on a high place, opposite the entry of the Tent of Meeting.” (t. *Sukkah* 3:11)
- c) This story is not part of the Old Testament narrative.
- d) Again, Paul sanctions the rabbinic tradition by inspiration.
- 5. If ever there was a Jew who was steeped in Judaism, that Jew was Paul.
- 6. No one could say that Paul had abandoned Judaism because he did not understand it or did not fully realize what it was.
- B. Some have suggested that Paul, the brilliant and zealous rabbi, would have been the logical successor to Gamaliel.
- C. “What did Gamaliel think of his brilliant pupil? One would like to have a word from him. But the position of leadership to which he will soon attain shows that the master’s approval rested on Saul. Perhaps the old teacher looked proudly on the young man from Tarsus as a possible successor. When Saul left Jerusalem he was to all intents and purposes the one young Jew in all the world who had most in prospect before him. He had been educated as a rabbi and the career of a rabbi lay before him. But that was not all. Many a young rabbi lived in comparative obscurity. This young rabbi had great friends at Jerusalem who could help him to the highest places if he proved worthy. We may imagine the joy of his parents as he returned home full of honor, the hope of Gamaliel and the pride of his home.” (Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, 20–21)

IV. Was Saul A Member Of The Great Sanhedrin?

- A. The one item that makes some people think Paul was a member of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was his statement that when Christians were put to death, he “cast his vote against them” (Acts 26:10).
 - 1. When people ask about Paul being a member of the Sanhedrin, they are usually unaware that there were *many* Sanhedrins in Israel (local Sanhedrins in the villages and Lesser Sanhedrins scattered throughout the land).
 - 2. It might be that the King James version of Acts 26:10 says it best, “...and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.”
- B. Under normal circumstances, Saul would have been far too young to be a member of the Great Sanhedrin.
 - 1. When we are introduced to Saul at the stoning of Stephen, he is referred to as “a young man named Saul” (Acts 7:58).
 - 2. While Luke paints Saul as a “young man,” the Sanhedrin was composed of the “elders” of Judaism (cf. Num 11:16).
 - 3. As a “young man,” Saul received his commission from “all the council of the elders” (Acts 22:5–6; 9:14; 26:10–11).

4. The Tosefta claims that before a man could be elevated to sit in the Great Sanhedrin, he first had to be made a judge in his own town, then “they promote him and seat him on the Temple mount, and from there, they promote and bring him up to the Rampart, and from there, they promote and bring him up to the chamber of the hewn stones” (t. *Hagig.* 2:9).
 5. Once a man made it to the Chamber of Hewn Stones, he was not automatically made a sitting court member but had to progress through the three rows of “disciples” first.
 6. “And three rows of disciples of sages sit before them. Each and every one knows his place. [If] they found need to ordain [a disciple to serve on the court], they ordained one who was sitting in the first row. [Then] one who was sitting in the second row joins the first row, and one who was sitting in the third row moves up to the second row. And they select for themselves someone else from the crowd and set him in the third row. [The new disciple] did not take a seat in the place of the first party [who had now joined in the court] but in the place that was appropriate for him [at the end of the third row].” (m. *Sanh.* 4:4)
- C. Saul lacked a few other qualifications to sit on the court.
1. From what we can glean from the New Testament, Saul appears to have never been married, yet men without children could not sit on the court.
 2. The Talmud states, “The eunuch and one who has never had children are ... not to be seated on a Sanhedrin” (b. *Sanh.* 36b).
 3. Pharisees on the court had to be scribes, yet Paul’s manual occupation was that of a tent-maker (Acts 18:1–3).
- D. It should also be noted that when Paul gave his pedigree, he never mentioned being a member of the Great Sanhedrin—or even the Lesser Sanhedrin (Phil 3:4–6).
- E. In addition, there is no evidence that any ancient writer claimed or even suggested that Paul was a court member.

V. Saul’s Commission From The High Priest

- A. Saul’s power and authority to persecute Christians came directly from the high priest in Jerusalem (Acts 9:1–2; 22:5).
1. Which high priest it was depends still a matter of debate.
 2. Caiaphas, the most likely candidate, served as high priest from AD 18 to 36.
 3. “Jonathan, the son of Ananus, the former high priest,” briefly held that authority from AD 36–37 (Josephus, *Antiq.* 18:95).
- B. It is hard to imagine a scenario in which a recent rabbinical school graduate could approach the high priest unless that young man had proven exceptionally gifted and zealous (Gal 1:14).
1. This scenario gets even more challenging to imagine once you recall that Saul was a devout Pharisee and the high priest was a Sadducee!
 2. Saul’s commission did not permit summary executions but demanded that prisoners be returned to Jerusalem for a trial and appropriate punishment (cf. Acts 22:5).
 3. The letters that Paul received might have been more of a “letter of introduction” to the synagogues in Damascus rather than official extradition papers.

4. “Throughout the empire, social superiors provided letters of introduction to their peers or inferiors on behalf of those they recommended. Such recommendations could also aid Jewish travelers in finding lodging with Jews in various areas. Because the high priest in an earlier period had authority to extradite Judean fugitives, Damascus’s synagogues would take Saul’s commission very seriously.” (Walton and Keener, *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, comments on Acts 9:2)
 5. One such letter was sent by “the chief men of Jerusalem” to confirm upon Josephus his civil authority in the region of Galilee (Josephus, *Life* 310–312).
- C. Did the Romans give Jewish authorities in Jerusalem the power to extradite inhabitants from other Roman provinces?
1. At a much earlier time in history (c. 142 BC), the Romans directed the ruler of Egypt to hand over to “Simon the high priest” (as the leader of the Sanhedrin) any Jewish “troublemakers” so that they could be punished “according to their law” (1 Macc 15:16–21).
 2. Nearly a century before Saul’s journey to Damascus, Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) had granted the Jewish high priest and the Sanhedrin jurisdiction over Jews in foreign cities (Josephus, *Antiq.* 14:192–195).
 3. Though both of these examples are from a much earlier time than the first century AD, it might have set the precedent for such actions in the days of Saul.
 4. In addition, Rome gave King Herod the Great exceptional power to extradite Jewish fugitives from areas outside of his ordinary jurisdiction.
 5. “Caesar had given such a privilege to no other king as he had given to him, which was this: that he might fetch back anyone that fled from him, even out of a city that was not under his own jurisdiction” (Josephus, *War* 1:474).
 6. It is also possible that Rome turned a blind eye to Saul’s activities since the Romans thought of “Christians” as a sect of Judaism at this time.
- D. Damascus of Syria was about 140 miles northeast of Jerusalem, which would be a six-day journey by foot.
1. Josephus claimed that in the Jewish war against Rome (AD 66), the Romans slaughtered 10,000 Jews in that city in just one hour.
 2. “They came upon the Jews, and cut their throats, as being in a narrow place, in number ten thousand, and all of them unarmed, and this in one hour’s time, without any body to disturb them...” (Josephus, *War* 2:561).
 3. However, later, he estimated the number of slain on this occasion to be 18,000.
 4. “It would be too long for me to speak at this time of every destruction brought upon us; for you cannot but know that there was not any one Syrian city which did not slay their Jewish inhabitants, and were not more bitter enemies to us than were the Romans themselves: nay, even those of Damascus, when they were able to allege no tolerable pretense against us, filled their city with the most barbarous slaughter of our people, and cut the throats of eighteen thousand Jews, with their wives and children.” (Josephus, *War* 7:366–368)
 5. Whichever number is correct, it demonstrates that Damascus had a substantial Jewish population in the middle of the first century AD.
 6. It was on Paul’s journey to Damascus that he encountered the Lord (Acts 9:1–6).

Conclusion

- I. There was a time when Saul of Tarsus, the brilliant student of Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, tried to destroy the religion of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 26:9–11).
 - A. Saul had a part in putting Christians to death or in prison.
 - B. After his conversion, he could never forget those terrible deeds (1 Cor 15:9).
 - C. He always considered himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15).
 - D. Paul's only consolation was that he "did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim 1:13).
 - E. In time, he could honestly say, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Phil 3:7).
- II. "Passing by Jesus himself, Paul stands forever the foremost representative of Christ, the ablest exponent of Christianity, its most constructive genius, its dominant spirit from the merely human side, its most fearless champion, its most illustrious and influential missionary, preacher, teacher, and its most distinguished martyr. He heard things in the third heaven not lawful to utter (II Cor. 12:4), but he felt himself a poor earthen vessel after all (II Cor. 4:7). He sought to commend himself in the sight of God to every man's conscience, for he had seen the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ and was the servant of all for Jesus' sake (II Cor. 4:3 ff.)." (Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, 4)

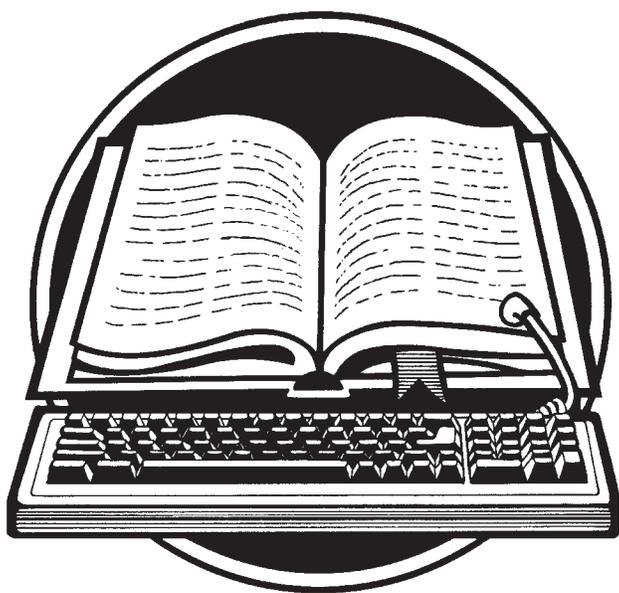
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