

FROM CHRISTIAN PERSECUTOR TO AMBASSADOR IN CHAINS: PAUL OF TARSUS, APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

WHO WAS PAUL?

The great Evangelizer Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, is considered by many Christians to have authored a majority of the 27 [New Testament](#) (1) books which form the [Holy Bible](#) (2). His epic journey is the standard bearer of conversion accounts, as he was transformed from being the most wicked persecutor of first century followers of "The Way" to the unswerving "Ambassador in Chains" ([Ephesians 6:19-20](#)) who preached and taught the Good News of [Jesus Christ](#) (3) while helping nurture infant churches along the path.

EARLY LIFE

The Scriptures don't tell us much about Paul's heritage or early life. [Acts 22:3](#) shares that Paul was born in Tarsus of Cicilia (*ed note: circa 5 AD*), then a large trade center on the Mediterranean coast in what is now south central Turkey, and that he "studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors." Born into a devout Jewish family (4), Paul referred to his lineage in [Philippians 3:5](#) as being "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of [Benjamin](#) (5), a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee." He later became a leader of the Christian Church in the first century world. The "son of Paul's sister" is mentioned in [Acts 23:16](#) and Paul shares in [Acts 23:6](#) that he "descended from Pharisees." In [2 Timothy 1:3](#), Paul gives thanks to God, "whom I serve, as my ancestors did."

PRESENT AT THE STONING OF STEPHEN

The first mention of Paul in the Bible is in [Acts 7:54-60](#), when he is referred to by his Jewish name of Saul. In this account, he is present at the stoning of the first Christian martyr, [Stephen](#) (6), when "the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul." It was common for first century Jews to have two names- one Hebrew, with the other being either Latin or Greek- which leads us to the following paragraph.

SAUL AND PAUL: STORY BEHIND THE NAME

In some modern day Christian circles, some teach that Saul's name was changed by God to Paul when he was converted from Judaism to Christianity. As noted previously, Paul's Jewish name was Saul, perhaps after the biblical first King of Israel, who was also from the tribe of Benjamin. Also claiming Roman citizenship he inherited from his father ([Acts 16:37-38](#) and [Acts 22:22-29](#)), he was also known by the name of Paul (biblical Greek) and Paulus (Latin). Roman citizenship status gives Paul the avenue in which to successfully appeal to the Emperor in [Acts 25](#).

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In [Acts 13:9](#), Saul is called "Paul" for the first time on the island of Cyprus. The author ([Luke](#)) indicates the names were interchangeable: "But Saul, who was also called Paul..." This was much later than the time of his conversion, which took place on the road to Damascus in [Acts 9](#), when Jesus asked of him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Adopting his Roman name was typical of Paul's missionary style. His method was to put people at their ease and to approach them with his message in a language and style to which they could relate, as in [1 Corinthians 9:19-23](#) (7). He is called Paul in all other Bible books where he is mentioned, including those that he authored.

In [Acts 18:1-3](#), he meets up with a fellow tentmaker, Aquila, and his wife, Priscilla. He resides and works with them during his 18 month stay in Corinth ([Acts 18:11](#)) and later develops a missionary relationship with them ([Romans 16:3-4](#)).

SAUL: PERSECUTOR OF CHRISTIANS

After Stephen was stoned to death (see earlier reference), [Acts 8:1-3](#) tells us a great persecution broke out in the Church the very same day. All followers of The Way were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, with the exception of the Apostles, as "Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison." [Acts 9:1-2](#) shares that Saul was relentless in his pursuit, "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem." Post conversion, Paul later confesses his persecution of God's church in both [Galatians 1:13-14](#) and [Philippians 3:6](#).

FROM PERSECUTOR TO AMBASSADOR

The most profound Christian conversion account of all time is recorded in [Acts 9:3-18](#) and majestically displays the unequalled power of Jesus Christ. Here we have Saul, a highly educated Pharisee steeped in the Law of Moses. Somehow, he truly believes he is doing God's work by ridding the world of "Followers of The Way." Now, he's on his way to Damascus to hunt down more souls to imprison (or worse). Suddenly, a light from Heaven flashed around Saul and he fell to the ground as a voice asked him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Scripture indicates that Saul instantaneously knew the Source of this occurrence, as he asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The response confirmed it. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Blinded, Saul was led into Damascus by his fellow travelers. Once at the house of Judas on Straight Street, he did not eat or drink for 3 days ([8](#)).

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Meanwhile, the Lord Jesus was setting things up to advance His Kingdom here on Earth as only He can do. As Saul was still blind and praying over what was going on, across town in Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called upon him in a vision to go to where Saul was. Jesus revealed to Ananias that Saul was deep in prayer and was being given a vision of his own- one that a man named Ananias was coming to lay hands on him and restore his eyesight.

Ananias, like Moses long before him, was hesitant to receive the task given him. Ananias stammered that he knew that Saul had done much harm to the holy people in Jerusalem. As if Jesus was somehow unaware of what the current circumstances were, Ananias exclaimed that Saul was now in Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest everyone calling on the name of Jesus.

Again, as with Moses and his insecurities hundreds of years earlier, the fears of Ananias did not change what the Lord had in mind. Jesus told him ([Acts 9:15-19](#)), "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Thus began the ministry of Paul of Tarsus.

In [Galatians 1:16](#) Paul writes that God "was pleased to reveal his son to me." In [1 Corinthians 15:8](#), as he lists the order in which Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, Paul writes, "last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."

NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORSHIP

Of the 27 New Testament books, a great number have been traditionally attributed to having been authored by Paul. Due to the conflicting opinions of Bible scholars, we bypass referencing which category they may or may not fall into, as that risks us getting "lost in the weeds" of what this resource is truly all about- Paul's conversion and subsequent Ministry to give honor and praise to Jesus Christ.

MARTYRDOM

The New Testament does not say when or how Paul died, but many church scholars place his death sometime between 64-67 AD in Rome. The writings of Ignatius, Tertullian, Jerome and Eusebius of Caesarea all reference the death of Paul from being beheaded.

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PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

A 14 minute video outlining the Missionary journeys of Paul can be explored on the website link listed at the bottom of this document.

DOCUMENT SOURCES

- (1) <http://www.downriverdisciples.com/new-testament>
- (2) <http://www.downriverdisciples.com/the-good-news>
- (3) <http://www.downriverdisciples.com/jesus-christ>
- (4) <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000OEOKL2>
- (5) <http://www.downriverdisciples.com/twelve-tribes-of-israel>
- (6) <http://www.downriverdisciples.com/the-first-martyrs>
- (7) <https://www.catholic.com/qa/why-did-god-change-sauls-name-to-paul>
- (8) <http://www.downriverdisciples.com/fasting>

<http://www.downriverdisciples.com/ambassador-in-chains>