

The Apostle Paul

- As we begin, we recognize that most of what we can know about Paul is contained in the letters we have that he actually wrote, and the Acts of the Apostles. There are instances when the two do not dovetail. In those instances, it is recommended we choose the version found in the letters rather than the version presented in Acts. In addition, there is much to be learned by studying the customs and history of the times with an emphasis on Judaism, Greek thought, Roman culture, and of course Paul's interactions with those who had known Jesus personally such as Peter. Also of great importance is the need to concentrate on material before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE as life changed dramatically for Jews and the followers of Jesus after that. What follows is a list of information about Paul we can feel comfortable knowing to be true. Our purpose is to understand the man, Paul, as deeply as we are able twenty centuries later.
- Born about 4 BCE, or perhaps a little later, and passed away approximately 62 – 64 CE in Rome under Nero probably.
- Born in Tarsus of Syria as Saul. Tarsus was a major city.
- It was not uncommon in those days for a person to have two names. We do not know exactly when and how Paul became his primary name, but we are certain Saul and Paul is the same person.
- Paul was in Jerusalem during the ministry of Jesus.
- He was a Greek speaking Jew from the area of Asia Minor.
- He was influenced by Greek thinking and presentation.
- He was born a citizen of Rome.
- Paul worked with his own hands – probably Tent Making. So, he was more than a common laborer but less than of a wealthy class.
- Paul's profession made it easy for him to move from place to place and set up shop wherever he might be.
- He could read and write and knew how to dictate.
- Paul wrote in Koine (Common) Greek rather than the elegant and sophisticated Greek used by some others.
- He was taught scripture and the *oral* Torah by Gamaliel the grandson of Hillel, one of the most famous rabbis in history.
- Gamaliel interestingly was a defender of the early believers in the divinity of Jesus.

- As a young man, and future scholar he probably memorized the Hebrew Scriptures in whole or part.
 - He quoted scripture from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - Paul became a Pharisee well advanced in learning. Pharisees believed in life after death, non-biblical traditions, and studied the scriptures in detail.
 - Some people see Paul as arrogant. He freely said he was far more advanced in learning than other Pharisees and he felt the same as a follower of Jesus. Probably this understanding is overstated in that he was probably only letting us know his achievements in order to make a point.
 - Paul was a persecutor of believers in Jesus and probably urged various synagogues to punish converts to the faith. This would have included ostracism and light flogging.
 - He became a believer in the risen Christ somewhere around 33 CE.
 - The common story is that Jesus appeared to him in some manner, perhaps a bright light, on the road to Damascus.
 - Paul was intelligent, dedicated, compassionate, emotional, and clever, had a temper, and was completely dedicated to his mission for Jesus Christ.
 - After Paul's conversion he went into Arabia (probably west of Damascus), and then returned to Damascus.
 - After 3 years Paul met with Peter and James, Jesus' brother, for 15 days in Jerusalem. It was confirmed that Paul would take the good news to the gentiles and Peter and James would do the same with the Jews.
 - Then after 14 years Paul returned to Jerusalem to compare theological understandings with the powers that be including Peter, James, and John. The purpose was to make sure the gospel he was preaching to the gentiles was approved by them. They agreed that gentiles need not take on the rules of Judaism in order to be true believers in the risen Christ. To Paul's chagrin they backtracked on this somewhat in a couple of cities.
 - Paul wrote 7 letters which are printed in the New Testament. (Galatians, Romans, Philippians, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Philemon, 1st Thessalonians)
 - Other letters attributed to Paul in scripture were probably written after his death by followers who may have had access to these and other letters he wrote.
 - Paul was a missionary for Jesus Christ from the 30's through the early 60's.
 - He had a complete understanding of the teachings of Jesus.
 - Paul was not an orator – he spoke like everyone in the street.
 - His physical appearance was somewhat sickly and his illness was visible.
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- Paul would not accept money but said others could be paid for preaching.
- He did have wealthy supporters.
- Paul had no motive other than the Gospel for what he did.
- His life in the Way was much harder than his easy life in Judaism.
- Paul saw himself as a libation being poured out. See Philippians 2.17
- Paul saw the meaning of life as the education of the soul. (Platonic in nature)
- Paul had an out of body experience. See 2 Corinthians 12.
- When he went to Galatia, he was suffering from some sort of an eye disease and was sick with a fever. He had trouble seeing. Galatia was in the mountains at high altitude.
- Paul carried scars from his numerous beatings.
- Paul believed we learn through suffering and won't learn without it.
- As a tent maker carrying a few leather tools he could set up shop anywhere and probably preached the gospel as he worked, eventually gaining enough converts to begin a community.
- Paul suffered for his leadership. Paul was often hungry and ill-clad. He was flogged at least five times, jailed, and arrested for taking a gentile too far into the Temple grounds. Since he was a Roman citizen, he was eventually taken to Rome to stand trial.
- Paul wrote his letters to the congregations he had founded to answer questions and concerns that had arisen after his leaving. Often other missionaries had presented another "gospel" and Paul was compelled to refute their teaching. He did not return himself because he was moving constantly into new territory.
- The world around the Mediterranean was uniquely ready for Paul's ministry. The Romans made sure there was peace everywhere in the empire. There were good roads and one could also travel by ship. There was a common language, Greek. It is easy to see the hand of God working in the background.
- Paul's letters give us an entry into the world of the first Century that gospels cannot. They are therefore uniquely important to the serious student of the early church. In addition, these letters have formed the foundation for the thinking of many a famous theologian.

Notes on the Roman influence of Paul and the times in which he lived:

- Gravitas – never not working

- Humility not a virtue.
 - Greek was the dominant language. Latin in the streets.
 - Romans loved everything Greek.
 - They believed in harmony in the universe.
 - Fate replaced the idea of the devil and the stars were useful for predicting ones fate.
 - Every town contained: Forum, Senate, Temple to the gods, Theater, Treasury, Marketplace, Public baths. The Ephesus theater is still in use.
 - Arranged marriages.
 - However, women in the Roman culture had more freedom than other cultures.
 - 2/3rds of the Roman world were slaves and there were four levels of slave.
 - Lots of tired people.
 - Life was incredibly harsh.
 - Terrible torture and punishment.
 - There were three classes of citizens: Senators, Equis, and Plebs
 - Roman Gods: a contract between Rome and the gods. If you do what they say you are blessed and if you don't bad things will happen.
 - They accused Christians of being atheists.
 - Christian festivals were hidden within Roman festivals. December 25th is an example.
 - Expected length of life less than 30 years.
 - A woman must become pregnant 5 or 6 times to keep the population steady.
 - You could easily be a grandfather by age 30.
 - When born one had a 50-50 chance to live to 17.
 - No idea about sanitation.
 - Drinking wine was how one stayed alive. (Poor me a hot one.)
 - No ventilation in buildings.
 - Fires occurred often and Rome burned often.
 - Extended families very important as no other social security.
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