

Paul [Saul]

From Saul's [the Jewish name for Paul **Acts 13:9**] birth until his appearance in Jerusalem as a persecutor of Christians there is little information about his life.

Although of the tribe of Benjamin and a zealous member of the Pharisee party, [**Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5; Acts 23:6**], he was born in Tarsus a Roman citizen, [**Acts 16:37; Acts 21:39; Acts 22:25**].

Jerome cites a tradition that Paul's forbearers were from Galilee. It is not certain whether they migrated to Tarsus for commercial reasons or were colonised by a Syrian ruler. That the family were recorded as citizens suggests that they had resided there for some time.

Tarsus was a centre of learning and it assumed that Paul being acquainted with various Greek philosophies and religious cults during his youth there.

This assumption has been challenged because relevant texts place Paul in Jerusalem as a very small child, [**Acts 22:3; Acts 26:4**]. When read in sequence these scriptures show; 1) born in Tarsus; 2) brought up by mother in Jerusalem; 3) educated by Rabbi Gamaliel as a young man.

Paul was given official authority to direct the persecution of Christians and as a member of a synagogue or Sanhedrin council, "cast my vote against them," [Acts 26:10].

In the light of Paul's education and early prominence we may presume that his family were wealthy and of prominent status, his nephew's access to the leaders in Jerusalem accords with such an impression, [Acts 23:16-22].

Paul's personal appearance is suggested in scripture as not being impressive, [**1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 10:10**].

In the apocryphal "*Acts of Paul and Thecla*" Paul is described as a man of little stature, thin haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining and nose somewhat hooked..."

While there is no evidence that Paul was acquainted with Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, his experience of the martyrdom of Stephen [Acts 8:1] must have made an impact on him, the glorified Jesus Christ's question in Acts 26:14 implies as much.

The encounter with the risen Jesus Christ transformed Christ's enemy into His apostle.

Apart from an interval in the trans-Jordan desert, Paul spent the three years following his baptism preaching in Damascus, [**Galatians 1:17; Acts 9:19**].

Under pressure from the Jews, Paul fled to Jerusalem, where Barnabas ventured to introduce him to the leaders of understandable suspicious Christians, [Acts 9:26-28].

Paul's ministry in Jerusalem lasted scarcely two weeks, for again Jews sought to kill him, [Acts 9:29-30].

Nothing is recorded in scripture as to Paul's life in Tarsus for a period of some ten years.

Barnabas, hearing of Paul's work in Tarsus and remembering their first meeting, requested that Paul came to Antioch to help in the flourishing Gentile mission, [**Acts 9:25-26**].

After a year of growth, Paul and Barnabas were sent on a “famine visit” to help the stricken Christians in Jerusalem, [Acts 11:27-30].

Paul worked hard to convince the Jews that Gentiles were acceptable to the Creator God. The lives that Paul touched were changed and challenged by meeting Jesus Christ through him.

God did not waste any part of Paul, his background, his training, his citizenship, his mind, even his weaknesses.

Are you willing to allow the Creator God do the same with your life?

You will never know all that the Creator God can do with and through you until you allow Him to have all that you are!

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

The Greek word translated “bodies” is “soma” meaning whole life, body, mind and human spirit [**Job 32:8**]. The sacrifice referred to is the burnt offering sacrifice when everything is burnt on the altar.

Lessons we can learn from Paul’s life –

Paul was never afraid to take an issue head-on and deal with it.

Paul was sensitive to God’s leading and despite his strong personality, he always did as the Creator God directed.

True obedience comes from a relationship with the Creator God, but obedience will never create or earn that relationship.

Real freedom does not come until we no longer have to prove our freedom but accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord.

The Creator God does not waste our life when we surrender it to Him. He will use our past and present so that we are fully trained to be used by Him in the future, [Revelation 20:4, 11-13].