



## ABSTRACT

No doubt there are hundreds of books, articles, and eBooks that have been written about the life of the Apostle Paul. Despite all the work that has been written on the subject, there is always room for more on Paul.

By Joseph F. Roberts, ThD, PhD

# THE CHIEF

The Life and Ministry of the Apostle Paul

Published by:  
**International Missionary Baptist Publishing Ministries**



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## **The Chief**

By Joseph F. Roberts, ThD, PhD

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## The Chief

### Introduction to the Series

1 Timothy 1:15 KJV *15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*

No doubt there are hundreds of books, articles, and eBooks that have been written about the life of the Apostle Paul. Despite all the work that has been written on the subject, there is always room for more on Paul. He is such an outstanding figure, we never tire to expound on the life of a man whose beliefs and actions have caused him rise to the top of the list, to be one of the most ancient men to come to the top of human history, other than Jesus Himself. The lessons to be learned from his life and his teachings can be compared to a well of knowledge whose depths cannot be reached. Yet at the same time he calls himself the chief of sinners. Why would we want by any reasonable notion to consider the work of a man who thought of himself in that manner? We will see.

In this work, I am not presenting anything new. Someone somewhere has already written or spoken about everything that Paul said or did. Therefore, I am drawing from a vast works on the life of Paul as well as from the Scriptures, of which there is much there to use.

So, come with me as we travel with Paul through the roads of his life and glean some lessons for ourselves.

## Chapter One

### The Chief

#### I. Family

There is not a lot of information that is available concerning the family of the Apostle Paul. We will, however, look at what is given.

#### Father, a Pharisee

We find in Acts 23:6, that his father was a Pharisee. Paul writes in this verse: Acts 23:6 KJV *But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.*

We are left wanting to know just who his father was. Nowhere in Scripture or history are we given a hint of the name of his father. It would appear that Paul came from a well-to-do family namely because his father was a Roman citizen. Not many, outside of those born in Rome, were natural born citizens. Many were able to buy their citizenship, but this was not the case with Paul. He was a “natural born” citizen because of his father’s citizenship. Roman citizens had freedoms that noncitizens were not allowed to have.

Note in the verse above that not only was Paul a son of a Pharisee, but he was also a Pharisee himself. In Acts 22:25-28, Paul refers to the fact that he is also a Roman Citizen.

Acts 22:25-28 KJV *25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? 26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. 27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. 28 And the chief captain answered,*



*With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.*

Paul's free-born Roman citizenship would aid him greatly in his ministry for the Lord.

### **Mother Unknown**

We know very little about Paul's father, but we know even less about his mother. We have a little more information about his family than we do about his parents. Reference is made his sister's son in Acts 23:16.

*And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.*

We will later see that Paul was in Jerusalem when this occurred, so it becomes clear that Paul's sister lived in Jerusalem.

Paul names at least three different men in the book of Romans that are his kinsmen. We do not know if they were his brothers or some other relative such as a cousin, uncle, etc.

*Romans 16:7 KJV 7 Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*

*Romans 16:11 KJV 11 Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.*

Regardless of who they were, they were co-workers with Paul and as such probably suffered much as he often did. We do know that Paul almost always had a number of co-laborers with him wherever he went.

Marvin R. Wilson, writing in the periodical, *Christian History*, Issue 47, Reprint 2019, had this to say concerning Paul's relatives:

*At least seven of Paul's relatives are mentioned in the New Testament. At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul greets as "relatives" Andronicus and Junia, Jason, Sosipater, and Lucius. In addition, Acts mentions Paul's Sister and his nephew, who helped Paul in prison (Acts 23:16-22).*

*It is possible that Paul's "relative" Lucius is Luke, the author of the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. On his second missionary journey, Paul may have gone to Troas (where Luke lived-or at least where he joined Paul) because he knew a relative he could stay with there (Acts 16:8, 11).*

## Childhood

We can learn much concerning his childhood in two different passages of Scripture.

*Acts 22:3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.*

*Philippians 3:5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews;*

## Tarsus

Paul was born in Tarsus in the region of Cilicia. The city of Tarsus was already a city of antiquity even before Paul was born. "Tarsus was already a significant trade center under the Hittites & was developed from a much earlier urban center by the **Hatti\*** around 2500 BCE." (<https://www.worldhistory.org/Tarsus/>)

\* “The Hatti were an aboriginal people in central Anatolia (present-day Turkey) who first appeared in the area around the River Kizil Irmak. The prevailing understanding is that they were native to the land although it has been suggested they migrated to the area sometime prior to 2400 BCE. The region was known as ‘Land of the Hatti’ from c. 2350 BCE until 630 BCE, attesting to the influence of the Hattian culture there. They spoke a language called Hattic and did not seem to have a written language of their own, using cuneiform script for trade dealings. As the region was heavily forested, the Hatti built their homes of wood and made their living through trade of timber, ceramics, and other resources.” (<https://www.worldhistory.org/hatti/>)

“Caesar was so impressed by Tarsus that he made it tax-exempt and lavished further favors on the city; in gratitude, Tarsus renamed itself Juliopolis. Caesar also rewarded the Jews of the region (and, by extension, all Jews who would eventually live under Roman rule) freedom to practice their religion in thanks for their support during his struggles with Pompey. His decree, most likely from 47 BCE, was upheld by Augustus Caesar (r. 27 BCE-14 CE) and the emperors who succeeded him.

“After Caesar's assassination in 44 BCE, Mark Antony and Octavian (the future Augustus) pursued the conspirators and their forces, finally defeating them at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE. Antony was still in the region, at Tarsus, in 41 BCE when Queen Cleopatra of Egypt made her now-famous overture to him from her barge on the Cydnus outside the gates of Tarsus. Caesar and Cleopatra had been involved both politically and romantically and she now needed Antony's support and protection. On his side, Antony recognized the value of having a controlling interest in

Egypt, Rome's breadbasket owing to their export of grain, and Tarsus was the beginning of their famous love affair and political alliance.” (<https://www.worldhistory.org/Tarsus/>)

“Saul, the future Saint Paul, was born in Tarsus a Roman Citizen and a devout Jew (Acts 22:28, Philippians 3:4-5). Everything known about him comes from the biblical book of Acts, the epistles which make up most of the Christian New Testament, and other narratives (such as The Acts of Paul and Thecla) not included in the Bible. His birth name was no doubt Saul while Paul (Paulus) was his Roman name which he naturally would have used more in his missionary work among the Gentiles. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no biblical evidence that Saul changed his name to Paul after his conversion experience. Acts 13:9 states that Saul was also called Paul and he is referred to as Saul elsewhere following his conversion.

“He was sent to study in Jerusalem and became a prominent member of the Jewish community there (Acts 22:3). When the disciples of Jesus Christ began sharing their new faith, Saul was among their persecutors until he experienced a vision on his way to Damascus in which Jesus spoke to him and he was struck blind (Acts 9:3-9). After recovering his sight with the help of Christians, he became the great evangelist, traveling the Roman roads of Syria-Cilicia Phoenice to spread the new faith.” (<https://www.worldhistory.org/Tarsus/>)

## **Education**

In Acts 22:3 we learn that Paul was sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel.

“Paul, whose original name was Saul or Sh'aul, was born in the town of Tarsus, Cilicia (in modern southeastern Turkey), of Jewish parents belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. Both his parents were Roman citizens. It is safe to assume that Paul's earliest language was Koine Greek, the household language of all educated Roman citizens throughout the empire. Paul was sent at an early age to Jerusalem to attend Bible school. Studying with a famous rabbi, Gamaliel, he learned to write in both Greek and Hebrew and became thoroughly versed in the law. It seems certain that Paul studied in Jerusalem during the three years of Jesus' public life and that he was present at the time that Jesus was crucified by the Romans. He may even have seen and heard Jesus preach. He certainly must have heard of Jesus and his movement among the people.

“Paul lived in the closing days of the Second Jewish Commonwealth. When he was young and studying rabbinic theology, Palestine already lay under complete Roman domination. The Jewish people no longer exercised any real national sovereignty. The traditional boundaries of Israel, as known from the previous Hasmonaean and Salamonian kingdoms, had been severely reduced. Rome preferred to govern its captive peoples by dividing them into manageable provinces. By the time Paul had converted to Christianity and was launched on his extensive missionary journeys, affairs in Palestine had taken a turn for the worse. The calm and relative stability that had lasted during the reign of King Agrippa I, was severely shaken after his death. A new spirit of nationalism and revolt against the foreign invader rose among the leading Jewish class, the Pharisees. Throughout Palestine the younger generation of Pharisees molded the spirit of the people in such a way that the Jewish revolt of 66

A.D. and the consequent destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. became inevitable.

“Paul derived from his early education a thorough knowledge of both the oral and the written Jewish law. He also learned of the traditional rabbinic method of scriptural interpretation and commentary. Paul was thus heir to the long, rich, and varied tradition of Pharisaism as it culminated in the latter days of the Second Temple. Apparently, Paul had gained an outstanding reputation as a young rabbinic student because he was authorized by the Jewish authorities to seek out and prosecute members of a new sect who proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Paul apparently made several trips throughout Palestine in search of Christians.”  
(<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/st-paul>)

Young Jewish men were also required to learn some type of trade. In Paul’s case, that trade was tentmaking.

“In his childhood and youth, Paul learned how to “work with [his] own hands” (1 Corinthians 4:12). His trade, tent making, which he continued to practice after his conversion to Christianity, helps to explain important aspects of his apostleship. He could travel with a few leather-working tools and set up shop anywhere. It is doubtful that his family was wealthy or aristocratic, but, since he found it noteworthy that he sometimes worked with his own hands, it may be assumed that he was not a common labourer. His letters are written in Koine, or “common” Greek, rather than in the elegant literary Greek of his wealthy contemporary the Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, and this too argues against the view that Paul was an aristocrat. Moreover, he knew how to dictate, and he could write with his own hand in large letters (Galatians 6:11), though not in

the small, neat letters of the professional scribe.”

(<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Paul-the-Apostle>)

Earlier we noted that Paul’s greatest teacher was a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel. He was a very respected scholar and teacher. Wikipedia has this to say about him:

“**Gamaliel the Elder** (/gəˈmeɪliəl,-ˈmaː-,\_gæməˈliːəl/; also spelled **Gamliel**; Hebrew: רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הַיְיָרִי רַבָּן *Raban Gamli’el hazZāqēn*; Koinē Greek: Γαμαλιήλ ὁ Πρεσβύτερος *Gamaliēl ho Presbýteros*), or **Rabban Gamaliel I**, was a leading authority in the Sanhedrin in the early first century CE. He was the son of Simeon ben Hillel and grandson of the great Jewish teacher Hillel the Elder. Gamaliel is thought to have died in 52 CE (AM 3813). He fathered Simeon ben Gamliel, who was named for Gamaliel's father, and a daughter, who married a priest named Simon ben Nathanael.”

## Conclusion

Next, we will look at Paul’s early adulthood from not only Scripture but also history.

1 Jones, Daniel; Gimson, A.C. (1977). *Everyman's English Pronouncing Dictionary*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. p. 207.

2 “Gamaliel”. *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

3 Schechter, Solomon; Bacher, Wilhelm. "Gamliel I". *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

4 *Avodah Zarah* 3:10

## Chapter Two

### The Chief

#### Young Manhood

Acts 26:4 KJV *4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; 5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.*

#### Introduction

He would have completely learned and mastered the Hebrew language and text because the Tarsus synagogue taught nothing but the Hebrew text and sacred Jewish law. Every boy would repeat the phrases in chorus after the synagogue keeper until every vowel, accent, and rhythm were precisely correct. They would then learn how to write the Hebrew characters on papyrus and roll them into scrolls. Later they would receive the Septuagint on a roll of vellum. By the age of 13, Paul would have mastered Jewish history, the poetry of the psalms and the majestic literature of the Prophets. He would have been able to know every pitch change and it all accurately with not mistakes. By this time, he would have been ready for a higher education, and he would have been 13 years of age. Soon he would be sent to Jerusalem. (The Life of Paul, True Horizons, page 5)

Paul, known as Saul in his early years, was sent by his family to Jerusalem to learn under the Rabbi Gamaliel. Many scholars believe that he actually had two names, both Saul and Paul. The first being named after Israel's first King. The second was a nod to the Greeks, Paulus. He was called Saul until several years in his ministry, namely during his first missionary journey.



It was also there that he learned his trade, that of tentmaking. Each Jew was bred to some type of trade. No Rabbi took fees, but he supported himself. Marvin R. Wilson had this to say concerning the trade of tentmaking.

*...Luke calls him a “tentmaker” (skēnopoios), which suggests Paul was a weaver of tent cloth from goats’ hair. The term, however, can also mean “leatherworker.” Other early translations of Luke’s term mean “maker of leather thongs” and “shoemaker.”* (Marvin R. Wilson, writing in the periodical, *Christian History*, Issue 47, Reprint 2019)

Albert Barnes in his New Testament commentary, commenting on Paul’s working with his hands in Acts 18:3, had this to say:

*Why he did it, the historian does not affirm; but it seems pretty evident that it was because he had no other means of maintenance. He also laboured for his own support in Ephesus, Ac 20:34 and also at Thessalonica, 2Th 3:9,10. The apostle was not ashamed of honest industry for a livelihood; nor did he deem it any disparagement that a minister of the gospel should labour with his own hands.*

*For by their occupation. By their trade; that is, they had been brought up to this business. Paul had been designed originally for a lawyer, and had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. But it was a regular custom among the Jews to train up their sons to some useful employment, that they might have the means of an honest livelihood. Even though they were trained up to the liberal sciences, yet they deemed a handicraft trade, or some honourable occupation, an indispensable part of education. Thus Maimonides (in the Tract Talmud. Tors, c. i. & 9) says, that “the wise generally practise some of the arts, lest they should be dependent on the charity of others.” See Grotius. The wisdom of this is*

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