

## Chapter Two

### Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans

### **Who Was the Apostle Paul?**

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,” (Romans 1:1).

The Apostle Paul was born in the city of Tarsus in the province of Cilicia. His father was of the sect of the Pharisees.

“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” (Acts 23:6).

John Chrysostom (350 A. D. - 407 A. D.) places Paul’s birth at 2 B. C. and his death in 66 A. D. at the age of 68 years old. Therefore Paul was born in a Greek city surrounded by Greek culture, but was trained in the strict Jewish sect of the Pharisees.

“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5).

The educational maxim of the Jews was “at five years of age, let the children begin in the Scripture; at ten, the Mishna; at thirteen, let them be subjects of the law.” The Talmud stated: “What is commanded of a father towards his son? To circumcise him, to teach him the Law, to teach him a trade?”

Paul’s parents were Roman citizens. Therefore Paul was his Hellenized name (Latin and Roman) while Saul was the Jewish form of the same name. More than likely, he grew up in this dualism. This was the cultural influence that would be the corporate ethic of Paul’s childhood.

In his childhood, Paul was trained as a tentmaker. Later this would be the means through which he supported himself as an evangelist whenever he would stay at any place for any length of time during his missionary journeys.

“<sup>1</sup> After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; <sup>2</sup> And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. <sup>3</sup> And because he was of the same craft. he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. <sup>4</sup> And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (Acts 18:1-4).

“Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (Acts 20:34).

Somewhere between the age of 10 to 13, Paul was sent to Jerusalem to be trained in the Law under the great Jewish teacher of the Pharisees, Gamaliel (the grandson of the great Hillel). Here he would spend the rest of his life until his conversion to Christianity, probably somewhere around 32 A.D.

“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” (Acts 22:3).

The next Scriptural account of Paul is at the time of the stoning of Stephen. If Chrysostom's date of Paul's birth is accurate, as well as the 37 A. D. date, a common date of the stoning of Stephen, this would have made Paul 39 years old at this time.

Philip Schaff (**History of the Christian Church**, Vol. I; Eerdmans) estimates Paul to be "about or over thirty years of age." He also states that "Philo extends the limits of 'young man' from twenty-one to twenty-eight, Xenophon to forty."

Dr. John Whitcomb (New Testament Chronological Chart) places Paul's conversion at 32 A. D., 2 years after the crucifixion in 30 A. D., based on a birth date of Jesus in 5 B. C. This seems the most logical. That would make Paul at about 34 at his conversion and the stoning of Stephen.

"And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 7:58).

Paul possibly was a member of the Sanhedrin. If not, he was working to that end. This was the very prestigious governing body over the Jews made up of priests and elders. According to the Mishnah (San. 1:6), the Great Sanhedrin numbered 71 members (the extra, over seventy, was the leader and was usually the High Priest of Israel). There were also local Sanhedrins of 23 members. In all probability, a person *earned* the right to be a member of the Sanhedrin and was appointed from within that body when a member died or retired.

Although the majority of the Sanhedrin were of the aristocratic Sadducees, there were numerous professional scholars who were experts in the matters of the Law ("Lawyers"). These individuals were called Scribes and were usually Pharisees. This would have been Paul's means of admission. This was the judicial system of Israel. It was before this "council" that Stephen was brought. Paul would have been of the "synagogue of . . . Cilicia" and probably one of those who brought Stephen before the council.

"<sup>8</sup> And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. <sup>9</sup> Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called *the synagogue* of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. <sup>11</sup> Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against* God. <sup>12</sup> And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon *him* and caught him, and brought *him* to the council" (Acts 6:8-12).

The fact that Saul's mission was to imprison Christians (Jewish believers) seems to confirm he was not yet a member of the Sanhedrin, but was proving himself deserving of the position. As a member, he would certainly not have had the time to chase all over the country after Christians, but the authority to do so could only come from the Sanhedrin.

"<sup>1</sup> And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison" (Acts 8:1-3).

"<sup>1</sup> And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, <sup>2</sup> And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2).

It was on this trip to Damascus that Paul was confronted by the resurrected and glorified Jesus, the Son of God. The two statements of Jesus to Paul are remarkable.

“<sup>4</sup> And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul. Saul, why persecutest thou me? <sup>5</sup> And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*” (Acts 9:4-5).

Essentially, Paul’s persecution of Christians was viewed as a persecution against Christ Himself, and Paul’s attempt to annihilate Christianity is reflected as an ox that rebels in vain as he kicks in the air against his master’s sharp goad that directs him where he wants him to go. For the next three days, Paul sits in the city of Damascus blinded and waiting for the Lord to send someone to instruct him as to what to do.

“<sup>8</sup> And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink” (Acts 9:8-9).

Once Ananias comes to Paul at Damascus, he lays his hand upon him and Paul receives his sight again. Paul was water baptized after this.

“<sup>17</sup> And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. <sup>18</sup> And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. <sup>19</sup> And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus” (Acts 9:17-19).

Immediately Paul began to preach Jesus as the Christ in the synagogues of Damascus. It was due to his success in persuading Jews that Jesus was the Messiah that the Jews began to plot to have him assassinated until it came to the place that Paul had to escape for his life one night.

“<sup>20</sup> And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? <sup>22</sup> But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. <sup>23</sup> And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: <sup>24</sup> But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. <sup>25</sup> Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket” (Acts 9:20-25).

Paul’s three year trip into Arabia would seem to follow his escape from Damascus. This probably refers to an area South of Damascus which included Mount Sinai. It is most probable that it was to that site he went.

“<sup>17</sup> Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. <sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days” (Galatians 1:17-18).

“For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children” (Galatians 4:25).

During those three years in Arabia, the Apostle Paul probably spent time in meditation and study of the O. T. Scriptures in light of his new revelation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. As a trained Pharisee, the majority of those Scriptures were already committed to memory. If our 32 A. D. date for Paul's conversion is correct, that would make him about 37 years old (based upon a 2 B. C. birth date) in 35 A. D. when he arrives in Jerusalem for the first time after his conversion.

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26).

It was during this trip to Jerusalem that Paul met Barnabas.

“<sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:27-28).

When the believers at Jerusalem discovered the plot to assassinate Paul, they took him under protection to Caesarea and sent him from there to Tarsus.

“<sup>29</sup> And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. <sup>30</sup> Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus” (Acts 9:29-30).

It would seem that this is what Paul was referring to in Galatians 1:21.

“Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia” (Galatians 1:21).

Apparently Paul spent many years at Tarsus. From here he taught and preached Jesus as the Christ in all the surrounding synagogues. During this time a group of Jewish believers had formed at Antioch due to the dispersal after the murder of Stephen. Barnabas was sent to Antioch by the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem to oversee the Church there. Barnabas would go to Tarsus and bring Paul back to Antioch with him. Barnabas and Paul would minister together at Antioch for one full year before being sent to Jerusalem with an offering for the believers there who were under great persecution due to king Herod (Herod Agrippa I).

“<sup>25</sup> Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: <sup>26</sup> And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. <sup>27</sup> And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. <sup>28</sup> And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. <sup>29</sup> Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: <sup>30</sup> Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. <sup>1</sup> Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. <sup>2</sup> And he killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 11:25-12:2).

The killing of the Apostle James and the resulting death of king Herod was in 44 A. D. Therefore, nine years had passed since Paul left Jerusalem for Tarsus. That would mean he spent about eight years at Tarsus and one year at Antioch before going to Jerusalem with the relief offering. Once Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch, they were separated from the Church (called out) to go on a missionary journey to Cyprus. They would take John Mark with them.

“<sup>25</sup> And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark. <sup>1</sup> Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. <sup>3</sup> And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away. <sup>4</sup> So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 12:25-13:4).

