

4. Paul's Early Years

I. The Pre-Conversion Years

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3).

cf. Stephen: "Moses was born [in Egypt]... he was brought up for three months in his father's house...Pharaoh's daughter...brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:20-22).

"circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless." (Phil 3:5-6)

Chronology	
Born in Tarsus	AD 5
Moved to Jerusalem	10
Crucifixion	30
Converted	34
First visit to Jerusalem	37
Second visit to Jerusalem	48
First missionary journey	48-49
Third visit to Jerusalem	49

Witherington, *New Testament History*

A. Born in Tarsus

Paul was born in Tarsus a few years after Jesus was born in Judea. He had a multicultural identity, and was fluent in both Greek and Aramaic.

- Hellenistic identity: born a citizen of the Greek city Tarsus. It was chief city of Cilicia, which at this time was part of the Roman province of Syria. He seemed proud of his citizenship of this "not insignificant city" (οὐκ ἄσημη πόλις Acts 21:39).
- Jewish identity: of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5), named after its most famous member, Saul (שאול, Σαούλ, Σαῦλος). His parents were probably conservative Jews; he was "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil 3:5), suggesting he identified with Aramaic-speaking Jews of Jerusalem rather than Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora.
- Roman identity: born a Roman citizen, with a Roman name (*cognomen*) Paul (*Paulus*, Gk Παῦλος).

B. Raised in Tarsus or Jerusalem

Acts 22:3 is ambiguous whether Paul was raised in Tarsus (Porter) or Jerusalem (English translations). If in Tarsus he would have received the earlier stages of a Greek education (grammar).

C. Educated in Jerusalem

Paul moved to Jerusalem for religious education. Presumably his parents moved there; his sister's son was living in Jerusalem ca 57 (Acts 23:16).

He was educated (πεπαιδευμένος) as a disciple at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), a leading rabbi, presumably commencing this after his bar-mitzvah when he began to live under Torah. He excelled as a student (Gal 1:14). He was trained as a Pharisee, educated in the "traditions of the fathers" (see sidebar).

He also learned a trade, like most Pharisees. He was a tentmaker (σκηνοποιός Acts 18:3), a skilled rather than manual laborer, making tents, sails, canopies, military equipment. Priscilla & Aquila were of the same trade.

D. Persecution of the Church

Paul was motivated by zeal. His models would have included Phineas (Num 25) and the Maccabees.

E. Appearance

“a man small in size, bald-headed, bow-legged, well-built, with eyebrows meeting, rather long-nosed, full of grace. For sometimes he seemed like a man, and sometimes he had the countenance of an angel” (*The Acts of Paul and Thecla* c. 150).

His physical presence (παρουσία τοῦ σώματος) was weak (2 Cor 10:10; Gal 4:14) and his speech of no account

II. Conversion

Call

Threefold commission:

1. be God’s chosen instrument.
2. mission to the Gentiles.
3. suffer for Jesus’ name.

III. Post-Conversion

Arabia

First Visit to Jerusalem

Tarsus and Cilicia

Antioch

A. Visits to Jerusalem

Saul made three visits to Jerusalem (some scholars think he made only two).

First visit: after escaping from Damascus, Saul visited Jerusalem, presumably staying with his sister. The apostles were reluctant to meet this former persecutor. But Barnabas took an interest in Saul and introduced him to Peter, with whom he stayed 15 days. Saul proclaimed Christ in the synagogue of the Hellenistic Jews, as had Stephen (Acts 6:9). This is heavily ironic since it was this preaching of Stephen that had stirred Saul to persecute the church. The Jews’ reaction to Saul was the same as their reaction to Stephen. The apostles hustled him out of town, taking him down to Caesarea so he could catch a boat home to Cilicia.

Second visit (Acts; Gal 2):

Third visit (Acts 15):

IV. Tradition

The Pharisees believed that at Sinai God gave Moses two types of Torah: a written Torah and an oral Torah. Each generation received (παραλαμβάνω) the oral Torah from the previous generation and passed it on (παραδίδωμι) to the next. This tradition of the fathers (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πατρικῶν) or tradition of the elders (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, Matt 15:2; Mark 7:3,5) concerned halakah (הַלְכָה), detailed instructions for daily life.

During the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews understood that God's judgment was justified because they had broken covenant and failed to keep Torah. This produced a renewed commitment to Torah, and the emergence of a group devoted to the study and teaching of Torah: the scribes (סֹפְרֵי, γραμματεῖς). The Pharisees intensified Torah, building a hedge around it to prevent them from inadvertently breaking it. The oral Torah was codified in written form as the Mishnah ca. 200 under the leadership of Judah ha-Nasi (Judah the Prince or the Patriarch). Over subsequent centuries a commentary (Gemara) was written on the Mishnah. Mishnah and Gemara together form the Talmud (תַּלְמוּד). There are two Talmuds: the Palestinian Talmud (*Yerushalmi*) developed ca. 350-450 by the Jewish community in Palestine, and the Babylonian Talmud (*Bavli*) developed ca. 550-600 by the large Jewish community in Babylon.

Jesus dismissed the tradition of the Pharisees as “the tradition of men” (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων, Mark 7:8), for which sake they broke, nullified, let go and set aside God's command/word (Matt 15:3,6; Mk 7:8,9,13). By contrast, Paul says that what he has received and passed on is from the Lord not from men (1 Cor 11:23; 15:3; Gal 1:12).

Tradition in the Church

A gross simplification: the Orthodox Church holds a fixed Tradition; the Catholic Church holds an expanding Tradition; the Protestant Church rejects Tradition but holds many traditions.

- Orthodox: seeks to preserve the tradition of the early Church, especially as developed by the early Church Fathers. This commitment is evident in liturgy (the usual liturgy is that developed by St John Chrysostom), in theology (largely unchanged since the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa), and in the continued relevance of the seven ecumenical councils (325–787).
- Catholic: Tradition is the official teaching of the *magisterium*. Scripture must be interpreted by the Church. Dogma is open to expansion, e.g. immaculate conception (1854), papal infallibility (1870), bodily assumption (1950).
- Protestant: the reformers rejected Catholic Tradition, seeking to return *ad fontes*, to the source, basing its theology and practice on Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*). Protestant churches have been busy ever since developing many traditions. At the same time, most Protestant churches, especially evangelical ones, are largely ignorant of church history. This was not true of the Reformers.