

RUSSELL SANDERS

7-2-2021

THE APOSTLE PAUL – LESSON 1

THE EARLY LIFE OF SAUL OF TARSUS PART 1

Prior to the conversion of the Apostle Paul, he was known as Saul of Tarsus, his birth place. Where is Tarsus, and why is that important?

Tarsus was a key city of the Roman province of Cilicia. It was located near the far upper Northeast part of the Mediterranean Sea. Today's location would be in Turkey just a little west of the westernmost part of the northern border of Syria.

The dominant Greek culture had established universities as a means of advanced higher education. The two most prominent universities were in Athens, Greece and in Alexandria, Egypt where the world's largest library of that time was located. The third most important university was in Tarsus which enabled Paul to be reared in a culture where higher education was very important.

Saul was multi-cultural having grown up as a devout Jew in the Greek culture of a Roman province. Thus, he was a natural-born Roman citizen, fluent in Greek and understanding its culture and soon to become a student of Jewish religion and law. This multi-culturalism would suit him as the ideal apostle and missionary to the gentile world, which was molded in Greek culture and religion, yet being savvy of Roman law.

Having benefited very early in life from the elite educational atmosphere of Tarsus, he was relocated early in life to Jerusalem where he would intensely study Jewish law and customs. His chief instructor was the Pharisee Gamaliel who was the foremost Jewish teacher of that time.

Saul had come from a relatively wealthy family. He had learned the tent-making trade which was surely learned from his father. This skill was occasionally of benefit to him in later years of extensive travel as a missionary for Christ.

As young Saul studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, he obviously did very well as he was respected by the ruling religious body, the Sanhedrin. It was at this time that a new religious sect arose and grew very rapidly. This sect touted Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and accused the Jewish priesthood and the ruling Sanhedrin of plotting and carrying out of Jesus' murder through Roman channels. This greatly infuriated them as they tried unsuccessfully to squelch this new movement. This sect of believers of Jesus were called "Followers of the Way" taken from Jesus' words as recorded later in John 14:6 where He said, ***"I am the Way, the truth, and the life..."***.

About one year into this explosive new movement, the Sanhedrin set their eyes on a particular target, a deacon of The Way named Stephen who was performing great miracles, signs, and

wonders in the name of this “heretic”, Jesus of Nazareth. As a result, a great number of Jews were becoming converted as Followers of The Way. They had Stephen arrested and tried for heresy against the Jewish faith. He was convicted and sentenced to death by stoning.

Tomorrow we shall see how Saul fit into this picture.