

Paul – A Legal Case Study
Chapter 2
The Initial Interview

Sometimes it happens in jail, other times it happens in the office, but regardless of location, the initial interview of the client is critical. During this interview one begins gathering the information that will set the lawyer on course for her or his further work.

Surprisingly, while it is important to an interview that a client tell you the truth, it isn't absolutely necessary. If a client fails to be fully informative, or if a client "remembers" things differently than what is true, time and hard work will disclose that. The initial interview is a chance to get basic information and set up a road map of where case development best proceeds.

In addition to getting the information that will help me proceed with handling the case, I use the interview as a chance to find points of connection. I need to know where I can relate to the client. I also need to know the blind spots where I don't relate well.

The initial interview generally serves also as an "assignment interview. By that I mean it is the interview where I learn what the client's real desires are. I want to know why the client did what the client did that led to the legal difficulty, but I also want to know what the client wants from me. Is the goal a trial and vindication or is it a plea bargain with the smallest punishment possible?

Notes are extremely important during an interview. Lawyers must keep up with where information comes from so that they are able to use that information later. It does me no good to remember some key fact in a case if I can't remember where that fact comes from when I go to prove it up at trial.

In this case which I approach as if I am Paul's defense lawyer, I am going to need to do the same, albeit with a slightly different form. My plan to keep this readable is to provide major citations in footnotes while in real life I would likely scrawl them onto the side of the legal pad.

With Paul, we will be able to access certain information I would be seeking in the initial interview. Some information I'd like has been lost to time, but that doesn't thwart the goals of this study. Often there are huge holes in what you learn from clients, and the lawyer's job is to take the information available and work with it. That is what we will do here in the initial interview.

I break the interview into sections. I start with background and move on from there into areas of concern. I always keep a “TO DO” list on an alternate page as I realize work I will need to do to further my case development. This will become apparent to the reader.

Background

As I probe Paul’s background, I want to see the road he walked before the arrest. If you really want to know and understand someone, anyone, you need to know their life story. Who we are is determined not only by our DNA, but by the events of our lives. We become who we are from our interactions with our families, friends, enemies, and strangers. How we think, our interests and beliefs, are formed by these interactions as well as our upbringing and education.

I want to know this about Paul. This is the “background” of the interview of Paul.

Name:

Everyone needs to know the name of the client, and it is no less different with Paul. My legal team includes a “trial scientist.” We call him Dr. Bob. Dr. Bob is a lawyer, but before going to law school, he was a clinical psychologist. Dr. Bob explained to me long ago that we need to always be careful with people who change their names! That often happens when someone has something to hide or when they are escaping their past.

What about Paul? Many people believe that Paul changed his name when he “became a Christian” from Saul to Paul. It is as if the Christian transformation was so total and complete, that Paul chose a name that was “close” to his original name, but was different.

This inference is not a fair inference, and our initial interview would have rectified it. The inference comes from an inadequate reading of the New Testament as well as a deficient understanding of Roman society and culture in the first century.

The New Testament can be divided into four different kinds of writings: gospels (four of them), a history of the church (commonly called “Acts”), letters (also called “epistles”), and an apocalyptic piece called “Revelation.”¹ Paul features in the history book called Acts as well as authoring 13 of the letters. In the letters, each of which is written to churches in the mission field, Paul identifies himself as “Paul.” In Acts, he is “Saul,” until he goes out into the mission field. Then he is “Paul.” The exception comes in Acts when Paul is recounting the events encountering Jesus on the Damascus road. There Jesus calls him “Saul,” and Paul uses that name when retelling the story to the Jewish audiences in Acts 22 and Acts 26.

¹ How one divides the New Testament can differ. Some use a fifth division and consider the book of Hebrews a “sermon” rather than an epistle or letter.

As for the cultural times, today, most western names are simple. For example, my name is William Mark Lanier. I have a first name, William, which comes from my father's first name. My second name, Mark, is my familiar name that my parents have called me since birth. My last name, Lanier, is my family name, and all the people in my family have that name.

During the time of Paul, each Roman citizen also had three names.² The three Roman names were not set up like names in Western civilization today. The Roman process of three names died out with the Roman Empire in the 5th century,³ but history has left us with evidence to clearly understand the naming at the time of Paul. To understand the Roman naming system, we will use the example of Gaius Julius Caesar. The first name⁴ (Gaius) was the personal given name. Frequently, this is the name people would use to refer to a person either alone or in combination with one of the person's other names. The second name (Julius in our example) typically denoted one's heritage or clan affiliation (Caesar came from the Juliae clan). Typically, the last name was a nickname or sometimes a family name passed on.

We do not know all three of Paul's Roman names. We only know his third Roman name, *Paullus* (in Latin, meaning "little") while in Greek it was *Paulos* (Παῦλος). This name would be common and a label people would use for the apostle.

Paul would have had the three Roman names as part of his registration as a Roman citizen, but Paul would also have had an additional name. Being a Hebrew who was born into a devout family, Paul would have had a Hebrew name that was used in Hebrew circles. Paul's Hebrew name was Saul.⁵

² Actually, people would frequently have more than just three names, but three names were required for registration of a Roman citizen. Wilson, Stephen, *The Means of Naming – A Social and Cultural History of Personal Naming in Western Europe* (London: Routledge 2004) at 4.

³ With the Germanic invasion, most people had one name after the fall of Rome. Over time, that expanded with second/family names becoming common in the 11th and 12th centuries. Middle names were added after the Renaissance. For a full history on the naming process, see Wilson's book cited above.

⁴ The Latin term for this first name was *praenomen*. The Latin term for the second name was *nomen or gentilicium*. The Latin for the third name was *cognomen*.

⁵ The Hebrew comes from *sha'al*, which means, "to ask." It was the name of the first King of Israel. The Greek is spelled *Saoul* (Σαοῦλ) in places and *Saulos* (Σαῦλος) in others.

In Hebrew circles, Paul was called “Saul.” This explains the alternate usage. Paul was never changing his name because of a “conversion.” A close look at Acts shows Luke using Paul’s Hebrew name past his conversion up to the time where Paul (Saul) and Barnabas are on their first missionary journey. On the island of Cyprus, before explaining Paul’s interaction with a magician, Luke writes, “But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said...” (Acts 13:9). After that, Luke uses Paul’s Roman name exclusively except when quoting Paul’s description of his conversion (Acts 22:7, 13; 26:14).

Appearance

We’ve all heard the adage, “You can’t tell a book by its cover.” That doesn’t change the fact that we often form impressions about people by visual cues. Almost subconsciously, we note how people look. We consider their dress, mannerisms, and behaviors, and make assumptions about the person that might be born out through further interactions or modified. Either way, first impressions are important.

One of the judges before whom I have spent a good bit of time refers to people who get “sentencing haircuts.” He explained that almost every time, whenever a person appears before him for sentencing (the hearing where the judge assesses what sentence a criminal will get), the person has a brand-new haircut, looking clean and good. It is common for lawyers to “clean up” their clients because looks matter.

I can’t really determine what Paul looked like. Some might think based on his letters and influence that he was a huge fellow, overpowering in his demeanor and able to wow and impress folks. I don’t think that assessment is right, however. His letters intimate that he wasn’t overpowering and that his enemies used that to trumpet their own credibility over Paul’s.⁶

Paul’s message had power *in spite* of his appearance. Our best assessment of Paul’s appearance comes from outside the Bible. Our earliest non-Biblical writing on Paul comes from the later part of the first century (some scholars date it in the second century), in a book titled the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. The book received wide circulation in the Eastern Church.

⁶ For example, in 1 Corinthians 3:2, Paul spoke of his initial time with the fledgling church as one where his presence was “in weakness and in fear and much trembling.” In his second letter to that church, Paul would call himself a “jar of clay” seeking to proclaim Jesus as Lord rather than himself (2 Cor. 4:5,7). He also spoke of his physical life as a “burden” of this earthly “tent” (2 Cor. 5:1-4). Later in that chapter he compared himself to those who have cause to boast about their appearance.

While detailing the interactions of Paul with a virgin named Thecla, the book contains our oldest description of Paul. Paul is described in chapter 1, verse 7 as,

a man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting, and he had large eyes and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long, and he was full of grace and mercy; at one time he seemed like a man, and at another time he seemed like an angel.

Scholars believe the account in the Acts of Paul and Thecla is not historically valid. It is seen as an attempt to pass off a wonderful story about Paul as if it were true and written by Paul himself.⁷ That makes one question the narrative, but since the story was likely written at a time when people were still alive who had known Paul, one figures the physical description is fairly accurate. If you wish to sell a story, your chances are greatly diminished if you give the wrong physical data about the man you write up!

One might think that with all the success Paul had on the mission field, that he was someone that drew people in with his magnetism and physical beauty. Ultimately as a lawyer, however, I safely assume that Paul was not an overly impressive physical specimen, but one whose strength and believability stemmed from his convictions, not his debonair appearance.

Family history, childhood, and education

One summer I taught a law school class on jury selection. In the class, I taught the prospective lawyers not only the rules and mechanics associated with jury selection, but also a bit of the art. Selecting a jury involves trying to determine what jurors might be favorably disposed toward your client and case, and what jurors carry a deep-seated bias that would preclude them from being fair and impartial.

One day, I brought in one of my mentors, Ernest, to speak to the class. Ernest came by his name honestly. His genuineness was never doubted by anyone who spent much time with him. That was one feature that made him a strong lawyer. Another was his perspective on jury selection (“voir dire” is the proper legal term).

⁷ The early church leader (and lawyer) Tertullian wrote around 190AD that the work was falsely named as “Acts of Paul,” and that “the presbyter who compiled that document, thinking to add on his own to Paul’s reputation, was found out, and though he professed he had done it for love of Paul, was deposed from his position.” *De Baptismo Liber 17* (Evans’ translation 1964).

Ernest explained his key to voir dire. “I want to know about people’s past. I want to know the road they’ve walked. If I can figure out the road people have walked in their lives to get to the present, I can reasonably predict what they will do and where they will go in the future.

Personal history is very important to trial lawyers. It would be a major focus in my initial interview with Paul/Saul. I can draw a good bit of the information I would get in an initial interview by looking closely at the the basic storyline given in Acts 21-23, considered in the first chapter. Here there are notable comments about Paul’s personal life.

In Acts 21:37, when Paul said to the Roman tribune, “May I say something to you?” The tribune was startled to hear Paul speak to him in Greek. He asked Paul, about his Greek and in Paul’s reply we learn of his past. Paul said, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city.”

After Paul got permission from the tribune to address the Jewish masses that were assaulting Paul before the tribune interrupted by arresting Paul, Paul shifted from Greek to Hebrew (or Aramaic) as he addressed the Jews. Paul told them, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel...” (Acts 22:3).

Paul then recounted his conversion experience, adding that God had sent Paul to share the news of Jesus as Messiah to the Gentiles. At this point, the crowd grew mad with anger and the tribune ordered his men to examine Paul under torture (flogging with whips).

Paul stopped the torture before it began by telling the soldiers he was a Roman citizen. (That made the torture illegal.) The Tribune had come and asked Paul about Paul’s citizenship when we read Paul’s claim, “I am a citizen by birth.” Later, the tribune set Paul before the Chief Priest and ruling council of the Jews. During Paul’s discussions with the council, we read Paul explaining, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6), giving us a bit of insight into Paul’s parents. A bit later, the council plots to ambush Paul and the attempt is thwarted because “the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush” (Acts 23:16).

Sometime later, as Paul appeals through the Roman judicial system he makes an appearance before King Agrippa in Caesarea. Paul begins his defense telling Agrippa, “My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews” (Acts 26:4). It is during this speech to Agrippa that Paul confesses, “I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them” (Acts 26:10).

Paul also gives us some insight into his upbringing in his letter to the church at Philippi. In Phil. 3:5-6, Paul writes that he was, “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.”

Implications

From these passages, one can learn a great deal about Paul’s early life. One learns that:

- Paul was born a Roman citizen (which tells us Paul’s father was also a Roman citizen);
- Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia (Paul was a citizen of Tarsus as well as a Roman citizen);
- Paul’s father was a devout Jew (Pharisee);
- Paul was not an only child, having at least one sister (and through her a nephew);
- Paul spoke Greek fluently as well as Hebrew/Aramaic and at least a good measure of Latin;
- Paul moved to Jerusalem at some point and continued his studies under Rabbi Gamaliel;
- Paul’s family kept their heritage and could trace their lineage to the tribe of Benjamin throughout the centuries, even through the captivities and dispersion; and,
- Paul cast his vote against saints of the church; possibly indicating Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin.

As I lawyer, I would set my assistants to work on “scrubbing” these facts to see what is fairly learned from other historical sources.

The historical insights

Tarsus If I sent someone to research Tarsus, “no obscure city,” it would produce some useful information. Tarsus was an ancient city, already several thousand years old at the time Paul was born. It was located near what is now the southeast coast of Turkey. The town was inland ten miles from the coast on the Cydnus River, and the river formed a lake, which served as a naval station. Although historically, Jewish people in Israel were not typically seafarers, Paul was from an area where the sea was seen as a natural resource for transportation and commerce.

Tarsus had a storied past. It had seen the Assyrian King Shalmaneser in the 800’s B.C. as well as King Sennacherib in the 600’s B.C. Alexander the Great had saved the city from

burning in 333 B.C. Julius Caesar spent time in Tarsus, and it was Tarsus where Cleopatra, dressed as Aphrodite, sailed in to meet Marc Antony in 41 B.C.

Tarsus was a city of learning and culture. Strabo (64/63 B.C. – 24 A.D.), a Roman writer of geography during the early years of Paul’s life recorded that, “The people of Tarsus have devoted themselves so eagerly, not only to philosophy, but also to the whole round of education in general, that they have surpassed Athens, Alexandria, or any other place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures of philosophers.”⁸

New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce (1910-1990) called Tarsus a “university city,”⁹ noting that Tarsus famously exported scholars into the Mediterranean world.¹⁰ As a cultural and educated city, Tarsus had an early influence on Paul such that one is not surprised that Paul was able to converse with the educated philosophers of Athens. No doubt even the most important Greek philosophers in Athens would have respected Paul’s educational roots in Tarsus. Paul’s “resume” would make him worthy of any scholar’s listening. Paul could quote Greek poets from memory and understood the implications of the latest Greek philosophies.¹¹

Paul could easily come by this knowledge as well as great dexterity with the Greek language in Tarsus. As Strabo noted, “the city of Tarsus has all kinds of schools of rhetoric; and in general it not only has a flourishing population but also is most powerful.”¹² Tarsus was the perfect place for one who was to grow up and take the gospel to a Greek world.¹³

⁸ Strabo, *Geography*, 14.5.13 (Loeb Classical Library, H.L. Jones transl.).

⁹ F. F. Bruce, *Paul – Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans 1977) at 35.

¹⁰ Strabo is Bruce’s source as well. Strabo wrote that in Tarsus “the men who are fond of learning are all natives, and foreigners are not inclined to sojourn there; neither do these natives stay there, but they complete their education abroad, and but few go back home.” *Geography* at 14.5.13.

¹¹ See Acts 17:16-34.

¹² *Geography* at 14.5.13.

¹³ Some scholars argue that Paul moved from Tarsus to Jerusalem in infancy, or at such an early age, that any Tarsian influence on Paul is unlikely. See e.g., W. C. van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem, The City of Paul’s Youth*, (Epworth Press 1962). We find these arguments unpersuasive in light of the exegesis other scholars offer of the Acts passages noted above as well as the clear non-Jerusalem influences shown in Paul’s life.

Knowing Tarsus as a philosophy and rhetoric center with a strong influence on Paul (Paul also spent time there after his conversion – Acts 11:25-26) puts emphasis behind Paul’s comments on philosophy and rhetoric. In one of Paul’s letters to the church he started in Corinth, Paul wrote,

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech [*rhetoric*] or wisdom [*philosophy*]. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Paul knew the power of rhetoric and philosophy. He also knew something he considered much stronger.

Citizenship Paul was a citizen of Tarsus as well as a Roman citizen. These two citizenships came about through different manners. The cost for Tarsus citizenship was fixed at 500 drachmae according to Dio Chrysostom, a first century Greek writer/orator from nearby Bithynia (now Northwestern Turkey).¹⁴ This was no small amount, and scholars generally consider that Paul must have come from a family of some wealth.¹⁵

As for Paul’s Roman citizenship, Paul explained he was born a citizen. This means Paul’s father was a Roman citizen. (When Roman citizens had children, those children were automatically Roman citizens.) Citizenship would pass by birth. There were several other ways to get citizenship, including purchase, reward by the emperor, or certain completions of military service.¹⁶

Roman citizenship offered many privileges in Paul’s day.¹⁷ Roman citizens were entitled to fair public trials, while non-citizens were not. Roman citizens were also immune from certain types of punishment (including crucifixion and flogging), and were entitled to appeal any punishment or conviction straight to Caesar.

¹⁴ Dio Chrysostom Oration 34.23 (Loeb Classical Library No. 358).

¹⁵ See Bruce at 36.

¹⁶ John McRay, *Paul, His Life and Teaching* (Baker Book House 2003) at 24.

¹⁷ For a full discussion of these privileges and duties see J. A. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome, 90 B.C.-A.D. 212* (Cornell Univ. Press 1967) pgs 72-74, 250ff.

Interviewing Paul, I would learn that Paul's Roman citizenship served him well in his ministry. The New Testament records three times when Paul invoked his rights as a Roman citizen. Acts 16 reports Paul's imprisonment with Silas in Philippi, after receiving beatings at the hands of the local magistrates.¹⁸ Around midnight, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing, an earthquake shook open the jail, offering Paul and the others freedom. The jailer, who no doubt should not have been sleeping without a watch over the prisoners, awoke to the discovery of open doors. Fearing the prisoners had fled, and knowing his own life would be forfeited, the jailer started to kill himself. Paul shouted for the jailer to stop, telling him no one had fled. This led to the jailer's conversion along with that of his household.

The next day, the magistrates ordered Paul's release, but Paul refused to leave the cell! Paul said, "They [the magistrates] have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out" (Acts 16:37). The magistrates were fearful over their deeds and came to Paul with apologies, giving Paul a personal escort out of town.

The second time Acts speaks of Paul invoking his Roman citizenship came in Jerusalem during the arrest discussed in chapter one. After Paul's arrest, the soldiers were ordered to torture and question Paul, Luke records,

But when they had stretched him [Paul] out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"

The third instance occurred about two years later. Luke gives an account of Paul before the rulers Festus and Agrippa. Festus had intended to send Paul back to Jerusalem where some of the Jews were waiting to kill him. Instead of returning, Paul declares, "I appeal to Caesar!" With that automatic right of appeal, Paul was shipped off to Rome, taking the gospel with him.

Pharisee

Paul repeatedly says that he was a Pharisee. While Paul speaks of his past in Acts 26:5 saying he "lived as a Pharisee," Paul also uses the *present tense* in Acts 23:6 saying, "***I am*** a Pharisee." Notably Paul was not a first-generation Pharisee because he also called himself a Pharisee of Pharisees, specifying his lineage in that sect of Judaism.

¹⁸ Paul could have invoked his citizenship and prevented the beatings, but for reasons we do not know, Paul chose not to.

Paul knew his Pharisaic heritage was significant in the ears of his Jewish listeners. Why? This is important to Paul, and I would immediately send someone to research Pharisees to see what Paul meant when he made such a claim. This investigation would reveal a lot. Josephus explained that the Pharisees were one of the main powerful sects within Judaism in the first century. According to Josephus, Pharisees had been influential for two centuries before Paul and Christ as they sought to ensure the Jewish way of life against external and internal forces.¹⁹ Josephus noted that after the death of Herod (4BC), the Pharisees were scheming for power in Herod's replacement. Josephus writes,

for there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God.²⁰

This perception of the Pharisees is consistent with what we read in the gospel accounts. The Pharisees were concerned that Jesus ate with the unholy (Mt. 9:11; Mk 2:16; Lk 5:30); the Pharisees were consistent with fasting (Mt. 9:14; Mk 2:18; Lk 5:33); the Pharisees took offense at indications they were less than appropriately holy (Mt 15:11-13); the Pharisees sought to challenge Jesus on issues of the law and custom (Mt. 19:3; Mk 2:24; 10:2; Lk 6:2); the Pharisees tithed down to the very herbs they harvested (Mt 23:23; Lk 11:42); by all outward appearances, the Pharisees seemed pure and holy (Mt. 23:27); and they would always wash their hands before eating (Mk 7:3, 5).

This effort to ensure the Jewish law and way of life among the Pharisees also led to tension between some members and Jesus. Jesus was concerned with the tendency of some Pharisees to elevate the law and its finer points over people. For example, Jesus points out to the Pharisees who were upset over his disciples plucking grain to eat on a Sabbath that, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:23-28).

Jesus was also concerned that some Pharisees had a tendency to externalize their religion into the list of do's and don'ts that forgot the need to purify and live holy in the heart. In Matthew, we read Jesus saying:

You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Mt 23:26-28).

¹⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 13 §288-298.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 17 §41.

Yet, not all interactions with the Pharisees were negative in the gospels. Some Pharisees would have Jesus over for dinner (Lk 7:36; 11:37; 14:1; 17:36); and while some plotted to kill Jesus (Mt 12:14; Mk 3:6; Jn. 7:32), other Pharisees warned Jesus about death threats (Lk 13:31). It was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, John tells us, that came to Jesus by night and got to hear the wonderful words of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” This same Pharisee Nicodemus brought expensive treatments for the body of Christ following the crucifixion (Jn 19:39).²¹

Josephus also sets out basic beliefs of the Pharisees. According to Josephus, Pharisees believed in life after death and a resurrection for reward and punishment. Josephus contrasted this belief with that of the Sadducees who did not believe in such a resurrection with corresponding rewards/punishments.²² Hand in hand with their belief in the afterlife, Pharisees firmly believed in the world of hierarchy among demons and angels, in contrast to the Sadducees who held no such beliefs. Pharisees also were believers in God’s divine provision (we might use the term “predestination”) that somehow combined with man’s free will while the Sadducees emphasized the free will of man and human responsibility.²³

This is consistent with what scripture relates about the Pharisees, at least as far as believing in the resurrection of the dead and the hierarchy of demons. The Pharisees accused Jesus as working under “Beelzebub, the prince of demons” when casting out demons (Mt. 12:24). In the last chapter I referenced Paul using the Pharisees’ views on the resurrection to incite a shouting match over the issue between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. As Luke told the story:

Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of

²¹ In Acts 15:5, we read that in the Jerusalem conference, some of the Pharisees in the church believed that Gentiles needed to first convert to Judaism before becoming Christians. “But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.’”

²² Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.8.14, “the Pharisees ... say that all souls are incorruptible; but that the souls of good men are only removed into other bodies, -- but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees ... take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades.” (Whitson translation).

²³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13.5.9, “Now for the Pharisees, they say that some actions, but not all, are the work of fate, and some of them are in our own power, and that they are liable to fate, but are not caused by fate... And for the Sadducees, they take away fate, and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose that all our actions are in our power, so that we ourselves are the cause of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly.” (Whitson translation).

Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. (Acts 23:5-8)

We see this confirmed when we probe the rabbinic sources on Pharisees.²⁴ In the "Babylonian Talmud" (a discussion of legal debates on the law finally put into final form around 700 A.D. but dating back several centuries before), we read of seven types of Pharisees, almost all of which are not praiseworthy! Only the Pharisees who study the law out of love, out of fear, or simply because it is the law of God are praiseworthy.²⁵

In Pharisees, as in other religious groups, we have a wide variety of people. But, we find people who are convinced that God is holy, that God is to be obeyed, that a resurrection follows death, that reward and punishment are found in the resurrection, that angels and demons are working on earth in the lives of humanity, and that the hand of God is active in protecting and providing for people. The variations come from motives and finer points of "doctrine." No doubt many Pharisees acted out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, envy, or even rivalry. Yet, those same motives Paul found among those carrying the Christian gospel message, with no Pharisaic affiliation whatsoever (Phil. 1:15-17). I dare say, we could probably find it in the midst of most Christian groups even today.

So we see Paul, who was raised a Pharisee, but who has no trouble calling himself a Pharisee deep into his years as a Christian. Paul carried the core Pharisaic beliefs. He not only believed in the resurrection for humanity, but he also knew he had witnessed a resurrected Lord. Paul says without that resurrection, Christians "are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Gamaliel

From Acts 22:1-3, it is clear that Paul studied under one named Gamaliel. Paul says this with clear pride, expecting it to have an impact on the listeners. This would be important to Paul's defense, and I would send a researcher or two to investigate who Gamaliel was,

²⁴ The rabbinic literature about the Pharisees is subject to significant scholarly debate. Many of the references to 1st century Jewish laws and customs some scholars deem appropriately understood as that of the Pharisees. Others dispute these conclusions. There are a few times, however, when early Jewish writings actually reference the Pharisees by name. The dates of these entries are also subject to heated debate.

²⁵ See the Babylonian Talmud, *Sotah* 3:4. There are seven types of Pharisees: One who does the right thing for the wrong reason; one who walks with exaggerated humility; one who does right to his own hurt; one who does right to the hurt of others; one who does right out of duty; one who does right out of love; and one who does right out of fear.

and what his students might have learned from him. It would not be hard to gather a lot of information about Gamaliel. Both the Bible and ancient Jewish non-Biblical writings give a lot of information about Gamaliel.

To more fully understand Gamaliel, it is helpful to understand his heritage. Shortly before Gamaliel, during the turn of the era from BCE/BC to CE/AD, there were two prominent rabbinic schools of thought in Jerusalem. One was that of Rabbi Shammai; the other was Rabbi Hillel's. These two rabbis debated many different positions which we can still read today. Not only were these two scholars pinnacle figures in interpreting the law, but their students became famous as well.

Shammai was the more strict of the two; Hillel the more accommodating. Jewish writings kept an example of the difference in approach to conversion between Shammai and Hillel. In the Babylonian Talmud,²⁶ we read of "a gentile who came before Shammai." The gentile says he will convert to Judaism if Shammai can teach him the whole law while the gentile stands on one foot. Shammai drives the gentile off with a stick. The gentile then goes to Hillel with the same offer. Hillel tells the gentile, "What is hateful to you, to your fellow don't do." Then, Hillel adds, "That's the entirety of the Torah; everything else is elaboration. So go, study."²⁷

Paul's mentor and teacher Gamaliel was Hillel's grandson²⁸ and, after Gamaliel's father, became the head of Hillel's school. Gamaliel, like his father and like Hillel his grandfather, carried the honorific title from Jewish rabbis of "the Elder." A successor of Hillel, and head of his school was Gamaliel, at whose feet Paul studied. Like Paul, Gamaliel was a devout Pharisee, and one can readily see the teachings of Hillel in the approaches of Gamaliel.

Like Hillel, Gamaliel brought a more pragmatic and moderate view towards life and faithful practice than that of Shammai. Some examples of Hillel's "laxity" are found in teachings on the Sabbath. Since the law allowed an ox to be taken out of the ditch on the Sabbath, Hillel believed that one could eat an egg that a chicken laid on the Sabbath.

Gamaliel took a similar pragmatic approach as recorded in Acts 5. Peter and the apostles were called before the High Priest and council for questioning. The reaction of the

²⁶ The Jews kept oral traditions and commentaries for decades and centuries before finally reducing them to writing. The Babylonian Talmud was such a written product. Scholars debate the final dates of the Babylonian Talmud, but it was finished in different sections starting around 200 A.D. and finished likely by 500 A.D.

²⁷ b. Shabbat, Chapter 2, I.12 (Hendrickson Publishers 2005) Neusner translation.

²⁸ *Babylonian Talmud*, b. Shabbat, Chapter 15:1, II.16G.

council and priests was murderous rage. But Gamaliel entered the picture with words of practical advice. As Luke records it, Gamaliel says,

take care what you are about to do with these men...keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” (Acts 5:33-39)

The importance of Gamaliel’s views on Paul becomes apparent from looking at Gamaliel’s teaching. McRay perceives an example of Gamaliel’s influence on Paul in the issue of divorce in mixed marriages. McRay writes,

Gamaliel, was a representative of the Hillel point of view, and Paul’s approach to Jewish law seems to have been the same. In dealing with the question of divorce among believers, Paul could draw on Jesus’ teaching to Jews, and so he wrote: Now this says the Lord, not I (see 1 Cor. 7:10). But in dealing with mixed marriages, those in which one of the partners had converted to Christianity, Paul could only say, as Gamaliel or Hillel would have said: ‘To the rest I say, not the Lord...’ (1 Cor. 7:12). Jesus never taught on the subject, since marriage outside the Jewish religion was not permitted (Ezra 10:11; Neh. 13:25). Paul, facing a new situation, the inclusion of the Gentiles in the new faith, which the law did not envision, had to make the necessary adjustments to embrace the new circumstances.²⁹

Gamaliel’s influence is not surprising because Gamaliel stressed the importance of the teacher-student relationship.³⁰

Alan Segal, a Jew who has written on Paul, notes that Paul’s placement in the school of Hillel/Gamaliel put him in a Pharisaic branch that was supportive of and even seeking Gentile conversion into Judaism.³¹ This made it an easy step for Paul to understand his own mission to fulfill the words of Jesus,

And he [Jesus] told me, “I will send you far away to the nations/gentiles” (Acts 22:21).

²⁹ John McRay, *Paul, His Life and Teaching* (Baker Academic 2003) at 45.

³⁰ *Babylonian Talmud*, ‘Abot R. Nat. A.40; ‘Abot 1:16; Pe’ra 2:6; ‘Or. 2:12; Yebam. 16:7.

³¹ Alan Segal, *Paul the Convert, the Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (Yale 1990) at 96-105.

Apparently, the school of Shammai was in power and prominence during the ministry of Jesus and subsequent years of Paul's ministry. Hillel's school was in the minority.³² This explains not only the violent opposition Paul faced, but also some of the more intense run-ins the Pharisees had with Jesus and the apostles during Christ's ministry years.

Before leaving our investigation of Gamaliel, there are three other facts that are relevant in my hypothetical legal work for Paul. Each of these facts bear on Paul's work, and how he was "trained" for it, even before he changed his mind on whether Jesus was the Messiah.

First, Gamaliel reached out to the Jews beyond the area of Jerusalem. In Jewish writings one repeatedly sees Gamaliel reaching out to Jewish people living in the "diaspora" or the many communities outside of mainstream Israel. Gamaliel ministered to these people through their local synagogues, something Paul would do as well.³³

Second, Gamaliel was tolerant of Gentiles, much as Hillel sought to make Gentile conversion into Judaism an easy matter.³⁴

Finally, "Gamaliel stood almost alone in his love for the Greek language. It was studied in his 'school' and he even declared it the only language into which the Torah [the Old Testament Law] could be perfectly translated."³⁵

To be continued....

³² See discussion and footnotes of W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (S.P.C.K. 1955) at 9.

³³ *Babylonian Talmud*, y. *Ma'as.* 5:4 [56c]; *Sanh.* 11b.

³⁴ *Babylonian Talmud*, t. *B. Qam.* 9:30; y. *'Abod. Zar.* 1:9; *Sifre to Deut.* 38; *Ber.* 27a.

³⁵ *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, (Eerdmans 2000), "Gamaliel" with citations to the *Babylonian Talmud* at *Soṭa* 49b; cf. *Gen. Rab.* 36:8; *Deut. Rab.* 1:1; *Meg.* 1:8.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”* (Phil. 2:13).

Paul had a phenomenal resume for his mission! Paul was able to go to synagogues throughout the Greek/Roman world and attend services as a man who had studied under the great Gamaliel. Paul had impeccable rabbinical credentials! Not surprisingly, every synagogue offered Paul a chance to teach. Then Paul, the resurrection believing Pharisee, could speak of the resurrected Christ! We can find many layers of how God’s Spirit used Paul and worked through Paul. That same Spirit is at work in us! We are remiss if we fail to see how God sculpts each of us uniquely for his purposes and work. Too many of us convince ourselves that God cannot use us, either because of lousy past choices, inadequate training, addictions, or whatever. Truly there is nothing in our pasts, sin and all, that God will not use in powerful ways to bless others and glorify Him.

2. *“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy”* (Lev. 19:2).

It is good to seek holiness before God. It is right to have zeal about how we live our lives, but we must never forget that our motive is one of love (1 Jn 5:3 “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments”) growing out of God’s love for us. (1 Jn 4:19 “We love because he first loved us.”). Paul never left his Pharisaic concern for holiness; he just found its place in God’s order of things. Every one of Paul’s letters to churches starts with a section on doctrine and teaching, followed by a section on holiness and moral living!

3. *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world”* (1 Jn. 4:1).

As we sit before teachers, we should remember to measure what we hear with what God reveals through his word. We should never believe that simply because one claims to be a Christian teacher, her or his teachings are right before God. It is appropriate to keep what is right, but cast off what is not. Remember the Bereans! Luke writes, “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).