

Paul, a Citizen of Three Worlds

JEW

Diaspora Jew, born and raised in Tarsus

Tribe of Benjamin

Trained as a youth by local Pharasaic rabbis

Trained later in Jerusalem at the rabbinical school of Gamaliel

Learned Hebrew as a Pharisee

Worked for the inner circle of the Sanhedrin

ROMAN

Born a Roman citizen; did not have to purchase his citizenship

Paulus is a Roman name

Possibly spoke Latin to the citizens in Corinth and elsewhere

Used Roman imagery in his metaphors (citizenship, family relations, etc.)

GREEK

Read the Old Testament in the Greek Septuagint

Spoke Greek

Classical education in Greek rhetoric, Greek philosophy

Most of the Pauline Epistles follow Greek rhetorical argumentation and figurative patterns

Versed in Greek philosophical discourse (preached in Athens)

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Explanation

Paul's multicultural background provided him with training and experience that uniquely prepared him to be called of God as the apostle to the gentiles. From a prominent and no doubt wealthy family of Tarsus, the major metropolitan center of southeastern Anatolia, Paul received the advantages not only of education, both Jewish and Hellenistic, but also the privilege of prized Roman citizenship.

Although a Jew of the Diaspora and the son of a Pharisee, Paul's economically advantageous background afforded him the opportunity to undertake advanced studies in Judaism under the premier rabbi of the age, Gamaliel, in Jerusalem. Paul was thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament, the Jewish law, and Jewish customs.

Paul's writings also reveal his superb training in Greek, the language of his home city, and also in Greek rhetoric and philosophy. He probably learned these subjects in Greek schools as he was growing up. Tarsus was noted for its educational institutions.

In the eastern Mediterranean less than one percent of the population enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizenship. Thus, the important place of Paul's family in Tarsus is confirmed by their possession of the rare status of *Civis Romanus*.

By birth and religious training Paul was a Jew; by his birth in Tarsus and educational training Paul was a Greek; and by his birth in a high-ranking provincial family of citizen status, Paul was a Roman. This gave him the rare and powerful ability to move in and out of political and social circles throughout the world of his day.

References

Richard Wallace and Wynne Williams, *The Three Worlds of Paul of Tarsus* (London: Routledge, 1998).

J. Phillip Schaelling, "Paul," *EM*, 3:1068–70.