

Evidences of Paul's Wealthy Background

His father was a Roman citizen, a very rare privilege at this time.

His father was a businessman, making tents, awnings, sails, and other canvas or leather items.

His homeland was Tarsus, capital of the province of Cilicia and "no mean city" (Acts 21:39).

Tarsus was famous for its schools of philosophy and literature.

Besides being schooled in Tarsus, Paul was sent to be educated in Jerusalem.

He was tutored by Gamaliel, the best Jewish teacher money could buy.

The Sanhedrin knew Paul as a young man and entrusted him to arrest Christians.

Peter and the fishermen apostles found Paul hard to understand and to work with.

He could afford to travel extensively with companions throughout his life.

He had access to books and written materials.

Paul knew and could quote scriptures both in Hebrew and Greek.

He had the means to hire a scribe and to write copious, erudite letters.

His vocabulary and language were high class.

Paul could comfortably discuss and use the prevailing philosophies of the day.

He was humiliated when he had to work with his hands at his family's craft.

He knew how to handle and transmit money and organize and direct churches.

He stayed 18 months at Corinth, capital of Achaia, and 3 years at Ephesus, capital of Asia.

He welcomed opportunities to speak with rulers, such as Sergius Paulus in Paphos.

He converted wealthy people, such as Erastus in Corinth.

Paul knew his way around successfully in Jewish, Greek, and Roman courts.

He boldly entered the temple of Jerusalem with one of his gentile converts.

Paul was kept in special custody by Felix and Festus for a couple of years in Caesarea.

Felix detained Paul, hoping to extract a bribe from him (Acts 24:26).

When Paul arrived at Rome, he could afford to purchase a large house.

He hoped to spread the gospel to all the known world by converting the emperor himself.

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Explanation

How rich was Paul? Although Acts 18:3 styles him as a “tentmaker,” many factors strongly indicate that Paul was no ordinary craftsman. Indeed, he may have come from a very wealthy and privileged background. This makes the conversion of Paul all the more impressive. He not only renounced his Jewish background and a promising future among the leading men of Jerusalem, but he also left or dedicated everything he possessed to establish a kingdom greater than the Roman Empire. Although little is known for certain about Paul's childhood and upbringing, Paul's rare citizenship, his extensive education, cool savvy, unflinching boldness, aristocratic behavior, and unparalleled success all point in the same direction: It would appear that Paul came from no low- or middle-class background. He was prepared in no ordinary way. He was sent on no ordinary mission.

Reference

Robert J. Matthews, “Saul of Tarsus: Chosen for a Special Need,” *Ensign*, September 1987, 60–63.