

A Man of Three Worlds
Message 01 in the series, "Faith Under Fire"

A. Who was Saul/Paul?

1. A Jew by birth.

"I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law." Philippians 3:5 (NLT)

"...I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs....". Acts 22:3 (NLT)

2. A Greek by education and language.

"As Paul was about to be taken inside, he said to the commander, 'May I have a word with you?' 'Do you know Greek?' the commander asked, surprised. 'Aren't you the Egyptian who led a rebellion some time ago and took 4,000 members of the Assassins out into the desert?' 'No,' Paul replied, 'I am a Jew and a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, which is an important city. Please, let me talk to these people.'" Acts 21:37-39 (NLT)

Note: Tarsus was considered one of the intellectual capitals of the Roman world.

Alongside Athens and Alexandria, it was renowned for its schools of rhetoric, philosophy, and literature, attracting some of the brightest minds of the day.

Note: Growing up in Tarsus almost certainly exposed him to:

- Greek language
- Greek rhetoric (public speaking)
- Stoic philosophy
- Poetry and literature
- Debate and persuasion

3. A Roman citizen at birth with legal privileges.

"When they tied Paul down to lash him, Paul said to the officer standing there, 'Is it legal for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't even been tried?' When the officer heard this, he went to the commander and asked, 'What are you doing? This man is a Roman citizen!' So the commander went over and asked Paul, 'Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?' 'Yes, I certainly am,' Paul replied. 'I am, too,' the commander muttered, 'and it cost me plenty!' Paul answered, 'But I am a citizen by birth!' The soldiers who were about to interrogate Paul quickly withdrew when they heard he was a Roman citizen, and the commander was frightened because he had ordered him bound and whipped." Acts 22:25-29 (NLT)

Note: Most of the time, God's preparation is already underway before we even know what He's preparing us for.

"But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace. Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles." Galatians 1:15-16 (NLT)

"Your Majesty!" David said, 'I take care of my father's sheep. Any time a lion or a bear carries off a lamb, I go after it, attack it, and rescue the lamb. And if the lion or bear turns on me, I grab it by the throat and beat it to death. I have killed lions and bears, and I will do the same to this heathen Philistine, who has defied the army of the living God. The LORD has saved me from lions and bears; he will save me from this Philistine.'" 1 Samuel 17:34-37 (GNTD)

4. Zealous by nature!

“The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen’s accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand. And he told them, ‘Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand!’ Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ He fell to his knees, shouting, ‘Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!’ And with that, he died. Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.”

Acts 7:54-60; 8:1 (NLT)

“In the meantime Saul kept up his violent threats of murder against the followers of the Lord. He went to the High Priest and asked for letters of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he should find there any followers of the Way of the Lord, he would be able to arrest them, both men and women, and bring them back to Jerusalem.” Acts 9:1-2 (NLT)

“You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion—how I violently persecuted God’s church and tried to destroy it. I was far ahead of my fellow Jews in my zeal for the traditions of my ancestors.” Galatians 1:13-14 (NLT)

“I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church...” Philippians 3:6 (NLT)

Note: Paul took his misdirected zeal and surrendered it to God — and God used it to change the world.

“...I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace.” 1 Corinthians 15:10 (NLT)

“But if anyone dares to boast about something—I am talking like a fool—I will be just as daring. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they Christ’s servants? I sound like a madman—but I am a better servant than they are! I have worked much harder, I have been in prison more times, I have been whipped much more, and I have been near death more often. Five times I was given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks, and once I spent twenty-four hours in the water. In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from my own people and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. There has been work and toil; often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty; I have often been without enough food, shelter, or clothing. And not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches. When someone is weak, then I feel weak too; when someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress. If I must boast, I will boast about things that show how weak I am.”

2 Corinthians 11:21-30 (GNT)

Note: Some of us have poured tremendous passion into the wrong things — wrong relationships, wrong pursuits, wrong priorities. Now that Jesus has transformed you, bring that same intensity to obeying Him and doing His work.