

INTRODUCTION SAUL OF TARSUS

Saul was born into a Jewish family who lived in Tarsus, a historical city in south-central Turkey, 20 km inland from the Mediterranean Sea. With a history going back over 2,000 years, Tarsus has long been an important stop for traders, a focal point of many civilizations including the Roman Empire, when Tarsus was capital of the province of Cilicia.



Map 1. Shows the location of Tarsus and Jerusalem

Paul's father was, uniquely, a Roman citizen. This allowed Paul certain privileges and lays the groundwork later for his teaching here on earth and why he was entitled to some exceptions not given to other Jews. Saul was proud to be a Pharisee. The Pharisees were often the most vocal and influential religious society of Judaism of the three major ones: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. He had studied under a famous Jewish teacher in Jerusalem with the name Gamaliel. Saul was convinced that he must use all his energies to wipe out the new teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ by threatening and murdering His followers. The first time we read about Saul in the Bible is in Acts 7:58 where witnesses of the stoning of Stephen laid aside their robes at his feet. He was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. And in Acts 8:3 we read that Saul began destroying the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, putting them in prison.