

Apostle Paul

Paul wrote, "Timothy my fellow worker greets you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater my kinsmen" (Romans 16:21).

Lucius, Jason and Sosipater were all related to Apostle Paul. When Paul dictated the Book of Romans to Tertius (Romans 16:22) he mentioned people he called kinsmen or relatives. Those people could have been his parents, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents or other relatives. People who were not Paul's relations were called fellow servants, saints, brothers, sisters, faithful servants or beloved, but to distinguish between other Christians and his own family, Paul referred to his family as kinsmen or relatives. 'Greet Andronicus and Junias my relatives' (Romans 16:7). 'Greet Herodion my kinsman' (Romans 16:11). 'Greet Rufus, the chosen in the Lord, his mother and mine' (Romans 16:13). This verse infers one of three things. (1) Paul is greeting his mother and the mother of Rufus. (2) Paul is greeting the mother of Rufus who has been like a mother to Paul. (3) Paul was greeting the woman who was the mother of Paul and Rufus. In Hebrew this verse reads, "Salute Rufus, chosen in the Messiah, the mother of him and of me." That last scenario means it was possible, Rufus was Paul's brother because they had the same mother.

If Rufus was Paul's brother, that puts Paul in an incredibly significant place during the crucifixion of Jesus. It also means Paul's other brother was Alexander. It was the father of Rufus and Alexander, Simon of Cyrene who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus. 'The Roman soldiers forced a man passing by coming in from the country, Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to go with them so he could carry Jesus' cross" (Mark 15:21). Paul was born in Tarsus, which was where southern Turkey is now. Simon of Cyrene was born in Cyrene, which was where northern Egypt is now but it is very possible Simon moved within the Roman Empire to Tarsus where Paul was born. Lucius, whom Paul said was his kinsman was also from Cyrene (Acts 13:1), linking closely both Simon and Lucius as being related, and Lucius was related to Paul. In those days people often took their names from the location where they were born or grew up. For example, Mary Magdalene was born in Magdala near Galilee but when she met Jesus she was living in Bethany with her sister Martha and brother Lazarus (John 11:1 & 2), but her name 'Magdalene' did not change. Paul was born in Tarsus, grew up in Jerusalem but remained, 'Saul or Paul of Tarsus' (Acts 9:11; 22:3).

Servants of God had been called disciples for hundreds of years. 'Wrap up the testimony. Seal the law among My disciples' (Isaiah 8:16). Disciples were first called Christians about 40AD. Alexander became a disciple soon after Jesus died (Acts 19:33). Rufus also became a disciple about the same time but Paul took much longer to accept Jesus. It seems he was one of the last of his family to accept Jesus as his Saviour. 'Greet Andronicus and Junias my relatives ... who are notable among the apostles, who were in Jesus before me' (Romans 16:7). Through all of his trials and imprisonments, he could rely on his blood family to be there for him most of the time. Although Paul made it clear who his family were, he never showed favouritism. He described other Christians as 'beloved', so he loved them as much as he obviously loved his blood family. We must not confuse this Godly Alexander, son of Simon with the man known as Alexander the coppersmith who was a blasphemer and who betrayed Paul (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 4:14).

Paul chose to remain unmarried so he could focus all his attention on serving the Lord, leading people to Jesus and increasing the Kingdom of God. He realised celibacy is a special gift from God. Paul wrote, "I wish all men were like me. However each man has his own gift from God, one of this kind and a gift of another kind. I say to the unmarried and to widows, it is good for them if they remain single as I am but if they do not have self-control, let them marry for it is better to

marry than to burn with lust ... I desire to have you free from cares. Those who are unmarried are concerned about the things of the Lord, how they may please the Lord but those who are married are concerned about the things of the world" (1 Corinthians 7:7 to 9; 32 & 33).

Paul was born about 10AD and was named Saul by his Jewish parents. Some time after he came to the Lord, he was called Paul which is a Greek name. 'Saul, who is also called Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 13:9). It was very common in those days for people to be known by two or even three names according to the languages spoken in Israel at that time which were Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Paul called himself a Hebrew Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin. Paul wrote, "I was circumcised on the eighth day from the house of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew speaker of Hebrew parents and regarding the law (Torah), a Pharisee" (Philippians 3:5).

What surprises most people is the fact Paul did not speak Greek and therefore could not have written his epistles in Greek. He was born into a Hebrew speaking family. Notice in the following text, Paul is asked by a Latin speaking Roman commanding officer if he spoke Greek but Paul said he was Jewish. 'As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he asked the commanding officer, "May I speak to you?" The commanding officer asked, "Do you know Greek?" Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city. I beg you, allow me to speak to the people." When the commanding officer gave Paul permission to speak, Paul, standing on the stairs, beckoned with his hand to the people. When there was a great silence he spoke to them in the Hebrew language saying, "Brothers and fathers, listen to the defence which I now make to you." When they heard Paul speaking to them in the Hebrew language they were even more quiet. He said, "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in Jerusalem ..." (Acts 21:37 to 40; 22:1 to 3).

Many preachers teach, Paul dictated all his letters but they are wrong. Only the Book of Romans was dictated by Paul to Tertius (Romans 16:22) and that would have been in Hebrew to the Hebrew speaking Jewish people living in Rome, but all of Paul's other epistles were written by Paul himself in Hebrew by his own hand. We know they were written in Hebrew because the nuances that are in the Hebrew language make no sense in Greek or any other language. Further to that, Paul constantly refers back to the Torah and Tenach (the Old Testament) which were written in Hebrew. Paul wrote, "This greeting is by me, Paul, with my own hand" (1 Corinthians 16:21). "See what large letters I write to you with my own hand" (Galatians 6:11). "The greeting of me, Paul, with my own hand" (Colossians 4:18). "The greeting of me, Paul, with my own hand, which is the sign in every letter. This is how I write" (2 Thessalonians 3:17). "I, Paul, write this with my own hand" (Philemon 1:19). All authors have their own unique style of writing and all of Paul's epistles and letters are similar in context and style.

"Five times from the Jews I received thirty-nine lashes with the whip. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I suffered shipwreck. I have been a night and a day in the open sea. I have travelled often in danger of rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own countrymen, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the desert, danger in the sea, danger among insincere brothers, in hard work and toil, going without sleep, in hunger and thirst, often going without enough food, in cold and nakedness" (2 Corinthians 11:24 to 27).

Paul suffered persecution, ill health and eye problems (Galatians 4:15), violence, cold, hunger, betrayal and three ship wrecks where it seems he was once way out in the open sea, yet not once did the Lord say these sufferings were because of sin. If Christians go through terrible sufferings in our modern world, they are immediately branded a sinner! Modern Christians need to change their opinion regarding suffering. All of the apostles accepted severe trials as something to rejoice about because they were suffering as Jesus suffered, being purified and

being made fit for the Kingdom of God. 'Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial that has come on you to test you as though a strange thing happened to you. Because you are partakers of Jesus' sufferings, rejoice ... If you are insulted for the name of Jesus, you are blessed because the Spirit of Glory and of God rests on you' (1 Peter 4:12 to 14). "I rejoice in my sufferings ..." (Colossians 1:24).

Paul had an amazing experience with the Holy Spirit when he was taken up to heaven for a short time (about 48AD). In his humility, Paul wrote in the third person so people would not idolise him. The revelations Paul received in the heavenly visit was the reason God humbled him with the thorn in the flesh to prevent Paul from becoming proud. 'I know a man in Jesus, fourteen years ago, whether he was in the body or out of the body I do not know, only God knows, a man who was taken up to the third heaven. I know that such a man ... was taken up into Paradise and heard revelations not lawful for anyone to utter. On behalf of that man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast except in my weaknesses. If I would desire to boast, I will not be foolish for I will speak the truth, but I refrain from boasting so nobody may think more of me than what He sees in me, or hears from me. Because of the extraordinary revelations I have received from God, so I would not become excessively proud there was given to me (from God) a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of the devil to torment me so I would not become conceited. I begged the Lord three times for it to depart from me but He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." I will gladly glory in my weakness so the power of the Lord may rest on me. I take pleasure in weaknesses, injuries, hardships, persecution and distresses endured for Jesus' sake, for when I am weak, then am I strong' (2 Corinthians 12:2 to 10).

Paul lived his life for God. Before he had his experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus he zealously murdered all the Jews he could, who believed in Jesus as their Saviour, believing he was doing God a service but he was ignorant of the Truth and knew only legalism (Acts 22:3). 'The devout Jews threw Stephen out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses placed their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul (about 33AD)' (Acts 7:58). 'Saul, still breathing threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so if he found any who were of The Way (as the early church was then called), whether men or women he might bring them bound to Jerusalem' (Acts 9:1 & 2).

Although Paul was zealous for God, he did not know God personally and had to ask, "Who are You Lord?" After Paul had his experience with Jesus (about 34AD) he just as zealously proclaimed the Gospel to as many people as possible, teaching multitudes about the blood and cross of Jesus. 'As Paul travelled and was close to Damascus, suddenly a light from the sky shone around him. He fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" Paul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The Lord said, "I am Jesus Whom you are persecuting. Get up and enter the city and you will be told what you must do." The men who travelled with Paul stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. The men led him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. He was without sight for three days and neither ate nor drank' (Acts 9:3 to 9). 'I persecuted The Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As the high priest and all the council of the elders testify, from whom also I received letters to the brothers and travelled to Damascus to bring them who were there to Jerusalem in bonds to be punished. As I made my journey and came close to Damascus about noon when suddenly there shone from the sky a great light around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" I asked, "Who are you, Lord?" He said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth Whom you persecute." Those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid but they did not understand the voice of Him who spoke to me. I said, "What

shall I do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Arise and go to Damascus. There you will be told about all things which are appointed for you to do." I could not see for the glory of that light and being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came to Damascus' (Acts 22:4 to 11). 'I thank Jesus Who enabled me, Jesus our Lord because He counted me faithful, appointing me to service although I was before (salvation) a blasphemer, a persecutor and insolent. However, I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief' (1 Timothy 1:12 & 13). There are not many people who are converted from religion to discipleship so dramatically. For thirty-three years Saul/Paul faithfully served Jesus no matter what the hardship from about 34 AD to 67 AD.

After his dramatic encounter with Jesus, Rabbi Saul's name (pronounced Sh'aul) was changed to Paul. Paul echoed the teachings of Jesus but used his own words. Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life yet these are the Scriptures testifying about Me" (John 5:39). Paul said, "Having obtained help from God, I stand this day testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would happen, how the Messiah must suffer and how by the resurrection of the dead He would be first to proclaim light both to these people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22 & 23).

Everything Paul preached came from devout Judaism. The breach between Judaism and the Messianic movement had already started before Paul met up with Jesus on the road to Damascus. The tensions had culminated in the death of Stephen and that incident brought persecution to the fore. Paul was a powerful force in the new Messianic Movement later called Christianity (Acts 11:26). The teachings of Paul were strongly Jewish. There was complete harmony between the laws of Moses, the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of Paul.

Apostle Peter was the first one who realised the epistles and letters written by Paul were holy writings and would be included with the Old Testament, Peter called the 'other' Scriptures. Peter warned those who would ignore Paul's writings, it would be to their own destruction. 'Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom God gave him as he did in all of his letters, speaking in them of these things. In those letters there are some things that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and spiritually unstable distort as they do to the other Scriptures to their own destruction' (2 Peter 3:15 & 16).

Paul was once saved from the mouth of a lion. The cruel and barbaric Romans made sport of watching hungry lions tear people to pieces before devouring them in the arenas. Paul wrote, "I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Timothy 4:17). Paul knew he would be better off with the Lord in heaven than to stay on earth but knew his unique ministry was benefiting many people and truly, Paul's ministry still to this day benefits Christians. He said, "For me to live is Jesus and to die is to gain ... I am in a dilemma between the two, having the desire to depart (go to heaven) and to be with Jesus which is far better. Yet, to remain in the flesh is better for your sake" (Philippians 1:21, 23 & 24).

Paul was ready to die for Jesus. 'We (Paul's companions, Acts 21:8) stayed there some days when a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea (about 41AD). Agabus came to us and taking Paul's belt, he bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So will the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt and will deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard these things, both we and they of Caesarea begged him not to go up to Jerusalem but Paul said, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:10 to 13).

Sadly, Paul was executed in Rome about 67AD by the evil ruler Nero. Paul knew he was going to die and effectively be sacrificed but he was ready to go. 'I am already being poured out, offered as a sacrifice and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished

the race. I have kept the faith. What awaits me is the Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge will give to me on Judgement Day and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing (that brought salvation)' (2 Timothy 4:6 to 8).

Paul always had an encouraging word. 'Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say, Rejoice!' (Philippians 4:4). 'Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing praises and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always concerning all things in the name of our Lord Jesus to God the Father' (Ephesians 5:19 & 20). 'We exhort you brothers, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient toward all ... Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Jesus for you' (1 Thessalonians 5:14, 16 to 18).

Amen and God bless you.

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