

Week 2: Paul's Pursuit of Righteousness (Phariseism and Persecution)

I. Significance of Paul's Tarsan Citizenship – Acts 21:39

“Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.””

A. Possible explanations for his citizenship

- Paul simply was not a “citizen”
- Generational wealth from noble family ¹
- Purchased as a freeman or craftsman ²

B. Possible benefits of his citizenship

- Honorary benefits – Acts 21, Acts 22
- Relational benefits
 - a) With the higher echelons – 1 Corinthians 1:26
 - b) With the lower echelons – 2 Thessalonians 3:8-10

II. Significance of Paul's Roman Citizenship – Acts 16:37; 22:28

“That Paul was a Roman citizen is one of the most celebrated biographical details that is known concerning Him. How he came by that citizenship is something of a mystery, but it is known that he was prepared to make use of the advantages it afforded him to facilitate his passage around the cities of the Roman empire .”³

A. Possible explanations for Paul's family citizenship

- Freed slaves ⁴

B. Benefits to Paul of his citizenship

- Protection and Provocatio

¹ Theissen, Gerd. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) p. 36. See also Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (Trinity Press International, 1991) p. 4

² Reisner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Eerdmans, 1998) p. 152. See also Grant, *Augustus to Constantine* (Westminster John Knox Press) p. 48

³ Watkin, *Paul of Tarsus: Citizen of No Mean City* (The Journal of Legal History) p. 119

⁴ Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, V

III. **Significance of Paul Being a Pharisee** – Phil 3:5; Acts 23:6; 26:5

“The spiritual awakening of the Maccabean period and the internal struggles which followed, over the true theocratic form of the people of God, had a still more marked effect: the consequence was a tendency towards a rigorous accentuation of the Torah.”⁵

- A. When did the Pharisees originate?
 - The Exilic Era – Rabbis and Halakah.
 - The Maccabean Era – Revolution and Revival.
 - The Roman Period – Tikkun Olam and Desire for Righteousness.
- B. How did they fit into the general social/political scene in NT times?
 - Grassroots origins.
 - Phariseeism was not political but religious.⁶

IV. **Significance of Paul’s Persecution** - Acts 7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13

[T]hreatening and slaughter had come to be the very breath that Saul breathed, like a warhorse who sniffed the smell of battle. He breathed on the remaining disciples the murder that he had already breathed in from the death of the others. He exhaled what he inhaled... The taste of blood in the death of Stephen was pleasing to young Saul and now he revelled in the slaughter of the saints both men and women.⁷

- A. Its Authority - Acts 9:2; 22:5; 26:12
- B. Its Motive⁸ - Acts 6:9; 26:9, 11; Phil. 3:6

⁵ Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (Trinity Press International, 1991) p. 51-52

⁶ Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: Their Origin and their Philosophy*, (The Harvard Theological Review, 1929) p. 186

⁷ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (B&H Academic, 2000)

⁸ Bruce, p. 71 “The law and the customs, the ancestral traditions, and everything that was of value in Judaism, were imperiled by the disciples’ activity and teaching. Here was a malignant growth which called for drastic surgery. The defence of all that made life worth living for Paul was a cause which engaged all the zeal and energy of which he was capable. When the chief priests and their associates launched their attack on the disciples, Paul came forward as their eager lieutenant.”