

# **THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF PAUL**

## **Paul's Past: From Pharisee to Persecutor**

### **1. Paul's Pharisaic Formation**

- Born in Tarsus (Acts 22:3) – a major Greco-Roman city known for philosophy and trade.
- Educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, a leading teacher of the Hillel school.
- Paul's identity: A Hebrew of Hebrews, from the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5).
- Fluent in both Hebrew and Greek – enabling him to move between Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds.

### **2. The Hillel–Shammai Divide**

- Hillel Pharisees – generally moderate, emphasizing mercy, flexibility, and broad inclusion of Gentiles.
- Shammai Pharisees – stricter, zealous for purity, and resistant to compromise with Gentiles or perceived sinners.
- Paul, though trained under Hillel's grandson Gamaliel, likely leaned toward Shammai-style zeal (Galatians 1:14).
- This explains Paul's intensity in persecuting early Christians – he viewed them as corrupting Israel's holiness.

### **3. Paul as a Persecutor**

- Paul ravaged the church, entering homes to drag Christians to prison (Acts 8:3).
- He approved of Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:58–8:1), seeing Christians as blasphemers.
- Driven by zeal – rooted in Shammai's vision of purity and covenant loyalty.
- Believed persecution was service to God (John 16:2 echoes this mindset).

### **4. Historical Insights**

- Paul's background prepared him uniquely to reinterpret Scripture after his encounter with Christ.
- The collision of Hellenistic culture, Roman power, and Jewish tradition shaped Paul's worldview.
- Paul's eventual transformation shows how God repurposes even misguided zeal for kingdom purposes (1 Tim 1:13).