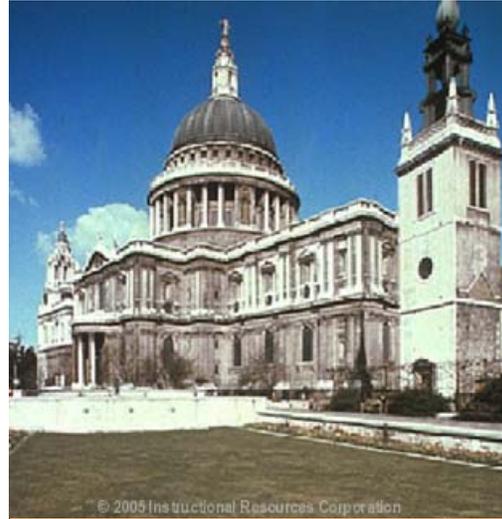


Saul of Tarsus is one of the most important religious leaders in the history of the world. Saul, who later used the name Paul, traveled on foot throughout the lands around the Mediterranean Sea, including modern Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Jerusalem. As he walked, he carried a message to the people he encountered. But without the Internet or television, Paul's message could only be spread from person to person and town to town. Despite this fact, Paul was able to convert many followers to a new religion called Christianity. What is even more astonishing about the story of Paul is that he began as an enemy to Christianity and did what he could to destroy it.



Saint Paul's influence lives on today. Saint Paul's Cathedral in London is named for him.

### **Saul of Tarsus**

Scholars have spent years studying the life of Paul, who is a saint in the Catholic Church. The exact dates of his birth and death are unknown. He is thought to have been born sometime around the year 10 CE in modern-day Turkey on the Mediterranean Sea. He was raised in the Jewish faith and spoke Hebrew but was also taught to speak Greek. At his birth, he was given two names, as was the tradition among Jews at that time. His Hebrew name was Saul, and his Latin name was Paul. Because his father was a Roman citizen, Paul was a Roman citizen as well. But as a devout Jew, he went by the name of Saul.

As a young man, Saul was taught to work with his hands as a tentmaker. This trade meant that he did not live a settled life but rather traveled from place to place. He was a member of the Pharisees, a Jewish religious movement. As a Pharisee, Saul was an expert on Hebrew scripture and knew much of it by heart. His Jewish beliefs clashed with Christian beliefs. Saul especially disagreed that Jesus was the messiah. The idea of the messiah, or the savior sent by God to redeem his people, is an important part of Jewish and Christian beliefs. However, Jews did not believe the Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus lived at the same time as Saul, but the two men never met. Saul took it upon himself to urge punishment for Christians because of the difference in religious views. He spent many years ensuring that followers of Jesus Christ were flogged (beaten) or publicly humiliated for their beliefs.

Then something dramatic occurred to Saul that changed everything. Because different versions of this event exist, it is hard to be sure exactly what happened. All accounts agree, however, that Paul saw a vision one day as he traveled down the road to Damascus. The Christian Bible says that as Saul made his way down the dusty road, he saw a blindingly bright light. A voice from the sky said to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” When Saul asked, “Who art thou, Lord?” the voice responded, “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.” Saul was so overwhelmed by this experience that he converted to Christianity right there on the road to Damascus. When he reached the city, he “. . . straightway . . . preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (*The King James Bible*, Acts 9.3, 9.20). From that moment forward, he went by the name of Paul.

### Paul's Work

So began Paul's missionary work. A missionary is a person sent to foreign lands



An icon illustrates the prominent Christian Saints Peter and Paul.

to promote a specific religion. One of Paul's

first quests was to learn more about the life of

Jesus. He traveled to Jerusalem, where he

searched for a man named Peter. Peter had

been one of the disciples, or followers, of

Jesus. Paul had only a short time to learn

from Peter in Jerusalem, as Paul was not

welcomed there. After he left Jerusalem, Paul

spent the rest of his life converting followers

to the Christian faith, setting up churches, and

helping to shape the beliefs of Christianity. He

was tireless and passionate, and he refused to

cease his work, despite the fact that he was

often hungry and cold from walking long

distances. He was also often persecuted and

sometimes beaten. In some ways, his life had

come full circle. He was now punished for his

beliefs just as he had punished others for

similar beliefs earlier in his life.

As he traveled, Paul left behind a trail of new followers. Some scholars believe that Paul preached as he worked, drawing listeners to him as he used his tent-making tools. From the writings he left behind, we know that Paul did not feel confident as a speaker, so the idea of him working and preaching at the same time seems likely.

After Paul left a town, he often communicated with his new converts by letter and continued to teach them, even from a long distance. In his letters, he encouraged them to persist in their faith despite hardships. These letters offer valuable information to historians about early Christianity and have also become a major part of the New Testament in the Christian Bible. Of the 27 books in the New Testament, Paul is the author of seven. Six others are believed to have been written in Paul's name by his followers. The letters of Paul are a key part of Christianity today. They provide insight not only into the character of one of Christianity's early leaders but also into the religion's basic beliefs.

Around the year 62 CE, Paul was arrested by the Romans in Jerusalem. After two years in prison, he was sent to Rome, where he spent another two years in captivity. Little is known for sure about the last years of Paul's life, but it seems that he was freed by Romans and afterward traveled to Greece. Thereafter he was again arrested and then executed, sometime around the year 67 CE. Shortly before his death, Paul wrote, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (*The King James Bible*, 2 Timothy 4.7). Indeed, Paul was faithful to the end, and his willingness to suffer and die for his beliefs inspired many who came after him to do the same. Paul's unwavering belief, his commitment to his mission, and his intelligence has influenced Christians from the early days of Christianity to the present.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** Which statement describes Paul's initial interaction with Christianity?
  - A.** Paul was raised as a Christian and was a loyal supporter his entire life.
  - B.** Paul was doubtful at first, but his friendship with Jesus led him to convert to the Christian faith.
  - C.** Paul was a member of the Pharisees and did not care about religions outside the Jewish faith.
  - D.** Paul did not believe in Christianity and called for the punishment of Christians.
  
- 2.** How did Paul come to embrace the Christian faith?
  - A.** His support of Christianity would convince the government to end all taxes.
  - B.** While on the road to Damascus, he heard a voice from the sky and instantly converted.
  - C.** He was raised in the Christian faith by his father and his brother, who was already an apostle.
  - D.** He was working as a tradesman in Judea when he heard the gospel and eagerly converted.
  
- 3.** Paul's most enduring legacy in Christianity was for which achievement?
  - A.** his work as a missionary
  - B.** his authorship of the Gospel of Paul
  - C.** his introduction of the Christian bible to Islam
  - D.** his construction of the first Christian church
  
- 4.** Paul had a lengthy journey as a Christian. He went from punishing Christians for their beliefs to embracing the faith and devoting the rest of his life to Christianity. What life events led to Paul's transformation? Support your answer with evidence from the text.