



What was Paul's cultural context? Where did he come from? Who was he? Which school of faith did he belong to? What did he think and what did he teach before Yeshua was revealed to him? Did Paul convert or did he create a new religion after his encounter with Yeshua?

The questions above will help us understand many of the passages we read in the New Testament scriptures, especially when Paul addresses certain audiences in a particular way. We know that Paul came from a very different background than the one of Yeshua (Jesus), who was developing his ministry in some specific areas of Judea, the Galilee and Samaria, mainly focusing on the lost sheep of the House of Israel according to biblical records, unlike Shaul, later to be known as Paul.

Matthew 15:24 *But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

Matthew 10:5-7 *These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6. But go rather to the lost*

sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'."

Paul's account in his letters tells us that he was born in Tarsus, which raises the question, **where is Tarsus located?** This city is not really in the land of Israel; rather it was an area just north of Israel, from what is now known as Lebanon, across the Mediterranean Sea to what today is southern Turkey. This region called Cilicia is where Paul was born in the city named **Tarsos** -- **Ταρσός** in Greek and "Tarsus" in Turkish. Paul himself was known by the name of this city, because at that time people were surnamed, so to speak, according to their place of birth. This means that it was not only a matter of saying that he belonged to or came from that place, but that it became part of his very name.



In Hebrew, Paul was called **Shaul HaTarsi** or **Shaul the Tarsian**; in English he was called Paul or Saul; in some religious areas he is widely defended as Catholic or as a proto-Protestant who lived close to Yeshua's time. But when we really start reading in the Hebrew context of scripture, we realize that it has no Catholic or Protestant associations, since as we are taught, his name was Shaul or Saul:

Acts 7:58 *And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

Acts 26:14 *And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."*

Paul has the same Hebrew name as the first King of Israel, which is **SHAUL** שְׂאוּל, and it means "someone who was acclaimed" or "someone who was requested." Both belonged to the tribe of Benjamin and this is an interesting fact when talking about the two Houses of Israel and the lost tribes, because the territory belonging the kingdom of Judah (Kingdom of the South) was not occupied only by the tribe that bears this name (Judah), but also by the tribe of Benjamin who had annexed this territory, along with many Levites from that area (because of their temple service), and together they constituted what was called the Kingdom of the South or House of Judah. The tribe of Judah, however, was predominant owing to their population.

It is after the Babylonian captivity that the word **Jewish** – **יְהוּדִי** – appears in the Tanach (Old Testament) instead of the reference to Israel as a nation. This is because the Jews or house of Judah were the ones who returned from Babylon, as described in the book of Esther, as Jews were the only ones who were taken captive to the Persian empire. After what happened in Babylon, some of them returned to the land of Israel, but many stayed; on the other hand, those of the tribe of Benjamin who remained were absorbed into the tribe of Judah and they were called Jews.

Esther 3:13 *And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.*

Yehudi (יהודי): The meaning of being Jewish (by Tzvi ben Daniel)

“First of all it is necessary for me to clarify that I am writing this article as a Jew by birth, as well as by choice. Over the years my understanding, and therefore my definition of what it means to be Jewish, has expanded significantly.

“According to the modern rabbinical definition, a Jew is one who was born of Jewish womb (that is, his mother is Jewish, regardless of the father’s religion). He is also a Jew who converts to the Jewish religion.



“But the term could also be analyzed from another perspective. Let’s delve into the scriptures, since the term Yehudi (Jew) has broader connotations and a deeper meaning than we normally attribute to it. In a way it could be compared in some sense with the term Ivri or the name Israel.

“Two thousand years ago, a Yehudi (Jew) was anyone who lived in the area of Yehudah, in addition to practicing the Jewish religion. That area was called Yehudah because it used to be originally, when the land was divided in the times of Joshua, the land corresponding to the tribe of Yehudah or Judah. The boundaries of this land expanded in post-Solomon times, when there were two main areas in Israel: the Kingdom of Judah (to the south) and the Kingdom of Israel (in the lands of Samaria and the Galilee, to the north).

*“If we go back to the person with whom this name originates, we have to go back to the time of Yaakov, our patriarch. His fourth son was named Yehudah by his mother Lea, when she said ‘now will I praise (“odeh”, from the same root as Yehudah) Yehovah’ (**Genesis 29:35**). Another verse that will help us with the context of what we are examining today comes from another Yehudi, Shaul (Paul), who gives his opinion at the end of the second chapter of his epistle to the Romans:*

“For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God, And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.” Romans 2:27-29.

“Paul was a Pharisee and this passage must be understood in context. There is no doubt that he believed, according to the Jewish religion of his time, that if a child was born to Jewish parents he was Jewish. But, here Paul is giving deeper implications of what it means to be a Jew. Being born to certain parents does not determine the way we will act in this world. Paul is using the term Yehudi for those who ‘earn it,’ so to speak.

“In this context, Yehudi would be ‘he who praises God with his works’ [free interpretation by Tzvi].

“So, yes, a Yehudi is one who was born to Jewish parents, like me or Paul; and also a Yehudi is one who converts to the Jewish religion. But above all, a Yehudi is one who acts in an upright and just manner, with a transformed heart to please the Creator.”

Interestingly, almost 600 years after the Jews returned from Babylon, Paul writes that he still identifies with the tribe of Benjamin, which gives us an idea of how his family preserved the tradition of saying “we are from the tribe of Benjamin” – remembering who they are after so many years, to the point of being able to preserve that identity, just as happens today with the House of Judah, who preserved that lineage of the Tribe of Judah.

Romans 11:1 *I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.*

Therefore, Paul was born in the Diaspora and not within the land of Israel; he was raised in the religion of Judaism and Jewish knowledge, and understood the Torah and its principles. We see that when Paul describes himself in his letter to the Philippians, he observes that many people

were very proud of heeding the Torah, something very similar to what we see today with the messianic movement, as Paul indicates:

Philippians 3:4-5 *though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;*



When we read these words carefully we realize that Paul was 100% Jewish, that he was circumcised as a child, but that in terms of the law he was a Pharisee, which is the equivalent of an Orthodox Jew today.

Paul was the son of Pharisees, which tells us that his father belonged to this branch of Judaism. The Pharisees were one of the sects mentioned in the gospels, which was known to add laws (Takanot) to YeHoVaH's Torah, to such an extent that, when it came to strengthening a law or commandment by building a fence around it so that no one could approach to sin, these men were the strictest.

We see an example of how Yeshua makes a commandment stricter without becoming a Pharisee, as in the case of looking at a woman with lust and in the same act committing adultery.

Matthew 5:27-28 NKJV: *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

The Prushim taught, and it was common knowledge among Yeshua's listeners, that in order to avoid adultery, a man should divorce his wife before going with another woman. They then made landmark resolutions concerning the grounds for divorce: (1) if a man finds a woman more beautiful than his wife, he can divorce her and marry the most attractive woman, and (2) if his wife burns his dinner he can divorce her. Yeshua clarifies the real problem: "adultery has already

been committed in the heart." In other words, adultery cannot be covered by filing a divorce on illegitimate grounds. Yeshua also repeats this principle in the incident registered in the book of Mark 10:11-12, in which any of the parties that initiates the divorce to marry another is, in effect, committing adultery, and he or she with whom they marry is committing adultery with him or her. The legal term for this situation should be "premeditated marriage." Michael Rood. The Chronological Gospels. The Mystery of the Seventy Week of the Messiah.

"And Beit Hillel said: He may divorce her even due to a minor issue, Such as, because she burned or over-salted his dish, as it is stated: "because he has found some unseemly matter in her" meaning that he found any type of shortcoming in her." Talmud Gittin 90a:3

Yeshua and Divorce (by Harold Calvo)

***"Is it not true that in the Law of Moses a man is allowed to divorce his wife?"** Something similar to this was what some Pharisees who came to tempt Yeshua asked him:*

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?".... They said to Him: "Why then did **Moshe command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?**" Matthew 19:3-7

First of all, it is important to clarify that the words "Law of Moshe" are used only to refer to the Torah of YeHoVaH which was received by Moshe on Mount Sinai.

"And YeHoVaH spoke all these words, saying" ... Exodus 20:1

In other words, it did not occur to Moshe to say "these words"; he was simply the instrument that YeHoVaH used to convey the message of the Torah to us. Second, the reason why these Pharisees tempt Yeshua is because they had invented ways to "get rid" of the commandments of the Torah, with the purpose of justifying themselves regarding adultery. The issue at hand here was to remarry for the second or third time in a premeditated way, divorcing with the support

*of the law in order to marry another woman who was prettier or younger, and despising and neglecting the first wife. But what were the Pharisees referring to when they said that “Moshe commanded to give a letter of divorce and put her away?” This reference is found in **Deuteronomy 24:1-2**: “When a man hath taken a wife and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he has found some uncleanness in her, then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife.”*

It is here that Yeshua’s wisdom and understanding once again left the Pharisees of the time speechless when he explained the very spirit of the Torah regarding divorce:

*He said to them “Moshe, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” **Matthew 19:8***

Yeshua was telling them that divorce was established because of the hardness of man; the will of the Father has always been and will always be that the man remains next to his wife, respecting her, loving her and taking care of her since this is a figure of Yeshua loving and taking care of his beloved Israel.



Would you like to know more about these controversial topics in which Yeshua confronted the religious leaders of the time? We invite you to [purchase *The Chronological Gospels*](#).

The sect of the Pharisees, to which Paul belonged, invented many commandments according to their private interpretation of the commandments of the Torah, but on many occasions they went against the Torah itself. This transgression to the Torah made it necessary for the followers of Yeshua to leave the teachings and doctrines of this sect, as it was the *adding or subtracting* to the commandments, which Yeshua came to warn us about. It is important to remember not to get to the legalistic point of telling others, “*you did this or that; therefore, you are sinning, because that is not even in the Torah.*” If we look at the example of the commandments of “washing of

hands” in Mark 7, it is found that Yeshua did not need to prove a point because this Pharisaic commandment is not given in the Torah.

Mark 7:1-9 *Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him [Yeshua], having come from Jerusalem. 2 Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, **that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. 3 For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. 5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" 6 He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 7 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'***



Now it is good to clarify an important point about the person who does not want to impose the additional commandments on others, but chooses to do it for himself and his family: Does it violate the Torah? If not, then that is a personal gesture. Therefore, if we wish to keep some tradition, let's not impose it as a universal legalism upon others, thus constituting a burden. There is no problem if you want to keep certain customs or traditions; you simply do not have to be legalist.



As Paul grew up in a Greek culture and experienced its influence, he quite possibly did not look at the Gentiles in the same way that the inhabitants of Jerusalem did, as did the disciples and Yeshua himself, who lived in the authoritarian environment of that time, when the Jews of Jerusalem were subjugated by the Romans. In contrast, Paul lived in a less oppressive sociocultural milieu influenced by other cultures, mostly that of the Greeks.

Nowadays we could assume that the Jews who reside outside of the land of Israel are not as strict in their way of thinking as would be the Jews who live in Israel and worship inside the synagogues of Jerusalem, as orthodox religious people. Whether at the time of Paul or currently, there has always been a large international secular Jewish population, which cannot be recognized as Jewish either for their actions or their looks. Concerning this, there is “something” about the presumably orthodox Jews in Jerusalem owing to their being on the land, and to the way that some commandments must be observed according to the Scriptures:

Deuteronomy 18:9 *When you come into the land which YeHoVaH your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.*

Deuteronomy 26:1 *And it shall be, when you come into the land which YeHoVaH your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it.*

The above allows us to remember how special the land of Israel is for YHVH. Likewise, it is possible to observe certain differences between the Kehila (congregation) in Jerusalem, where Yeshua’s brother James was, and the congregations that were under Paul’s mission as sent to the Gentiles. And this is where questions arise such as: ***Why was he going to the Gentiles? Did Paul create a new religion?*** Regarding these issues, there are great theological and historical discussions, always trying to elucidate what Paul was doing, and why on many occasions he appears to be creating a religion of his own by apparently going to the Gentiles saying: “*Believe in Jesus and do nothing else.*”

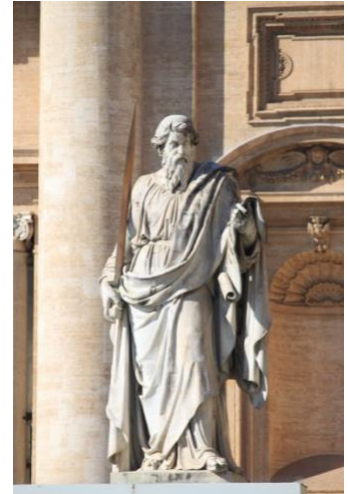
Paul was also a Roman citizen. According to one historian, Roman citizenship was only attained with the financial support of the empire, by being born in a city of the empire, or being in the Roman army.

"... Roman citizenship may have come to Paul through his family rather than through his status as a Jew of Tarsus." Brown (2002). Introduction to the New Testament, II, p. 559

The Romans at that point in history possessed what is considered a republic, in which there were laws that were executed with fair trials, in the presence of what we define today as lawyers, which we observe in the Book of Acts:

Acts 22: 22-29 *And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" 23. Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. 25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "**Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?**" 26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, **for this man is a Roman.**" 27 Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes." 28 The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "**But I was born a citizen.**" 29 Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.*

In this narrative Paul is in Jerusalem, and we see that there was no judgment. Today we could imagine a person walking on the street and being captured and beaten by the police without a reason and without evidence. It may be that in some Latin American countries this happens often, but in the Roman empire there were laws that forbade certain corrective actions without a fair trial. When the centurion and the tribune heard that Paul was a Roman citizen and they got scared, this helps us understand a bit more about the context of Paul's words when he articulated that he was a Roman citizen.



Centuries before Paul's birth, there were two different cultures in the region of Cilicia in Turkey, which is known in the scriptures as Asia Minor, east of Greece, and both were very important empires in that area of the world. When Greece made its conquest, they defeated the Persian empire, under the rule of Alexander the Great, 300 years before the Common Era. After the fall of the Greek empire, the Romans took over the Hellenistic culture, which by that time had spread throughout the entire Middle East and through the surroundings of the Mediterranean, which is why the populations had a Greek-Hellenistic culture within a Roman society, together with the different languages. In most of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean, Greek was spoken by inheritance of the Hellenistic culture, and Latin for being the language of the Romans. The name Paul, for example, comes from Latin, and the words "This is Jesus, king of the Jews" written on the cross were also written in Latin as one of the three languages mentioned in Luke 23:38.

Paul's parents decided that he would be raised in Jerusalem, studying at the feet of Gamaliel I, who was part of a lineage of very renowned rabbis among the Pharisees. There are many Talmudic records about Gamaliel, particularly one that tells of an occasion when a king and his queen came to Gamaliel to ask for his advice:

"And on another occasion** there was a similar incident with the king, queen and Rabban Gamaliel. It happened that a **dead lizard** was found in the kitchen of the royal household. Since a lizard is one of the crawling animals whose carcasses impart ritual impurity to the contact, **they wanted to deem all the food as ritually impure. They came and asked the King. He said to

them: Go and ask the Queen. They came and asked the Queen. She said to them: Go and ask Rabban Gamliel to pronounce on the matter.” Talmud Pesachim 88b:11

This Gamaliel I was the son of a rabbi named Shimon ben Hillel, who was the grandson of Hillel the elder, of the famous House of Hillel, which is mentioned next to the House of Shammai. These two Houses or rabbinical schools had different philosophies about certain criteria, which generated many debates. The House of Shammai had a much stricter way of thought, while the House of Hillel was more compassionate or flexible. Although these two schools might not seem complementary, neither were they one-dimensional. We see this in the case of Yeshua when in some occasions he showed himself to be more strict like Shammai and in others more permissive in the manner of Hillel. Studying Paul carefully, we could situate everything he taught between these two schools of thought, as in teaching to the Gentiles, which was part of the House of Hillel's orientation. The Talmudic records register a peculiar occasion with a Gentile:

“The Sages taught: There was an incident involving one Gentile who came before Shammai. The Gentile said to Shammai: How many Torahs do you have? He said to him: Two, the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The Gentile said to him: With regard to the Written Torah, I believe you, but with regard to the Oral Torah, I do not believe you. Convert me on condition that you will teach me only the Written Torah. Shammai scolded him and cast him out with reprimand. The same Gentile came before Hillel, who converted him and began teaching him Torah. On the first day, he showed him the letters of the alphabet and said to him: Alef, bet, gimmel, dalet...” Shabat 31a:5.

“A heavenly voice declared: ‘The words of both schools are the words of the living God, but the law follows the legislations of the school of Hillel’.” Talmud Eruvin 13b.

Just as Shammai was very strict and Hillel was very permissive, Paul went from being so strict to performing a task that no other Jew did before him, which is to go and teach the Gentiles. On one hand, Peter had the profound vision in the narrative of Acts 10, and afterward he understood that YeHoVaH doesn't want us to call anyone profane or unclean, because He doesn't differentiate between one person and another, but in any nation He accepts those who revere

Him and do what is good (**Acts 10:28, 34-35**). In that moment, Peter agreed to go with the Gentiles to Cornelius' house, at first because he didn't understand the meaning of the vision, which was revealed to him on the way. On the other hand, we see how Paul was constantly traveling and looking for people to evangelize, bringing the good news on a level that no one did before him.

To know more about Peter's vision and the meaning that was given to it, we invite you to read the following study: The Creator's Diet. [Click here \(or in the image\) to access](#)



Another difference between the Hillel School and the Shammai school was that regarding Shabbat. The House of Shammai taught that if someone fell ill during Shabbat, he was prevented from taking actions that would lead to the improvement of his health, including the search for a doctor, on the following grounds: *"Who are we to determine whether a person should be healed or whether a person should die even on Shabbat, because on Shabbat it is not lawful to do something."* For its part, the Hillel school taught that the Torah commands the preservation of life, so it is lawful to seek a doctor on Shabbat. On this, Yeshua left us an example:

Luke 14:3-6 *And Yeshua, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the shabbat?" 4. But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. 5. Then He answered them, saying "which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Shabbat day?" 6. And they could not answer Him regarding these things.*

As we see, none of those present reacted to Yeshua's question. Another important fact of this passage is that Yeshua shows traits of doctrinal inclination towards the school of Hillel. Another topic that arose was divorce, over which it is not good to be flexible, but this is what the school of Hillel taught. We find some examples in the rabbinical writings:

And Beit Hillel say: He may divorce her even due to a minor issue, Such as, because she burned or over-salted his dish, as it is stated: “because he has found some unseemly matter in her” meaning that he found any type of shortcoming in her. Talmud Gittin 90a:3

Matthew 5:27-32 *You have heard that it was said to those of old, [by the Sophrim and Prushim of antiquity] “You shall not commit adultery” (note 164 Chronological Gospels). 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Hell [Gehenna - Hinom Valley]. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Hell. 31 Furthermore it has been said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce [get].” 32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery [a matter of erva]; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”*

“The Pharisees invented ways to evade the commandments of the Torah concerning adultery, and the laws of their invented system were very debated among the different rabbinical schools. On this occasion, the Pharisees challenge Yeshua’s position on adultery, while on the other two occasions where this issue was also discussed it is He who challenges the Pharisees. The issue here is the new “premeditated marriage” or the divorce for pseudo-legitimate reasons in order to marry another woman, refusing to provide for the first one.” Michael Rood. The Chronological Gospels: The Seventy- Week Ministry of the Messiah. For more information on erva matters, see Mathew 5:27-32 event 62 and Luke 16:18 event 147

In cases like these, the rigorous philosophy of the Shammai House established that divorce could only be given on grounds of adultery. As we see, in this matter Yeshua aligns himself with the doctrine of the house of Shammai. We see how Yeshua brought doctrinal balance to these two schools. As Paul studied under Gamaliel, we can be assured that he was a connoisseur of the scriptures, since Gamaliel was a connoisseur of the Torah.



In the records of the gospels, the Book of Acts, and Paul's letters, we find that Yeshua's audience was mostly humble people such as fishermen, farmers or artisans from the Galilee area, whom he taught through parables or **mashalot**, the Hebrew name of the Book of Proverbs. On the other hand, the audience of Paul as opposed to the one of Yeshua were Greek

philosophers. This shows us that Paul was prepared by the Father to be able to face eminences and Greek philosophers at a very elevated level of discourse. Being Paul from the prestigious and great city of Tarsus, he was in stark contrast to the followers of Yeshua, who mostly came from villages, being very simple people.

Acts 21:39 *But Paul said, I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.*

Tarsus, being a province of Cilicia, had great commercial growth with the presence of philosophical schools created by Zeno the Stoic, so we can conclude that it was greatly developed. This could have been part of the environment in some of the interactions between Paul and the disciples, or with Peter himself, to an almost antagonistic or incompatible point, because they came from two completely different worlds, culturally and intellectually. Historical facts have revealed that there were almost 30 synagogues in the city of Damascus; in the scriptures we are told that Paul was allowed to preach about Yeshua as the Messiah in the synagogues, under the permit that the rabbis would establish at the time:

Acts 9:19-22 *So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. 20 Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. 21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*

Based on this experience of Paul before the rabbis, we could imagine that if a Jew in our time would arrive at a Christian church to preach that Yeshua is not the Messiah, he would likely not even have the opportunity or the permission to preach. Among first-century believers there was a very strong movement in favor of Yeshua being the Messiah, so much that people were accepting it and receiving it in the synagogues. Still, let's not forget that they had an enormous advantage, which is that there had not yet passed centuries of Christianity, which is the context that has provoked the argument that whenever a Jew is told about Yeshua as the Messiah, he will immediately relate it to hundreds of years of persecutions, the Inquisition, antisemitism, and theological disputes in certain countries where they tried to implicate the Jews:

"Murderers of the Lord and the Prophets, rebels and haters of God, Law-changers, resisters of grace, repudiators of the faith of their fathers, followers of the devil, breed of vipers, informers, slanderers, stiff-necked, pharisaic yeast, Sanhedrin of demons, cursed, execrable..."

Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop of Nyssa, Saint of the Catholic Church, Century III-IV.

"Faced with any evil that circulates through the body, it is the custom of good doctors to curtail the affected area with iron and first radically amputate the purulent rottenness, before the harmful part infects the healthy ones. [...] I think that your goodness, most sacred prince, will wish to imitate the sweetness of this admirable remedy [...] Well, among these rotten limbs to be avoided are the tongues of the Jews, who think that Christ, the son of God promised by the law, has not yet been born. [...] Catholic Archbishop, Theologian, and descendant of Jewish converts.

"Here in Wittenberg, in our parish church, there is a sow carved into the stone from which piglets and Jews suck; behind the sow stands a rabbi who raises the right leg of the sow, lifts her tail and looks at it with great effort in the Talmud under its tail, as if he wanted to read or see something very difficult and exceptional; they certainly found their Schem Hamphoras (Name of God) in that place." **Martin Luther, On the Jews and their Lies, 1543.**



“If this statement is true – and it seems very likely that it is – the history’s fiercest anti-semitic pamphlet would have Hispanic sources; the sketch would have been born in the Spain of the seventeenth century, in the atmosphere caused by the extraordinary boom of the nets woven by the Sephardim expelled in 1492.” **Joseph Perez, *The Jews of Spain*, p 257-259.**

At the time of Paul, Judaism was only established as a religion in the land of Israel and during the diaspora, which allowed him to present himself as a Jew to another Jew and tell him what had happened to him on the way to Damascus, when a blinding light threw him to the ground and a voice spoke to him:

Acts 9:3-5 *As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."*

From this context the scenario is different, since Paul is speaking from his personal experience and quite possibly these rabbis did not know anything about Yeshua, which is why Paul explains to them that the person who spoke to him (that is, Yeshua) was in Jerusalem, where he suffered, died and then rose again. He further clarifies that this event happened approximately ten years previously. The people of that time were much more prone to believe in the story of Paul, without being conditioned by the implications and the meaning of it, since Paul did not have much contact with Jerusalem and had only heard various details about what had happened.

According to some research, in the diaspora synagogues (outside Jerusalem), there was a type of internal ordering of worshippers wherein the first two or three rows belonged to the Jews who had established the synagogue, all orthodox and clearly circumcised; then in the subsequent rows we could find the proselytes of righteousness, which in Hebrew are known as **Ger Tzedek (righteous convert)**, who were Gentile converts to Judaism, such as the Galatians, Ephesians, Greeks, Romans, etc. Of these proselytes, the men had already been circumcised and the women had performed the Tevilah (immersion in water) which is what we know today as baptism, and after this process they became Jews. Further back we find what are called the proselytes of

the gate or the God-fearing **Ger Toshav (resident convert)** of which we find one reference in the Book of Acts in the person of Cornelius:

Acts 10:1-2, 21-22 *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who **feared God** with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always 21 Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" 22 And they said, "Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you."*

These God-fearing men were also Gentiles who could be part of the synagogue, chant the psalms, and even be part of the community, but who did not convert to Judaism because of circumcision. Despite having a good relationship with Judaism, these men were averse to circumcision because at that time, the performance of circumcision could be fatal due to the absence of medical care or specialized centers in case of infections, as we have today.

The previous example sheds a little more light on the context of chapter 15 of the Book of Acts, where Paul meets the group of the judaizers, Jews who lived in Jerusalem and who were more rigorous and orthodox about observing the Torah and regarding the topic of circumcision. In Paul's case, coming from the diaspora he usually deals with synagogues that are not so strict; as we saw, this was one of the characteristics of the school of Hillel, the flexibility about certain topics like circumcision.

Romans 2:25-29 *For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27 And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? 28 **For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the***

flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

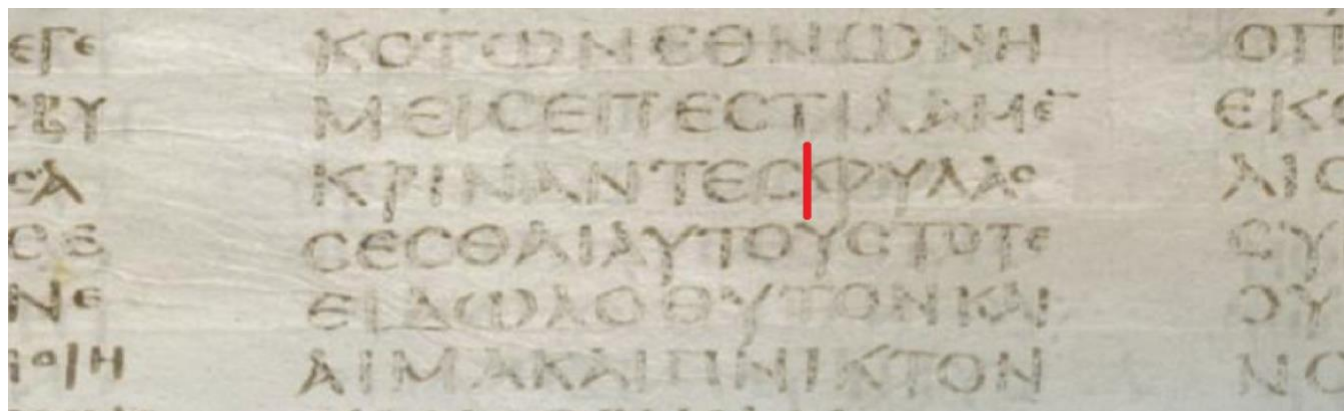
Romans 4:9-12 *Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. 10 How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, 12 and the father of circumcision **to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.***

Little by little we understand the topic of circumcision and how Paul assimilated it and transmitted it to the people in the diaspora. Many times people tend to confuse Paul's writings because they don't know the cultural and historical context in which the events took place. In the Book of Acts we observe how Paul defends his faith while defending explaining who he was when he was falsely accused of teaching the Jews not to circumcise:

Acts 21:18-25 *On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; 21 **but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.** 22 What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. 23 Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. 24 Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads [Numbers 6:13-20 – Nazarite vow], and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. 25 But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and **decided that they should observe no such thing** [just like the purification*

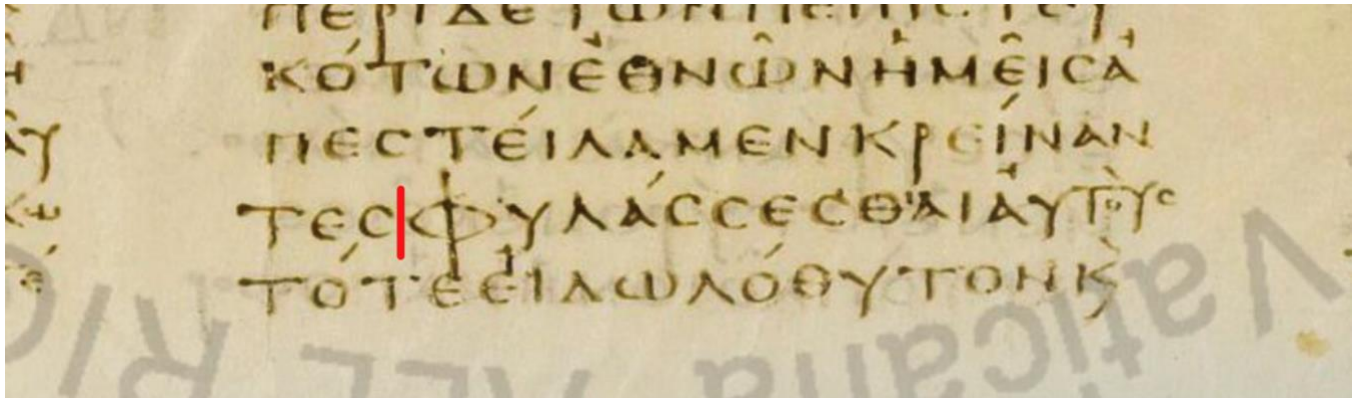
rites of the temple], except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”

“Decided that they should observe no such thing.” The oldest texts omit all these words, and they seem to be merely a marginal comment, partly echoing Acts 15:5 and Acts 15:24, but with a negative in the phraseology. They don’t represent any part of the given form in that chapter of the letter given to the synod or council... **except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality;** the commentators observe that this is regarding “keeping the law” in the verse 24. Is it any wonder that believers (like me) are often confused about the accuracy of the scriptures with the diverse interpretations and the continuous revelation of bad translations together with omissions and additions? But then I digress (!)



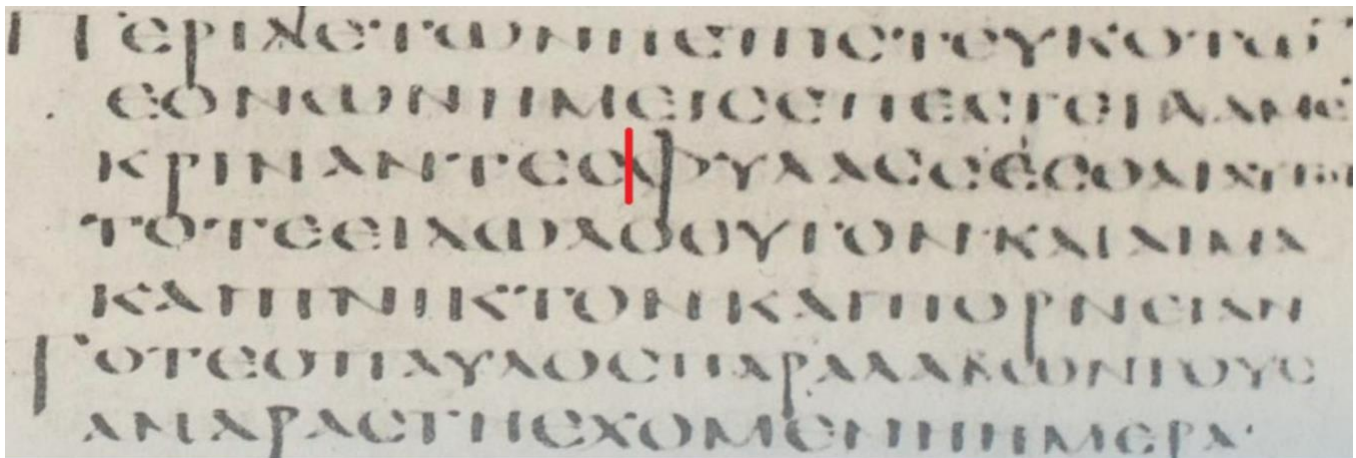
The words **“DECIDED THAT THEY SHOULD OBSERVE NO SUCH THING”** are not found in the manuscript.

Codex Sinaiticus IV Century



The words “DECIDED THAT THEY SHOULD OBSERVE NO SUCH THING” are not found in the manuscript Codex Vaticanus.

VI Century



The Words “DECIDED THAT THEY SHOULD OBSERVE NO SUCH THING” are not found in the manuscript.

Codex Alexandrinus V Century

We see how Paul must purify himself together with other people through the fulfillment of a Nazarite vow to prove that he never taught the Jews not to be circumcised, this being one of the points that most concerned the members of the Kehila (congregation) in Jerusalem. On the contrary, they didn't have a problem with the Gentiles, and about this we have the testimony given in the Jerusalem council a few chapters before:

Acts 15:19-21 *“Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God 20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols [Exodus 34:15-17], from sexual immorality [Leviticus 18:6-23], from things strangled, and from blood [Leviticus 17:10-16]. 21 For Moses [Torah] has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”*

“The synagogue of the Prushim was the only place in the old world where one could go to hear the Torah read and taught. The apostles in Yerushalaim were reiterating the minimum requirements that the Gentiles had to meet to enter the synagogues and begin their study of the Torah of Moshe. As the Gentiles acquired a fuller understanding of the Torah of Moshe, those in whose hearts was written the Torah, they would naturally come to the complete obedience of the commandments of YeHoVaH. Keeping the commandments of the Torah is the proper response that comes from the heart of one who has been redeemed by the blood of Yeshua. For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) but the gift of eternal life is given to all who by faith call on his name. If it was not because we are conditioned to have enmity against the Torah, we would live in complete obedience to the instructions of our Creator, and then we would learn to listen to His voice so that we can walk in the Spirit; as we see exemplified in the Book of Acts, those who oppose and deliberately break the commandments of YeHoVaH, do not possess the Holy Spirit living in them, no matter how religious they may appear in the flesh. (1 John 2:4).

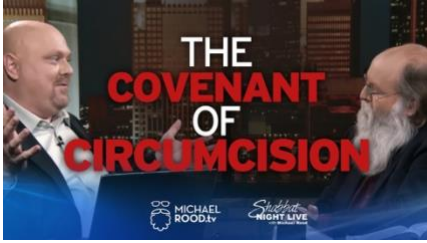
It was not a requirement for a Gentile to be circumcised in order to enter the synagogue on Shabbat and learn the Torah from Moshe. Circumcision is the sign of the covenant between YeHoVaH and Abraham: That all the land from the Euphrates to the Nile belongs to his offspring, the children of Israel. Gentiles are not part of the Abrahamic covenant, but they can choose to be. All those who wished to enter the Kehilah of Israel to learn Torah had to accomplish at least the four basic things that Ya'akov quotes from the Torah and that were reiterated in the last feast of Shaul in Yerushalaim (event <305>). However, they did not have to follow the Takanot of the Pharisees. Yeshua broke them and taught his disciples to break them. Moreover, he commanded those he healed to break them, and yet the Pharisees who became followers of the Messiah wanted to impose their eruv (Shabbat prohibitions), and their ritual washing of hands. They wanted the Gentiles to follow the same Takanot that Yeshua confronted. On the other

hand, Gentiles from pagan cultures tended to bring their idolatry and abomination to the Kehilah of the saints. Some still refused to observe the minimum requirements repeatedly detailed by the apostles, and Shaul had to deal with this perversion among the Corinthian believers (1 Corinthians 5:1) Both groups, conservative legalist and liberals, will be expelled from the fold on the day when Yeshua declares “Depart from me, you doers of anomia (without Torah).” Michael Rood. The Chronological Gospels: The Seventy Weeks Ministry of the Messiah.

The concern of the members of the Kehilah of Jerusalem was the veracity of the false report that they received about Paul’s anti-Torah ministry. Later in chapter 24 we see Paul defending himself before Roman authorities for going to the temple, besides the event in Acts 21. Paul was captured and left in prison so that governor Felix could ingratiate himself with the Jews, who requested him to be brought back from Caesarea to Jerusalem, and during this transfer the Jews intended to kill him. But before that happened, Paul said:

Acts 24:11-15 *Because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. 13 Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. 14 But this I confess to you, that according to **the Way** which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. 15 I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.*

The term **the Way** is quite interesting, as it was what the religious leaders considered and called a heresy: **the Way (Acts 19:9-23)** was how these men referred to the Jews who believed in the Messiah. What is currently defined as messianic Jews at that time was called **Those of the Way** as a designation of heresy. Paul manifests his belief in the Torah and the prophets, which for time were the only scriptures (Tanach), since the so-called New Testament accounts about Yeshua were transmitted orally. It was in this way that Paul defended himself, according to the belief of his fathers, which included circumcision among other things. Paul announced this throughout the land of Judea and among the Gentiles, as the testimony of Yeshua.



Do you have questions about circumcision? Check out this video: [The Covenant of Circumcision](#)

A couple of chapters later we see how Paul finds himself speaking before king Agrippa, who was the representative of the Roman empire, when the latter moved to the region of Caesarea. Paul had the opportunity to testify in front of the king, a fact of great relevance, since this would be equivalent today to speaking with figures of power, such as the president of a great nation, such as Donald Trump or Benjamin Netanyahu. The narrative tells us that Paul even “tried to convert Agrippa.”

Acts 26:20 *But declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should **repent**, turn to God, and do works **befitting repentance**.*

We see that Paul’s purpose was to bring repentance and conversion to God to all who could listen to him; likewise the word “converts” appears repeatedly in the gospels (**Matthew 3:2, 8, 11, Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3**) and in Paul’s letters (**2 Corinthians 7:9, Hebrews 6:1**), so much so, that it is often thought that he was converted on the road to Damascus, especially in the Christian-Catholic culture, which claims that Shaul, having the experience with the Messiah, was renamed Paul:

“With the ascension of the Risen Jesus to heaven and the subsequent coming of the Spirit Holy at Pentecost, the disciples were able to begin to discover the mystery of Jesus. These disciples formed a strange group within Judaism: that of the witnesses of the risen Jesus. They preached to announce to the Jews and then to them that they were not the Risen the Jesus: it is the cry of faith of the first Christians; also they celebrated the Risen One in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist; and they taught the newly baptized, collecting the deeds and words of Jesus.....

I saw a light coming from the sky brighter than the sun. I fell to the ground and heard a Voice that said to me in Hebrew Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me; in vain do you rebel against the sting? answered: - Who are You, Lord? And the Lord said: I am Jesus, whom you persecute. Now get up and take a good look: I have manifested myself to you to make you a servant and witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you later. I send you to the pagans, you will open their eyes, so that they turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; and, by faith in me, they will obtain the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance of the saints.

From that moment on Paul did not rebel against this vision of heaven, but addressed First to the inhabitants of Damascus, then to those of Jerusalem and Judea, and then to the heathen nations. He taught them that they should repent and turn to God, with the due consequences of a true conversion."

Gustavo Daniel D'Api Professor of Theology Pontifical Catholic University.

Many people have this notion about Paul, but actually the term **to convert** has its contextual origin in the Hebrew word **teshuvah**, which means to **return** and is well used as **repentance**. To convert in Greek is literally the word **epistrephein** - ἐπιστρέφειν, which means to **return** or **turn back**. Return to what? Return to God as members of his people, since we strayed from



God and must return to him. This does not mean to convert to a religious denomination.

John the Baptist (**Yochanan ben Zejaryah**) gave us an example of the true meaning of repentance, while teaching and exhorting the Pharisees to repent by showing works of repentance:

Luke 3:7-9 *Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 9 And even now the ax is laid to*

the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

John was leading people to repentance and explaining the true meaning of conversion. Returning to Paul’s passage, we see the interesting words as response from king Agrippa, after hearing Shaul’s testimony:

Acts 26:28-29 *Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." 29 And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.”*

Paul does not answer him with the word “Christian”; history tells us that the messianic or followers of the Way were also known as Christians. This leads us to the question: ***What does the word Christian mean, since this is the word used today?*** Except those who use the word Catholic because it is part of the Catholic religion, but Christian literally means ***a follower of Christ***, and Christ properly means ***anointed***. Therefore, the followers of the Way were called Christians for the first time in Antioch, as revealed in the passage of Acts 11:

Acts 11:25-26 *Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

The text tells us that the followers were called, not that they called themselves, “Christians.” This is why the king tells Paul that for a moment he almost persuades him to be a Christian; for his part Paul knows what it means for the king, that for a moment he almost became a follower of the *Messiah*, to the point of manifesting that he would like all those present to be made like him. Right here we find a key point, since now we understand that the first people who were called Christians were actually Jews who believed that Yeshua was the Messiah. In addition to this, the fathers of the church 100 years later also referred to the followers of the Way as Nazarenes or “netzarim,” which in Hebrew means followers of the one from Nazareth.

Acts 24:5 *For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.*

"But these sectarians ... do not call themselves Christians – but 'Nazarenes,' ...However, they are simply complete Israelites. They use not only the New Testament but also the Old Testament, as the Israelites do ... They have no ideas Different, but confess everything exactly as the Law [Torah] proclaims and to the Israelite way – except for their belief in the Messiah, if you will. Because recognize both the resurrection of the dead and the divine creation of all Things, and declare that God is one, and that his Son is Jesus Christ [Yeshua the Messiah]. They are finely trained in Hebrew. Because among them the complete Law [Torah], the Prophets, and the Writings are read in Hebrew, as is certainly done among the Israelites. They are different from Jews, and from Christians, only in what they follow. They are at variance with the Jews because they have come to the faith of the Messiah; But since they are still directed by the Law – circumcision, Shabbat, and the rest – they do not agree with the Christians... they are nothing more than Israelites.... It has the Good News according to Matthew very complete in Hebrew. Because it is clear that they still they preserve, in the Hebrew alphabet, as it was originally written.

Even to the Jews they are enemies. The Jewish people not only hate them, but even rise at dawn, at noon, and at sunset, three times a day, when they recite their prayers in the synagogues, and curse and anathematize them, saying three times a day "God curse the Nazarenes." Because they hold more resentment against them, because being Jews (the Nazarenes), they preach and believe that Jesus is the Christ, something that is contradictory for those who are Jews who have not yet accepted Jesus.

Epiphanius; Panarion 29, 7:2-5, 9:2-3

As expressed by some church fathers who were not part of the first believers but were more Gentile, the Nazarene followers of the Way had no difference from the Jews, except the belief in the Messiah personified in Yeshua. Many of these statements occur more than a hundred years after Paul had lived; later there were certain events that would change this perspective, as there were the persecutions against these groups that placed the Law of Elohim (God) above

Roman law, in the same way that Daniel and his friends, Ananias, Mishael and Azariah were taken to a fiery furnace in the time of the king of Babylon and were in turn saved from punishment for disobeying a Babylonian edict (Babylonian law).

Daniel 3:4-6, 15-18 *Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; 6 and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace... 15 Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."*

We must bear in mind that there must always be great respect for obeying the laws of any secular country or place, call it government or state; but if those laws go against the Torah, then the Torah should be given priority, without question, even if this costs us our lives. Likewise, Paul was respectful of the Roman authorities, but he always had the zeal to fulfill the Torah, being a Pharisee Jew who was zealous for the Torah in contrast to the term "hypocrite" as we have been taught or have understood it in Christianity.

*Pharisee, tr: From Latin **Pharisaeus**; from Gr. **Φαρισαῖος** **Pharisaîos**; from the Aramaic **pěrišayyā**; and from the Hebrew **pěrūšīm** 'separate' [from others].*

1. adj. *Follower of a Jewish sect that pretended rigor and austerity, but avoided the precepts of the law (Torah) and, above all, its spirit. Apl. A pers., u. t. c. s.*

2. adj. *Belonging to or relating to the sect of the **Pharisees** or its members.*

3. adj. **hypocrite**. Apl. A pers., u. t. c. s.

4. m. colloq. desus. Unjust, cruel, inhuman man.

Royal Spanish Academy, Dictionary of the Spanish language.

In the Scriptures we find several records that tell us that Paul kept Shabbat and also taught on Shabbat and likewise, when he traveled, he went up to Jerusalem to be able to keep the holidays:

Acts 13: 13-15, 42-44 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. 14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the **Sabbath** day and sat down. 15 And after the reading of the Law [**Torah**] and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on... 42. So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next **Sabbath**. 43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44 On the next **Sabbath** almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.

Acts 18:19-21 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, 21 but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast [**unleavened breads**], in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing."



1 Corinthians 5:7-8 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our **Passover**, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore

*let us keep the feast [**unleavened breads**], not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread [**Exodus 13:7, Deuteronomy 16:3**] of sincerity and truth.*

Serious charges were brought against Paul after he was brought to Caesarea, which they could not prove, since Paul always maintained in his defense the fact that he had not been against Jewish law, nor the Temple, and even not against Caesar himself:

*While he answered for himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.” **Acts 25:8.***

At this point, having already gone back and forth all over the Mediterranean, Paul states that not even against the law of the Jews did he dare to sin, which tells us that he remained a Pharisee and was also obedient to the Roman authorities. This in turn leads us to understand what Paul expresses in the letters to the Romans, Corinthians and Galatians about the different laws, such as the Law of the Torah versus the law of the members, the law of the Pharisees or the oral law, etc.

Romans 2:12-16 *For as many as have sinned without law [Torah] will also perish without law [Torah], and as many as have sinned in the law [Torah] will be judged by the law [**Torah**] 13 (For not the hearers of the law [Torah] are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law [Torah] will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law [**Torah**], by nature do the things in the law [Torah], these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the law [Torah] written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) 16 In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.*

Romans 7:21-25 *I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law [**Torah**] of God according to the inward man. 23. But I see another law of my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of*

death? 25 I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law [**Torah**] of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

1 Corinthians 9:20-23 And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law [oral law], (although I am not subject to the law [**oral law**] as under the law [**oral law**]), that I might win those who are under the law [**oral law**]; 21 to those who are without law [**torah**], as without law [Torah] [not being without law (Torah) toward God, but under law (**torah**) toward Christ], that I might win those who are without law Torah]; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you."

Galatians 3:10-14 For as many as are of the works of the law [oral law] are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law [Torah], to do them [**Deuteronomy 26:27**]." 11 But that no one is justified by the law [oral law] in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith [Habakkuk 2:4]." 12 Yet the law [**oral law**] is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them [**Leviticus 18:5**]." 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law [Torah], [**Deuteronomy 28:15-68**] having become a curse for us: for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" [**Deuteronomy 21:23**]. 14. That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

With all this information, it is easier to understand what happened in that first century, since we can read Paul's letters and understand the reason why he expressed himself in them in that way to the Gentiles. On some occasions we see him flexible in reference to certain subjects due to his training in the House of Hillel; likewise, we see what his position was regarding the issue of circumcision and how his perspective was very different from that of the orthodox Jews in the synagogues of Jerusalem or in those of the diaspora. Under this historical and cultural understanding we can delve into what was going on in Paul's mind.

In accordance with our attempt to ascertain who Paul was, it is time to ask ourselves the pertinent question, ***Did Paul start a new religion?*** The scriptural evidence tells us that Paul, after having carried out the persecutions of the believers in Yeshua and even after witnessing the death of Stephen, had an encounter with the Messiah and his mind was opened to the correct understanding of the scriptures, and this was the catalyst for the beginning of his teaching people to turn to the Most High (YeHoVaH) and have their conversion process to the eternal one, not to “Christianity” nor to any specific denomination, whether Methodist, Baptist, Assemblies of God, Catholicism, etc. Rather, we see in the Scriptures a character named Paul, making people return to the ways of the Torah, to the ways of YeHoVaH's instruction, showing works of repentance.



This explicitly tells us that it is not just about repeating the prayer of faith for Yeshua to enter in our heart and nothing more; here, we see that both Paul and John the Baptist himself called people to show works of repentance. ***What does this mean?*** It expresses that whoever was walking in adultery should not do it anymore, the one who stole should not steal anymore, and so

forth, which was part of Yeshua's ministry when he expressed to those who came to meet him with words like: *Your faith has healed you, get up, go! and sin no more!* This message is clear about returning to the old path, walking in righteousness before our Father and keeping his commandments.

From Paul we can assume that he always met his audience at their level, not at his, because we know that Shaul knew more than any contemporary Hebrew Roots scholar or Messianic believer. His knowledge of the Torah was exceptional to the point that he knew it by heart, and yet the Gentile with less comprehension would find grace in Paul's eyes; he would open the door and lend his hand to that person who was just starting to understand. It is in this way that we must show humility toward those who seek the truth and even those who are sinning. Paul presented himself with mercy and with the understanding of not excluding any Gentile; instead

he explained to them in a simple way and according to their level of understanding that it was possible to live in justice and righteousness before YeHoVaH. This is the heart of the Torah – loving your neighbor regardless of how he thinks, knowing that every relationship is worthy to The Creator.

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
John 13:35