

Photo of worshipers at the Western Wall of Jerusalem.

The worshiper at the right is wearing the tallit and tefillin (see note at bottom of page 4 for a detailed explanation).

“If anyone thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more; circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (Philippians 3:4-6).

Paul probably spoke more than four languages (1 Corinthians 14:18), but was conversant in at least these four. Aramaic was the common language spoken in Palestine in the first century. Greek was the language of commerce, Hebrew the language of religion, and Latin the official language of the empire (see Acts 21:37, 40).



Praying at the Western Wall

Philippians 3:4-6 provides greater detail into his family origins:

1. He was an Israelite.
2. From the tribe of Benjamin, Jacob's only son born in the land of promise.
3. A Hebrew of Hebrews.
4. He was a Pharisee, one of the strictest sects of the Jews. Pharisee means 'separated one' and there were only about 6,000 of them in New Testament times.

Paul grew up living in three worlds

1. His religious world was by the strictest standard Jewish.
2. The cultural and business context of the city in which he grew up was Greek and he was thoroughly familiar with it. He could easily move in the world of business and commerce. He might even have traded in goat hair, the raw material for manufacturing tents, versus actually sewing them.
3. Being born a Roman citizen guaranteed him tremendous privileges. He had the right to travel throughout the empire without being questioned. And as a citizen, he could never be crucified.



Praying at the Western Wall

What languages might Saul have spoken?

Aramaic

Greek

Hebrew

Latin

Saul was sent to Jerusalem to complete his education. He would have sailed from Tarsus to the Judean port of Caesarea, the greatest port on the eastern Mediterranean. This port, built by Herod the Great, was named in honor of Caesar and was located 50 miles from Jerusalem. Locate this city and Jerusalem on the map on page 8.

A pilgrimage to Jerusalem was the ultimate desire for Jews in his day and ours. The psalmist summed it up well when he wrote: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither away; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy” (Psalm 137:5 & 6 N.E.B.).



Modern Jerusalem



Model of Herod's Temple

Arriving

in the holy city, he would have been dazzled by the beauty of the Temple of YAHWEH recently rebuilt by King Herod; it was the holiest location in Judaism.

There were four major sects of Judaism in Saul's day

1. The wealthy, aristocratic Sadducees held the keys to power in the Temple.
2. The Hellenistic Herodians compromised their faith by mixing it with Greek culture.
3. The scrupulous Pharisees attempted to obey every detail of the Mosaic Law.
4. The Essenes withdrew from society and lived a communal life in the desert.

According to Acts 22:3 Saul was trained by Gamaliel, grandson of the greatest rabbi of the era, Hillel. They were Pharisees who believed in the Scriptures and held to the hope of the resurrection of the dead.

At the time of prayer Saul would have worn the liturgical vestments—the tallit or prayer shawl—and would have put on the tefillin, the leather straps worn on the forehead and arm containing a copy of the law.

This picture of Jerusalem was taken from the Mount of Olives looking west across the Kidron Valley to the eastern wall of the Temple Mount.

There were two gates facing east: the Golden Gate and the Lion's (or Stephen's) Gate. The Golden Gate opened into the temple complex and has been closed since the Crusades. Stephen's Gate is the only gate open today.

The Essenes lived at Khirbet Qumran near the Dead Sea. When the Romans approached in 68 AD, they hid their scrolls in nearby caves before fleeing to Masada. The scrolls were discovered in 1947 by a Bedouin shepherd and are the oldest copy of Scripture known today. These are the well-known Dead Sea scrolls.

Jesus referred to the tefillin (Hebrew) and tallit in Matthew 23:5. “They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.”

These pages are from the Leader's Manual. Notice the answers to the questions. In addition there is a commentary on the lesson. The worshiper in the picture is wearing the tefillin or phylacteries. A question about this appears at the bottom of the next page. A detailed comment can be read about tefillin below the question.

Phylacteries (Greek) are two leather pouches inside which are placed parchment copies of the law. The pouch or box is held to the forehead or arm by leather straps. The box worn on the forehead has four compartments containing four strips of parchment with the following passages written on them: Exodus 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21. The box worn on the arm contains one compartment with all four passages written on one strip of parchment. Pharisees took the instruction to bind the law on the forehead and heart literally, as do modern pious Jews. They are typically worn daily for morning prayers, except on the Sabbath and feast days. Some Pharisees in Jesus' day wore them all day long to demonstrate their superior piety.

In Numbers 15:37-41 the Lord instructed the Israelites to make tassels on the corners of their garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. This is referred to as the hem (KJV), fringe (RSV) or edge (NIV) of Jesus' garment in Matthew 9:20; 14:36. Today the tassels are placed on the tallit or prayer shawl. On page four is a photo of a worshipper wearing the tefillin and tallit during prayers at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.