

Why Did Saul Change His Name to Paul?

Why did a Jewish man get rid of his Jewish name when he began to follow the Jewish Messiah? Sounds suspect doesn't it? Because it is!

The central author of the New Covenant—at least of the letters to the congregations—was a fellow by the name of Saul of Tarsus. He was both Jewish and a Roman citizen not to mention an orthodox rabbi. He studied under Gamaliel, one of the most respected Jewish scholars of his day.

He was so zealous for God and convinced that Jewish people who believed in Yeshua were deceived that he sought to arrest Jewish believers and even approved the stoning to death of Stephen, a leader among the first Jewish believers (Acts 7:58, 8:1).

However, on his way to Damascus to arrest believers, he was knocked to the ground and blinded by a great light. Yeshua spoke to him and convinced him that he was on the wrong side of this issue. After this dramatic encounter he became a believer and began to share the good news of Yeshua with Jewish people.

'Also,' Not 'Instead Of'

Many years later, as he traveled throughout the known world seeking to help both Jews and Gentiles discover a dynamic, personal relationship with the King of the Universe, the Bible refers to the fact that he had two names.

Then Saul, who was *also* called Paul ... (Acts 13:9, *emphasis mine*). Sadly, for centuries Christians have taught that Saul changed his name to Paul after he became a believer. In other words, *he had to get rid of his Jewish name and take on a*

Christian one. This is unreasonable on two levels.

No 1st-Century Christian Names

First, why would a Roman name be synonymous with a Christian name? Roman heritage was a pagan polytheistic (belief in many gods) heritage and Rome became the primary persecutor of the body of believers for the first three hundred years. Furthermore, there was no such thing as a *Christian Name!* The name Paul only became a Christian name *because of Paul.*

Secondly, if Saul truly changed his name from a Jewish one to a Roman one, then why did he wait so many years after coming to faith to do so?

Jews Get Two Names

Anyone who grew up in a Jewish home outside of Israel would know that *it is common for Jewish people to have two names*, one that is connected to the area in which they live and a Hebrew name. My English name is Ron, but my parents also gave me the name Chaim, which is Hebrew for *life*. (Nevertheless, I go by Ron here in Israel because it is also an accepted Hebrew name and *way cooler!*)

When Saul was traveling in non-Jewish areas, he used his Roman name. Notice the passage doesn't say, "Saul, *who changed his name* to Paul," but rather, "Saul, *who was also called Paul...*" (Acts 13:9) as, *in addition to*, not *instead of*.

Just today, I was listening to one of my favorite teachers on my iPod while jogging. This man is an excellent bible teacher and he loves Israel. He and his church have given sacrificially to the body believers here. In his message he referred to when Yeshua appeared to "Saul"... then adding that he used Saul and not Paul because that is what "*his name was then.*" If someone so bright and anointed can miss this simple point, how easy has it been for the enemy to rob Saul, the second greatest figure in the New Covenant, of his Jewish

identity and thus confuse the nature of the New Covenant.

What's the Big Deal?

Good question ... for which there is an answer. The enemy has worked hard to blind the Jewish people to Yeshua. However, the ancient Church has helped by de-judiazing many of the central characters of the New Testament. Paul is not presented as Sha'ul, a learned rabbi who followed the Jewish Messiah, but as a *former Jew* who started a religion foreign to Judaism.

Certainly this was not the case in his mind as he states "For this reason therefore I have called for you ..., because for *the hope of Israel* I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20). In the mind of Sha'ul is not suffering for a new religion, but the *hope of Israel*.

Let's expose this Identity Theft and present Yeshua to the Jewish people in His original Jewish/Hebraic context.

Footnote: The name Paulos in Greek means *small* or *humble*. If Paul did take on this name later in life, it would not been to separate himself from his Jewishness (See Acts 21:20ff, Acts 23:6), but more a nickname that may have been given to him to reflect his humility, as he calls himself the *least of the apostles* and even the *worst of sinners*.

Of course, his embracing such a nickname would not have been so humble, so I am inclined to believe that he did indeed have a Jewish name and a Greek name.

Can you think of some other ways in which the gospel has been cleansed of its Jewishness? Use the comments section below.

Ron Cantor is the director of **Messiah's Mandate Int'l** in Israel, a Messianic Ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Ron also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish Roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of *Tiferet*

Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book, *Identity Theft*, will be released on April 16th. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.