

This was the place Saul wanted to see the most. His father was a Pharisee, one of the defenders of the Mosaic law, strict in his life and in his living. So, his father, and his grandfather before him, and Saul wanted to be a Pharisee, but there was also a name that he had heard spoken with great reverence and admiration, and that was the name of a teacher who held forth in Jerusalem. His name was Hillel, and he had lived to be a hundred years old. His son had sat at his feet.

Hillel had only recently died. Saul knew this, but he wanted to see the place where he had taught. And he went there to watch and to hear the son, Simon, hold forth on the teachings, the deepest understandings of the law of Moses. And beside Simon was his son, whose name was Gamaliel, and Saul listened with great intent. Would Simon be alive long enough for when Saul reached around 22 or 24 to be able to go to Jerusalem and live there and study under the great Simon, son of Hillel, or the great-grandson of Hillel, whose name is Gamaliel? But there was something else that he noticed, and that was that there was another cloister, an enclave right beside that one. Many students gathered around to listen to these men teach.

The man who had been a contemporary of Hillel was a man by the name of Shammai, and he was a competing teacher with Hillel. And Saul's father reached down and said that both of them had names their students had given them. Shammai was called "the binder"; he was so strict. And the other was Hillel, who was called "the looser", because you could get loose from the teachings of the binder, whereas the binder gave you no room whatsoever. Shammai taught a Mosaic law so strict that no man on earth could live up to it.

Saul looked to one course and then to the other, and he noticed young men his own age standing in the crowd staring at the cloister that had once been the place of Hillel and the cloister that had also at one time been the place of teaching for Shammai. He took note of those young people and wondered if he might see them someday when they were his own age. He need not have wondered. He had no need to wonder at all.

So, it was after the Passover that the trip back to Tarsus was repeated all over again. Paul had come back home, there to apply his skill as one who made Cilician cloth and Cilician tents. He knew that if he ever gained the complete skill of a tent maker, it mattered not where he lived in the world, if he put up a simple little sign that said 'Cilician' or 'Tarsus' tent maker, he would be sought after above any other kind of tent maker or tent repairer in any city anywhere.

And then something very interesting took place as Paul watched the years pass, constantly attending to the synagogue, always carrying his tefillin, growing in wisdom, growing in legalism, growing in the law, and growing in obedience to others who had come before him in their interpretations of the law. But when he was 18 years old, with plans to come live in Jerusalem spinning in his head, he began to hear something. It was news that would always spread from one synagogue to another, from one city to another, from one nation to another. In fact, the marketplace for both Gentile and Jew was a place to get news virtually every day. There was always someone coming in with information. There was always a place to either speak it or to have someone write it on the wall. That was the center place of receiving news. But most of that news was news

concerning the emperor and things that had to do with the city of Rome. It was also true that the only thing that you would receive there that was official was good tidings and good news about the emperor himself, but the whispers that went with it were always more interesting than the news. On this occasion, some men had come from Israel and were talking about some very strange events taking place, not in Jerusalem, nor Damascus, nor Caesarea, nor any of the other cities, but were taking place in the desert.

Saul was 18 years old. The year was 26 AD. It was an interesting year to say the very least. Tiberius had been ruling from the palace in Rome, but he had grown more sullen, darker in his mood. He had developed complete paranoia, thinking that just about anyone out there was plotting to kill him. He also decided that year to move out of the city of Rome. The palace there on Palatine Hill had been there for centuries, but it was also located in the filthiest and noisiest single spot on this entire earth. Yes, a place where people literally died from lack of sleep because of the noise.

The Emperor himself also had a villa outside the city, usually stationed not too far away from the peaceful cemeteries. People leaving on holidays would come to those cemeteries and have outings, lunch, and dinner together there among the quiet hills, stones, urns, and tombs. But this time, Tiberius would do more than that. He decided to move out of the city of Rome entirely. He would go to the island of Capri, out in the waters just off the coast of Naples. It was an interesting island. It had been given over to the wealthy to come there for leisure times, but now it was becoming the possession of the emperor himself, beautiful, well-kept, but the end of one end of the island was a cliff. They said it was a thousand feet high. At least it was very high, and he intended, this Tiberius, to make good use of it.

So, it was in the year 26 that he turned over the taking of messages and giving an alter ego to a man named Sejanus, who would take care of Rome when Tiberius was out of the city. Although Tiberius would come on rare occasions to the Senate to speak, usually in a few words, and then leave, no one wondered how Sejanus would end up. Foolish man, it seemed inevitable that one day he would incur the wrath of the emperor. And let this be known: what the emperor loved, the empire loved. What the emperor did not like, the empire did not like. And that which the emperor hated, the entire empire would make life miserable for such a one. It was for that reason the Jews had been so concerned about Tiberius.

At the age of 18, nothing had taken place in the life of Tiberius that had caused the Jews to feel threatened. There were three sections to this land of Israel. Galilee was ruled by a tetrarch who was the son of Herod, and he was the man whom Jesus would one day call the fox. His name was Antipas. Herod Antipas. Judea had been ruled for a short time by one of the sons of Herod, but Judah was a restless place. And in the year 26 AD, a military man took over as the governor of Judea. Now, let it be understood that some men in some provinces carried the name king, some of them proconsul, and some of them were simply referred to as governors, but if you belong to a not yet pacified province, chances are certain that you would be ruled by a procurator, a governor by the title of procurator as over against proconsul.

Now, all of the pacified provinces of all the Roman Empire were ruled over by the Senate. But those which were troublemaking provinces were ruled over by the emperor himself and entrusted to the hands of his procurators. Now, the procurators, governors, tetrarchs, and those who carried the title “king” but were not, all 104 of them, had to write an extensive letter to the emperor himself detailing what had happened in the last seven days. Every week, 104 men.

Now the new procurator, Pontius Pilate by name, arrived in Judea, being a harsh, rough, and sometimes even cruel, if not sometimes even disastrous, ruler. He decided to quell and break the will of the Hebrew people immediately. He had no more come by ship, docked in the harbor of Cessarea by the sea, taken his place in the palace, which also had a jail beneath it, a prison. A few days after his arrival, the Jewish people in Caesarea and in Jerusalem woke up to find that during the night, something called standards had been placed all over the city, both in Caesarea and Jerusalem. Now, these were, by Jewish minds, heathen flags intended to promote heathenism and did not belong in Jerusalem and should not be in Caesarea.

Remember these words that the population of Caesarea by the Sea was 50% Jewish and 50% Gentile, 50% heathen, and 50% of it Jewish. The Jews of Caesarea immediately asked for an audience with the governor and received it, in which they implored him to remove the standards. He said they would stay. For a Jew, this was blasphemy and in Jerusalem even worse. And so, a delegation from different parts of Judea asked for another audience with the governor. But rather than giving it to them, he made a plot; he would receive the Jews in a room filled with Roman soldiers. At a given point, he would tell them that if they did not immediately leave his room with their foolish requests, they would all have their heads cut off. And all the soldiers would instantly pull out this Roman sword.

And so, the Jews came in and implored Pontius Pilate to please remove the standards. He immediately made his declaration. The swords came out from the fists of every Roman soldier in the room, and, expecting the people to scream and leave in fear, all of the Jews fell on their faces before the feet of Pontius Pilate and pulled back their hair, exposing their necks, inviting death. Pontius Pilate had underestimated the monotheistic Hebrews.

Horried and remembering that he had a letter to write to the emperor and knowing that he dared not slaughter in his first week a large number of Jewish leaders, he gave in, and the next day the standards were all removed, but he would wait for his revenge. And he would wait for his revenge. The year was 26 AD. But there was something else that happened besides Tiberius moving out of Rome to Capri and from Pontius Pilate coming into Jerusalem in Cessarea and being met by devout Jews willing to die with their heads severed to have those pagan symbols removed.

And it was this. It was a very strange-looking man who had appeared out of nowhere. The hair of camels had been turned into threads and woven into a garment. It was an unclean animal, and it was rumored that he ate locusts, which were also considered unclean, and ate wild honey as his food. His hair had never been cut. His eyes were as black as coal, as was his hair, which reached almost to the ground. And instead of coming into the cities to proclaim the word of God, he began

preaching where caravans crossed in their paths and began to denounce the whole world by his strong and fervent words out there in the desert.

The people had to come to John rather than John coming to them. Sometimes he was in the wilderness in Judea, and crowds came. And there were times that he was near the Jordan River, and the crowds came to Galilee. And sometimes he crossed the Jordan River and baptized on the other side of Jordan, a word that hardly fell freely from the mouth of any devout Jew; beyond the Jordan was beyond Israel. And it said that he thundered against sin, that he thundered by name against some, and he also announced that the kingdom of heaven was very, very near.

His words were correct, for He (Jesus), “the kingdom” - He was very near. At 18, Saul, at every opportunity he got, learned all he could about what this almost insane-looking madman was saying. He was announcing the coming of the Messiah, and he was calling out that he himself was nothing but a cry out in the Judean wilderness. And so, did he listen, and so, did he plan and wait for the passing of years until the day he could leave home and go to Judea, perhaps meet this strange prophet, and sit at the feet of Simon or Gamaliel, until he would reach the age of somewhere between 20, 22, or 24. He had even found some of his kinsmen who agreed to let him live with them. In fact, they had looked forward to his coming. In fact, their names were Andronicus and Junia.