

Paul, Name of

Why do you call Rav Shaul the Apostle Paul?

Paul, or *Paulos* (Παῦλος), as it appears in the Greek, is the name that the Apostle most frequently calls himself in his letters. *Shaul* (שאול) or “Saul” was the original name given to this Jew who was born in the city of Tarsus. Like many Jews of the First Century, he was given two names: one Hebrew or Aramaic, and then another Greek or Latin. This is plainly attested by Acts 13:9 which speaks of “Saul, who was also *known as Paul*” (NASU).

It is not incorrect to refer to the Apostle Paul as Shaul, but we refer to him as the Apostle Paul because this is what he calls himself, as the vast majority of his audience was Greek-speaking. There are Messianics, and Messianic Bible translations, which fail to recognize the First Century reality of Shaul or Saul having two names. The first edition of *The Scriptures* (1993), a Sacred Name Only Bible, states, “Who changed the name of Sha’ul to Paul (Paulus)? We find no evidence in Scripture as to why, when, and by whom this change of his name was instigated. All we could find was this: The ancient Romans had a national hero named Paulus. Was this change from ‘Sha’ul’ to ‘Paulus’ done in order to appease the Roman people?”¹ This kind of reasoning is without any historical basis at all. The name of Shaul was not “changed” by some sordid, evil conspiracy, as some might try to make the naïve believe.

It is true that some in mainstream Christianity believe and teach that prior to his conversion of faith, this apostle was known as “Saul,” and then after his conversion at the Damascus Road, he had his name changed to “Paul.” Many of these people are as uninformed as the Messianics who believe that the name “Paul” was a fabrication of the Romans. The *Ryrie Study Bible*, a dispensationalist Christian source, correctly acknowledges in its commentary for Acts 13:9, “Saul was his Jewish name and Paul his Roman or Gentile name. Both were given him at the time of his birth, but he now begins to use his Gentile name in this Gentile environment.”² This is by no means an indication that Shaul had his name changed to Paulos by “evil scribes,” as some would like to insinuate, but a recognition of the reality that he had two names. Many Jews in the United States today are given a Hebrew name, and then a comparable English name.

The Salkinson-Ginsburg modern Hebrew New Testament translation actually uses the Hebrew form of *Paulos*, *Polos* (פולוס), in its translation of the Greek. Using *Paulos* is appropriate both for recognition of the fact that the Apostle had two names, and to be true to the source text of the Apostolic Scriptures.

We refer to the Apostle as Paul because he uses this name more times than his other name of *Shaul* or Saul, even though we have no problems with people calling him this. However, the conspiratorial claims of a few Messianics that his name was never Paul are without any substantial basis.

¹ *The Scriptures*, first edition (Randburg, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 1993), 1218.

² Charles C. Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible*, New American Standard (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1669.