



73 Twenty Ministries  
BIBLE STUDIES FOR THE ENTHUSIAST

# AT THE FEET OF GAMALIEL

EXAMINING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF JUDAISM'S MOST  
INFLUENTIAL FIRST-CENTURY TEACHER

73 TWENTY MINISTRIES

A TEACHING MINISTRY OF DR. ROBERT C CROWDER

## 73TWENTY MINISTRIES: CHARTING THE WORD, NAVIGATING FAITH

Rooted in a lifelong passion for teaching and guiding others in Biblical truth, 73Twenty Ministries is devoted to helping believers navigate the depths of Scripture with both clarity and conviction.

The name 73Twenty holds deep personal significance: it comes from my childhood home at 7320 Greenwood Boulevard in Denver, Colorado. It was here that the foundations of my faith, study, and service were first laid. With the majestic Rocky Mountains ever-present on my horizons, God's Word has been a constant guide and presence throughout my life. The logo of 73Twenty Ministries, with its three mountain peaks in gray, blue, and orange, symbolizes not only the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but also the unwavering foundation of Biblical truth upon which our faith is built.

For more than twenty years, I've served as a pastor, teacher, mentor, and author, committed to making Biblical truths accessible and applicable. Through sermons, Bible studies, books, articles, and other teaching resources, 73Twenty Ministries exists to equip believers, strengthen churches, and proclaim the Gospel. Our mission is both simple and profound: to chart the Word, guiding faith, and helping others anchor their lives in Scripture.

At 73Twenty Ministries, we believe that faithful Biblical study should engage the mind, transform the heart, and shape daily life. Whether through exegetical teaching, character studies, theological exploration, or practical application, every resource is crafted to deepen understanding, strengthen conviction, and encourage obedience to God's Word.

As a ministry grounded in a conservative Baptist, dispensationalist approach, we focus on Biblical exposition, doctrinal clarity, and practical discipleship. We uphold the belief that Scripture is the authoritative, inerrant, and sufficient Word of God, and it's our privilege to help others navigate its timeless truths.

I invite you to explore the resources at [73TwentyMinistries.com](http://73TwentyMinistries.com) and join us on this journey of discovery, growth, and unwavering faith. Together, let's stand on the mountain of God's truths and proclaim His name to every generation.

For His glory alone,

Dr. Robert C. Crowder, Th.D.

Founder, 73Twenty Ministries

# GAMALIEL: THE RENOWNED RABBI WHO TAUGHT THE APOSTLE PAUL

## INTRODUCTION

Gamaliel the Elder stands as one of the most significant figures in first-century Judaism and holds particular importance for Christian theology as the teacher who instructed Saul of Tarsus, later known as the Apostle Paul.<sup>1</sup> His influence on Jewish thought and his indirect impact on the development of Christianity through his famous student make him a figure worthy of careful study for understanding the religious and intellectual milieu of the New Testament period.

## HIS LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Gamaliel (Hebrew: גמליאל, meaning "God is my reward") was a prominent Pharisee who lived during the first century AD, roughly from 10 AD to 80 AD.<sup>2</sup> He was the grandson of the famous Rabbi Hillel the Elder, one of the most influential sages in Jewish history.<sup>3</sup> This distinguished lineage placed Gamaliel at the center of Jewish religious authority and learning during the crucial period when Christianity was emerging.

As a member of the Sanhedrin,<sup>4</sup> the supreme Jewish court and legislative body, Gamaliel held considerable political and religious influence. The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one members who served as the highest authority in Jewish religious and civil matters. His position there demonstrates the respect he commanded among his contemporaries and his role in shaping Jewish policy during a turbulent period of Roman occupation.

Gamaliel bore the distinguished title "Rabban" (our master), a designation reserved for only the most esteemed teachers and leaders. This title was even more prestigious than "Rabbi" and was typically given

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 22:3 records Paul's testimony: "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day."

<sup>2</sup> The exact dates of Gamaliel's life are debated among scholars, but most place his active ministry during the first century AD, coinciding with the emergence of Christianity and Paul's education in Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> Hillel the Elder (c. 30 BC – 10 AD) was one of the most important figures in Jewish history, known for his compassionate interpretation of Jewish law and his famous summary of the Torah: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary."

<sup>4</sup> Sanhedrin (Hebrew: סנהדרין, from Greek συνέδριον, meaning "sitting together" or "council") was the supreme council and tribunal of the Jews during the Second Temple period, consisting of seventy-one members including the high priest who served as president. The Sanhedrin functioned as both the highest religious court for matters of Jewish law and as a limited civil court under Roman oversight, with authority over capital cases (though execution required Roman approval), temple administration, and religious disputes. It met in the Chamber of Hewn Stone within the temple complex until 30 AD, when it relocated to the "trading post" due to the increase in capital cases, and later moved to various locations in Jerusalem.

to the presidents of the Sanhedrin or those of exceptional learning and authority. Only seven men in Jewish history have been honored with this title, underscoring Gamaliel's exceptional status.<sup>5</sup>

### HIS MINISTRY AS A RABBI

Gamaliel's rabbinic ministry was characterized by moderation, wisdom, and careful deliberation. Unlike some of his more rigid contemporaries, he represented a more liberal interpretation of Jewish law while maintaining deep reverence for Scripture and tradition. His approach to teaching and legal interpretation reflected the school of Hillel, which emphasized compassion and practical application of the law rather than strict legalism.

His teaching method appears to have been thorough and comprehensive. According to Acts 22:3, Paul testified that he was "brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers."<sup>6</sup> This indicates that Gamaliel's instruction was both intensive and extensive, covering not only the written Torah<sup>7</sup> but also the oral traditions<sup>8</sup> and rabbinical interpretations that would later be codified in the Mishnah<sup>9</sup> and Talmud.<sup>10</sup>

The phrase "at the feet of" suggests the traditional posture of students sitting on the ground while their teacher sat on an elevated seat or chair. This physical arrangement symbolized the respect and humility

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<sup>5</sup> The title "Rabban" (Hebrew: רַבָּן, meaning "our master") was the most prestigious rabbinic title in ancient Judaism, reserved exclusively for presidents of the Sanhedrin (Nasi). According to Jewish tradition, only seven men in history received this distinguished honor: (1) Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai (c. 30-90 CE), the sole non-Hillel descendant who received the title due to his extraordinary role in preserving Judaism after the Temple's destruction in 70 CE; (2) Rabban Gamaliel the Elder (c. 10-80 CE), grandson of Hillel and teacher of the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:3); (3) Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel I (c. 10 BCE - 70 CE), son of Gamaliel the Elder and Nasi of the Great Sanhedrin; (4) Rabban Gamaliel II of Yavneh (late 1st century CE), who succeeded Yochanan ben Zakkai and reorganized Judaism after the Temple's destruction; (5) Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel II (early 2nd century CE), who served during the period leading to the Bar Kokhba revolt; (6) Rabban Gamaliel III (early 3rd century CE), son of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi who compiled the Mishnah; and (7) Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel III (3rd century CE), the final recipient before the patriarchal office was abolished in 426 CE. The title was restricted to descendants of Hillel the Elder (except for Yochanan ben Zakkai) and represented the pinnacle of rabbinic authority, being greater than "Rabbi" but less than bearing no title at all according to Talmudic hierarchy.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase "at the feet of" indicates the traditional posture of disciples sitting on the ground while their rabbi sat on an elevated chair, symbolizing respect and the formal teacher-student relationship.

<sup>7</sup> Torah (Hebrew: תּוֹרָה, "instruction" or "law") refers to the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), also known as the Pentateuch. In its narrowest sense, Torah designates the written law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

<sup>8</sup> Oral Traditions (Hebrew: Torah she-be'al peh, "Torah that is on the mouth") refers to the body of interpretations, explanations, and applications of the written Torah that were believed to have been transmitted orally from Moses through successive generations of Jewish teachers and rabbis.

<sup>9</sup> Mishnah (Hebrew: מִשְׁנָה, "repetition" or "study") is the first major written collection of Jewish oral traditions, compiled and edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince around 200 AD, organized into six orders covering various aspects of Jewish law and practice.

<sup>10</sup> Talmud (Hebrew: תַּלְמוּד, "learning" or "study") refers to the vast collection of rabbinic discussions and commentaries on the Mishnah, with two versions: the Jerusalem Talmud (c. 400 AD) and the more comprehensive Babylonian Talmud (c. 500 AD).

expected of students toward their teachers. Paul's use of this expression indicates the formal nature of his education under Gamaliel and the depth of instruction he received.

Gamaliel's reputation as a teacher extended far beyond his famous student Paul. Jewish sources describe him as one of the great sages of his generation, and his legal opinions and interpretations were highly regarded. He was known for his ability to balance strict adherence to Jewish law with practical wisdom and mercy, a characteristic that would have provided Paul with a sophisticated understanding of both legal precision and pastoral sensitivity.

## HIS IMPORTANCE IN JUDAISM

Gamaliel's significance in Judaism extends across multiple dimensions of Jewish religious and intellectual life. As the successor to his grandfather Hillel's school of thought, he helped establish many of the interpretive principles that became fundamental to rabbinic Judaism. His legal decisions and teachings influenced the development of Jewish law for centuries to come.

One of his most famous rulings concerned the rights of women in marriage, specifically regarding the *get* (divorce document). Gamaliel instituted important reforms to protect women from being abandoned by husbands who traveled to distant lands and failed to return or send divorce papers. This demonstrated his concern for justice and his willingness to adapt traditional interpretations to address contemporary social problems.

In the realm of ritual law, Gamaliel made significant contributions to the standardization of Jewish practice. He was instrumental in establishing uniform procedures for various religious observances and helped codify practices that had previously varied from community to community. His decisions on matters of ritual purity, Sabbath observance, and festival celebrations became authoritative precedents.

Perhaps most significantly for Jewish-Christian relations, Gamaliel demonstrated remarkable wisdom and restraint in his response to the early Christian movement. According to Acts 5:34-40, when the apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin for preaching about Jesus, it was Gamaliel who counseled moderation.<sup>11</sup> His famous advice to "refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" reflects both his theological wisdom and his practical approach to religious disputes.

This incident reveals Gamaliel's character as a man who valued careful observation and divine providence over hasty action. His counsel likely prevented a more severe persecution of the early church at a crucial stage in its development. Whether this was his intention or simply the result of his general wisdom and caution, his intervention had profound implications for the spread of Christianity.

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<sup>11</sup> This incident, recorded in Acts 5:34-40, demonstrates Gamaliel's cautious wisdom and may have prevented more severe persecution of the early church at a crucial stage in its development.

## HIS LASTING LEGACY

Gamaliel's influence on Judaism continued long after his death through his disciples, his recorded teachings, and the precedents he established. The Mishnah preserves several of his legal opinions and interpretations, ensuring that his contributions to Jewish law remained part of the ongoing rabbinical tradition. His approach to balancing tradition with practical application became a model for subsequent generations of Jewish teachers and leaders.

Through his most famous student, the Apostle Paul, Gamaliel's impact on Christianity was immeasurable. Paul's thorough grounding in Jewish law, his sophisticated understanding of Scripture, and his ability to engage with both Jewish and Gentile audiences all reflect the quality of education he received under Gamaliel's tutelage. The intellectual rigor and theological depth that characterize Paul's epistles bear the marks of his teacher's influence, even as Paul applied his learning to the proclamation of the Gospel.

The respect accorded to Gamaliel extended beyond his lifetime, with later Jewish sources referring to him as "the beauty of the law" and recording that "when Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the law ceased, and purity and abstinence died." Such tributes indicate the profound impact he had on his generation and the sense of loss felt at his passing.

## CONCLUSION

Gamaliel represents a crucial link between the religious world of Second Temple Judaism and the emerging Christian church. His combination of learning, wisdom, and moderation made him an ideal teacher for the future Apostle Paul, providing him with the intellectual tools and theological foundation that would prove essential in his missionary work. For students of Scripture and theology, understanding Gamaliel's life and ministry provides valuable insight into the Jewish background of the New Testament and the educational formation that prepared Paul for his extraordinary apostolic ministry. His legacy reminds us that God often uses faithful teachers and scholars to prepare His servants for the work He has called them to accomplish.

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