

Who are three people mentioned the most in the New Testament?

The truth is, the more times a person is mentioned in the NT, the more significant they are to the NT.

OK, who is mentioned the most?

If your guess was Jesus, you are right. Jesus is mentioned, 1275 times in the NT. That's an easy one.

Second, would be Peter who is mentioned 176 times; But Peter is also known - as Cephas 4 times, and as Simon, 33 times.

Third would be the Apostle Paul, mentioned 202; But he is also mentioned as Saul 32 times.

Saul later changes his name to Paul, and so in the NT, Saul and Paul are one in the same. Saul is one of the most important people in the NT, so important that he ended up writing a good portion of the NT.

Saul was a Pharisee and his father was a Pharisee. He was from the Hebrew tribe of [Benjamin](#). Unlike many Jews of the day, Saul was a Roman citizen, something that would help him greatly as he traveled the Roman Empire. He was not originally from Palestine like the rest of the Apostles, but was from [Tarsus](#), located in what is now present day Turkey. Tarsus is a very old city, it was about 1000 years old when Saul lived there.

Though Saul was born in Tarsus he apparently spent most of his life in the Jerusalem area, perhaps arriving at a young age to be educated under the [Rabbi Gamaliel](#) - one of the greatest of rabbinical teachers of the day. We know that Saul must have been one smart cookie as the rabbis of the day would generally only take a total of about 12 students.

Saul was a contemporary of Jesus and Saul was probably at the Temple for his education when Jesus visited the Temple at age 12. Though Jesus and Saul never met during Jesus' ministry on earth. We saw a couple of weeks ago that Saul was introduced to Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. Jesus appeared to him, knocked him to the ground and blinded him - Saul later became a believer in Jesus Christ, then known as a follower of "The Way," now known as, Christianity.

All of this background made Saul the perfect person to spread the Gospel to those who were not Jewish by birth - the Gentiles. A Gentile is simply a person who is not ethnically Jewish, that's pretty much all of us here.

God uses all of Saul's life, both the positive and the negative, to build him into the person he needed him to be. God took Saul, all he was, even the passion he had against Christians, God took all Saul was, reversed his direction and then made him into the man he wanted him to be.

God takes all of your life experience, things events you are proud of and the things you hope no one will ever find out about, God takes everything in from your life, then reverses your direction and then uses everything that happens in your life to make you into the woman or man He wants you to be.

Don't be ashamed of your background, or where you come from. You are who you are, very, very, specifically, so God can use you in His particular circumstance. See, when you give your life over to Jesus Christ, you do not start your new life in Jesus Christ from zero. All that has been in your life has molded you into who you are - and God takes advantage of your past. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

When Katie and I were in Seminary years ago, we were broke. So we did whatever we could to get by. One of the things we did was housesitting for people in town when they were on vacation. What we looked for most, was folks who would let us use their washer and dryer while we stayed there. The washer and dryer in our apartment building used a lot of quarters for a small load of laundry.

So we placed ourselves on the list at the Seminary of people willing to house sit. We stayed at some very nice places and people were, very generous - Then there was Mrs. Taylor. I'll never forget Mrs. Taylor. She sounded just like Julia Child. It was amazing.

At that time in downtown Princeton, people usually paid 20 - 40 dollars a day for a person to house sit. Mrs. Taylor offered, 2 dollars a day, I negotiated her up to 5 dollars a day - and we could use the washer and dryer.

When Mrs. Taylor called us up to housesit, all she wanted to know was the origin of our last names and who we were related to. She said she would get back to us. She called the next day saying that she had checked our family background and would like to have us come by her house to see if we would like the job. I thought that was a bit odd.

Now she didn't have any pets, so I thought taking care of the house would be easy, boy was I wrong. Mrs. Taylor had about 200 plants, and each plant had very specific instructions on how to care for it. She wanted some plants moved from one side of the house to the other side of the house at a specific time of day, and then moved back again. She wanted about 100 of the plants moved outside at 8 in the morning, then back in at noon, and back out again at 4 in the afternoon and finally back in again at 7 in the evening. Some of these plants were very large. It would take considerable time to do what she wanted.

AND she insisted that we water all the plants with this tiny watering can that held about a pint on water. She said in her Julia Child voice, "Carefully lift the leaves of the plant, pour the water, lift and pour, lift and pour."

It was a nightmare.

But, using her washer and dryer would save us a great deal of money so we agreed.

Now, while Katie and I and the plants were in Mrs. Taylor's house we notice this large black book on the coffee table boldly labeled, "The Princeton Society Directory."

So we took a look.

Inside was page after page of names listed in alphabetical order, and then several columns after each name: A cross reference to who you were related to; Your primary residence, your summer house, your beach house, any international houses; The name of your yacht, or two; The name of your yacht club, the name other clubs you belong to; The name of your our university - it went on and on.

Now, I know what you are thinking.

Mrs. Taylor checked out our family background, so we must be related to someone in the book! But, alas, a reference to Loughman, or a reference to Katie's maiden name, Lawson, was nowhere to be found. We were not people of respectable society. Even so, Jesus Christ has been able to use us for his purposes and whatever your background, Jesus Christ will use you as well.

God uses your past, whatever it is, proud of it or not to prepare you. He takes you for who you are and reverses the direction of your life and makes you in to the person he desire you to be.

This background gives our man Saul exactly what he needs to present the Gospel to the world. Saul is a top notch biblical scholar, (remember, only the part of the bible that was around at that time was the OT) and Saul was educated by the best Rabbi of the day. Who else would be able to put two and two together from the OT of how Jesus is truly the Son of God? And since he is a Roman citizen, from a respected Roman province, who else would be able to present the Gospel in terms the Gentiles could understand?

So Saul gets right to work in Damascus by going to the synagogues and telling everyone that Jesus is the Son of God. Understand that when Saul goes to a synagogue, the people expect him to present letters of extradition of believers back to Jerusalem. Remember we saw that Saul had obtained letters of extradition of the high priest in Jerusalem to bring Greek speaking Christians who had left the territory of Palestine, back to Palestine for prosecution. Instead Saul tells them that the Christians are right, Jesus is the Messiah.

People are taken back, verse 21, "All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?'"

We see Saul proves Jesus is the Christ, you see that there in verse 22. The word used for "prove" in this context in the Greek means that Saul lined up all the OT references showing how Jesus had fulfilled them.

Also notice that in verse 20 Saul teaches that Jesus is, "The Son of God." Now this is the only occurrence of the title, "Son of God" in the book of Acts and it is significant. This is the title the high priest uses in Matt 26:63 when he questions Jesus at his trial, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

This designation is used immediately by Saul as a way of describing Jesus as the fulfillment hope for in the OT. The title “Son of God” marks Jesus out as the true representative of Israel and God’s anointed king. But, it is no mere title, it also expresses the relationship of Jesus with the Father. (Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22) Also implicit in this title is Jesus’ perfect obedience to God, and that Jesus is the ultimate revealer of God and THE authorized agent of God. By Saul teaching that Jesus is the Son of God, we see that Saul is proving to a Jewish audience that Jesus is the Messiah. Saul talks about Jesus in this way as he is now speaking to other Jews.

Now let’s stop at verse 22, for in verse 23 Luke takes a leap of time. Luke makes it sound like Saul leaves Damascus and heads for Jerusalem, but this is not the case. Luke is only giving us part of the story here and is leaving out some details that Paul fills us in on later.

Paul writes in Galatians 1:17-19, “nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother.

Saul stays in Damascus a few days preaching at the several Synagogues there and then heads out to Arabia. Arabia at that time was the [Nabataean Kingdom](#) (this link shows only a partial map) which lay on the eastern frontier of Syria and stretched all the way to the red sea. You may remember, King Herod had a wife, Phasaelis, who was a Nabataean. The capitol of the Nabataean Kingdom was the city of [Petra](#) which we all saw in the that Indiana Jones movie. So when Saul says he is going to Arabia, Saul means he is going to the Nabatean Kingdom. Most likely, Saul spent some time in the city of Petra preaching the gospel.

Now, we may suppose that Saul went to Arabia for a time of solitude, a retreat of sorts, but the context, here and in Galatians, tells us that Saul goes to Arabia soon after his conversion and commission to preach to the Gentiles, this suggests that he went there to preach the Gospel. Why would he stop preaching the Gospel, if he is found preaching it right after his conversion?

So, Saul is there in Arabia for three years and then he comes back to Damascus, where we pick up again in verse 23, "After many days had gone by..." Saul is back in Damascus and some men decide to kill Saul and so they watch the gates by day and night.

Now understand that these guys cannot just murder Saul without some sort of authorization, just like Saul could not murder Christians without papers from the high priest. Well then, who is giving authorization to kill Saul?

We see in 2Corinthians 11:32 that the governor under [King Aretas](#) had the city of Damascus guarded in order to arrest Saul. Aretas 9 BC - 40 AD was ruler of the Nabataean Kingdom where Paul spent some three years after his conversion. Apparently Saul had somehow annoyed the Nabataean authorities with his preaching activities in their kingdom and so the local ethnarch was advised of Saul's whereabouts and the city gate was watched so he could be brought to the Nabataean authorities.

The absence of any Roman coins found in the city of Damascus from 34-62 AD suggests that at this time Damascus was a part of the Nabatean kingdom. So it was King Aretas who gave the go ahead to arrest Saul from within his kingdom.

So Saul is lowered in a basket, and escapes to Palestine where the Nabataean have no authority to arrest him.

However, when Saul shows up in Jerusalem 3 years later, people had not forgotten him. Notice in verse 26 that the disciples refuse to see him not believing that he was the real thing. We may picture the disciples as fearless men, but here, we see they are very much human, and very much afraid.

Don't think that because you have experienced fear in working out your Christians walk that, having that fear somehow makes you less of a Christian. Fear is something normal we experience as we mature in Christ.

Saul finds himself alone in the city, his old friends and colleagues will not want to spend time with him, and the Christian believers in town think that Saul may be trying to trick them and when all seems lost, Barnabas helps him out. Here in verse 27 it says that [Barnabas](#) brought him to the Apostles. We could take that to mean that ALL the Apostles

were there, but Luke, who is being brief here, offers a generalization, Saul does not meet with all of the apostles, he only meets with two apostles, Peter and James. (Gal 1:18-24) Saul now lives with the Apostles and spends his time in Jerusalem. Saul takes up the work now, that was laid down when Stephen was killed, and debates the Greek speaking Jews, just as Stephen did, but like with Stephen, they want to kill Saul also. What comes around goes around.

So, those Saul tried to kill just three years before, are now taking him to safety, out of Palestine. They take him to the closest port [Caesarea](#), put him on a boat and send him off to Tarsus.

What a reversal of roles.

For anyone who was alive in Saul's day, Saul was the LAST person who they would have thought would make a great impact for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They took a look at his background, they took a look at who he was and concluded that Saul that Jesus were polar opposites. But they were wrong.

For us, it is hard to see how impossible it was for a man like Saul, to become a man like Paul. We read his powerful words and think that Saul was something other than the rest of us. But that is not true, Saul allowed himself to be used by God, and God in His turn took all that Saul was and great thing happened for the kingdom of God.

For you and I, it is the same. For remember, as we go through the book of Acts, we have learned that the book of Acts is not about the church, nor is it about the Apostles, the book of Acts is about Jesus Christ. Saul became great in the kingdom of God, because of Jesus, we become great in the kingdom of God for the same reason, because of Jesus.