Was the Apostle Paul a Jew?

Paul was a Jew who took great pride in his Jewish heritage. He lays out his Jewish credentials in Philippians 3:5-6: "If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee." The fact that he was circumcised on the eighth day means that his parents followed the commandment God gave to Abraham in Genesis 17:2. He was an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, one of the two tribes that remained loyal to David's line after the kingdom divided (see 1 Kings 12). It is also interesting that Israel's first king, Saul, was of the tribe of Benjamin and Paul's Hebrew name was Saul. Although Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28) of the city of Tarsus (Acts 21:39), he was "a Hebrew of Hebrews," meaning that he was raised according to Hebrew law and culture. He eventually moved to Israel and became a Pharisee (cf. Acts 26:5), which means that he was dedicated to keeping the Law in minute detail.

The gospel was more important to him than his Jewish heritage. Although, as a Christian, he was no longer under obligation to follow the Jewish Law, he would do so if that would give him the opportunity to share the gospel with other Jews. When with the Gentiles, Paul adapted to their practices. "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law" (1 Corinthians 9:20-21).

Christ called Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8). However, he still hoped and prayed for the salvation of Israel since they had, in large,

rejected the righteousness of Christ in favor of their own righteousness. Paul expresses his yearning in Romans 10:1-4: "Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

Although Paul was a Jew who loved his own people, he knew that in Christ Jews and Gentiles had been brought together, as he explains in Ephesians 2:11-22: "Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are

being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." And in Galatians 3:28 Paul explains, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Paul was a Jew whom God chose to take the good news of Israel's Messiah to the Gentiles, so that they, too, could be saved.