

What Did Paul Look Like?

Church tradition offers no descriptions of the physical appearance of Jesus, but one second-century work does provide a description of Paul (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 3):

Paul appeared to observers as “a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.”*

Is this accurate? The description is sufficiently early to be informed by actual memory and, furthermore, does not present a flattering portrait such as might suggest idealization. It also accords with passages from Paul's letters that suggest his outward appearance was unimpressive (2 Cor. 10:10; Gal. 4:13–15). Martin Luther voiced his own (uninformed) opinion on this subject: “I think that Paul was a pathetic, ugly, and scruffy little man—like Philipp.” Luther apparently was referring to his friend Philipp Melanchthon.†

*W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1964), 2:354.

†See Abraham Malherbe, “A Physical Description of Paul,” in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 165–70.