

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 38

Sha'ul's Second Missionary Journey ~ Part 6

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

We continue our ongoing story of **Sha'ul's Second Missionary Journey** beginning in Acts 16:25.

Philippian Jailer Converted

25 Around midnight, Sha'ul and Sila were praying and singing hymns to God while the other prisoners listened attentively.

Recall from our last post in verse 23 that there would be no sleep for the **emissaries** that night, thanks to their pain and uncomfortable position. But amid their suffering, they displayed their trust in **God** and their joy by **praying and hymns** praise to Him. I am not sure I could have done that.

26 Suddenly, there was a violent earthquake which shook the prison to its foundations. All the doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.

Luke does not say so, but clearly, the **violent earthquake** was an act of **God** in response to the prayers and praises of **Sha'ul** and **Sila**. The **jailer** understood this (v. 29).

27 The jailer awoke, and when he saw the doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, for he assumed that the prisoners had escaped.

If prisoners escaped, their **Roman** guards or **jailers** were forced to serve their sentences. Believing his **prisoners had escaped**, the **Philippian jailer** preferred a quick death over imprisonment or execution.

28 But Sha'ul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!"

Sha'ul's shout from within the prison interrupted the **jailer's** action, telling him that all the prisoners were safe. Commentators have puzzled over how **Sha'ul** knew that nobody had escaped and that the **jailer** was about to kill himself when, as verse 29 shows, the **jailer** himself needed a light to see what was happening.¹

29 Calling for lights, the jailer ran in, began to tremble, and fell down in front of Sha'ul and Sila.

30 Then, leading them outside, he said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?"

The **jailer fell trembling** because he realized the earthquake was supernatural. This prompted him to ask the most critical question in the book of **Acts**:

What must I do to be saved?

He was spared from death in the quake, spared from suicide by the discovery that the prisoners had not fled, and now wanted to be spared from **God's** future judgment.

31 They said, "Trust in the Lord Yeshua, and you will be saved - you and your household!"

¹ I. Howard Marshall, **Acts: An Introduction and Commentary**, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 288.

Trust in the Lord Yeshua (see Acts 11:20–23), **and you will be saved.** There are five conditions for the salvation of individuals stated in the **Brit Hadashah**:

- (1) Believing that Yeshua is Lord and trusting in Him (here & Romans 10:9).
- (2) Acknowledging him publicly (Romans 10:9, Lk 12:8).
- (3) Turning from sin to God (Mark 1:15, Acts 2:38).
- (4) Being immersed (Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16).
- (5) "Holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Messianic Jews [Hebrews] 12:14).

A person who meets the first four conditions but leads an ungodly life gives public evidence that he is not saved. **Sha'ul** names only the first condition, the touchstone, sensing that the **jailer** is ready to meet all the conditions as soon as they have been explained, which **Sha'ul** then does (v. 32).

³² Whereupon they told him and everyone in his household the message about the Lord.

³³ Then, even at that late hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed off their wounds, and without delay, he and all his people were immersed. ³⁴ After that, he brought them up to his house and set food in front of them, and he and his entire household celebrated their having come to trust in God. ²

The miracle served not to deliver them but rather to deliver the jailer.

~ John B. Polhill

The effect of the **jailer's** change of heart was seen, first, in his care for the physical needs of the **emissaries**; he did what he could to assuage the effects of their beating the previous day. After that, he and his family were immersed in the prison. Note that **Sha'ul** and **Sila** put the preaching of the gospel before their personal comfort, but the **jailer** saw to their needs before being immersed. The **jailer's** care for his prisoners was further emphasized by taking them into his **house**, where he provided for their needs in a meal, simultaneously expressing **Messianic** fellowship and joy at his and his family's conversion. After that, it can be presumed the **emissaries** had to return to their place in the prison. The other prisoners, likewise, would have been fastened up again, but **Luke** is silent on these unnecessary details of the story.

In our next post, we will continue to explore **Shaul's Second Missionary Journey**; we continue to learn more about **Sha'ul** and **Sila's** imprisonment starting in chapter 16:35.

² Acts 16:25–34.