

## Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 39

### Sha'ul's Second Missionary Journey ~ Part 7

**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 16:35.

#### Sha'ul & Sila Released from Prison

<sup>35</sup> *The next morning, the judges sent police officers with the order, "Release those men."* <sup>36</sup> *The jailer told Sha'ul, "The judges have sent word to release both of you. So come out and go on your way in peace."*

At dawn, the **Judges** ordered that **Sha'ul** and **Sila** be released. Some scholars claim verse 35 would be a suitable continuation of verse 24 <sup>1</sup> and that this and other "jailbreak" episodes are part of a body of mythical literature in which **God** rules over natural phenomena on behalf of His people. Hence, they claim verses 25–34 are fictional additions. Among several problems with this conclusion are the following: First, it is possible that the **Judges** ordered **Sha'ul** and **Sila** released because they realized that they had overreacted in jailing them in the first place. Second, it is very likely that the **Judges** experienced the earthquake and were told about the events at the jail, thus prompting them to fear **God's judgment**.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *But Sha'ul said to the officers, "After flogging us in public when we hadn't been convicted of any crime and are Roman citizens, they threw us in prison. Now they want to get rid of us secretly? Oh, no! Let them come and escort us out themselves!"*

**Sha'ul** knew the laws regulating the punishment of **Roman** citizens. Having been illegally beaten and denied **trial**, he refused to be released and pretended nothing had happened. **Sha'ul's Roman** citizenship is mentioned here for the first time in **Acts** (see Acts 22:25–29; 23:27; 25:11). **Roman** citizens were exempt from certain kinds of punishment (e.g., crucifixion) and were entitled to due process before punishment. (I may be showing my lack of remembering my civics lessons in high school, but I found it interesting that **Rome** practices "due process.") The question arises as to how **Sha'ul** would have proven his citizenship. There probably was a register in **Tarsus** that recorded his citizenship. Still, citizens also often carried small wooden tablets (some of which have been found), like a modern passport, that they used to prove their citizenship. Perhaps **Sha'ul** carried such a document.<sup>3</sup>

*I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law.*

~ Martin Luther King Jr.

<sup>38</sup> *The officers reported these words to the judges, who became frightened when they heard that Sha'ul and Sila were Roman citizens.* <sup>39</sup> *They came and apologized to them; then, after escorting*

<sup>1</sup> <sup>24</sup> *Upon receiving such an order, he threw them into the inner cell and clamped their feet securely between heavy blocks of wood.*

<sup>2</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *"Acts,"* in *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard (Broadman & Holman, 2015), 1188.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

**them out, requested them to leave the city. <sup>40</sup> From the prison, they went to Lydia's house, and after seeing and encouraging the brothers, they departed.**<sup>4</sup>

The fear of the judges is understandable. **Philippi** was a **Roman** colony that followed **Roman** law. Many people in the town would have known about the rights of a **Roman** citizen. Though not obligated to do so, **Sha'ul** and **Sila** counted the apology as amends for the wrongs they had suffered. It is often best for the **Believer** to forego demanding full justice.

In our next post, we will continue to explore **Shaul's Second Missionary Journey**; we will follow **Sha'ul** and **Sila** on their journey through Macedonia, starting in chapter 17:1.

---

<sup>4</sup> Acts 16:35–40.