

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 40

Sha'ul's Second Missionary Journey ~ Part 8

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 17:1.

Teaching In Thessalonica

This post will be short on **Scripture** but long on background information that will give us a better understanding of **Sha'ul's** writings.

¹⁷ ¹ After passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, Sha'ul and Sila came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue. ² According to his usual practice, Sha'ul went in, and on three Shabbats he gave them drashes from the Tanakh,

A **drash** or **drashah** is, literally, a "**searching**"; the word denotes a sermon, exegesis, exposition, or homiletical interpretation of a text. The typical form for a **drash** in the midrashic period (100 BCE to 500 CE) was: (1) introduction, consisting of a biblical verse with illustrations and parables, leading up to (2) the particular text to be explained, now expanded by stories, allegories and associations with other texts, and (3) conclusion, consisting of exhortations and words of comfort and ending with the **Kaddish** prayer (a prayer of praise to **God** used in **Jewish** liturgy, especially at funerals or memorial services ¹). That **Sha'ul** frequently used **Talmudic** and **midrashic** (an ancient commentary on the part of the Hebrew scriptures, attached to the biblical text) thought patterns are illustrated by Romans 10:5–13; 1 Corinthians 9:9–14; 2 Corinthians 3:3–18; Galatians 3:16, 4:22–31. ²

³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead and that "this Yeshua whom I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah."

One hears opposition to "**proof-texting**," which means explaining and quoting **Scripture** passages to prove something, just like **Sha'ul**. The main argument against **proof-texting** is that it can be misused: passages can be quoted out of context or invested with a meaning the author never intended. These are indeed abuses; "**nevertheless, God's firm foundation stands**" (2 Timothy 2:19) when passages are quoted concerning context, with terms correctly translated and explained, and with account taken of the culture and background of the author and his intended readers, the method is perfectly proper. The rabbis throughout **Jewish** history used it, and it is reasonable to suppose that **Sha'ul's** methods of using **Scripture** were well within **Jewish** tradition.

The fact that the **Tanakh** is cited some 695 times in the **Brit Hadashah** shows that its writers were convinced that although **God** had done something unique and radically new in **Yeshua**, the meaning of what he had done could be adequately expressed only with the **Tanakh**. This conviction set the first **Believers** to read the **Tanakh** with new eyes, which led to understanding how it relates to **Brit Hadashah's** truth. For some purposes, it was sufficient to refer generally to "**the Scriptures**" or "**the Tanakh**" (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Still, frequently, significant events in the life of **Yeshua** were related to individual texts. However, one seldom finds in the **Brit Hadashah** the kind of far-fetched allegory common in later rabbinic and **Christian** interpretation, and there is rarely the kind of sustained verse-by-verse commentary on a **Tanakh** passage that can be found already at **Qumran** and later in both **Jewish** and **Christian** traditions (but Messianic Jews 3:7–4:11 has this character). In conclusion, in the **Brit Hadashah**, individual verses are used

¹ Susan Gillingham, "Psalms through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1–72."

² David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary.

with restraint to express the writers' underlying confidence that **Yeshua**, the **Messiah's** coming, is central to fulfilling **God's** purposes for **Isra'el** and the world.

The Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Sha'ul had to show this from the **Tanakh**, e.g., from Isaiah 52:13–53:12 and Psalm 16:8–11, because the **Jewish** people expected that the **Messiah's** first and most crucial act would be political liberation.

This Yeshua ... is the Messiah. The first task was to re-order Jewish expectations. The second, here, is to show that these new expectations are fulfilled in **Yeshua**.³

On that occasion, he dialogued with them from the OT concerning Christ's death and resurrection in order to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the promised Messiah (Acts 17:2, 3)

~ John F. MacArthur

⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and threw in their lot with Sha'ul and Sila, as did a great many of the Greek men who were "God-fearers," and not a few of the leading women.⁴

The expected consequence of trusting **Yeshua** is to remain in fellowship with those who led you to faith. **Sha'ul** and **Sila**, unlike many of today's evangelists, never left new **Believers** to flounder for themselves; we are not told of new **Believers** who went off by themselves, eschewing the company of other **Body** members.

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 17:5.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Acts 17:1-4.