Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 158

Sha'ul's Arrest and Trial ~ Part 3

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

We continue in the **Book of Acts**. **Sha'ul's Arrest and Trial** continues in Acts 21:40.

Sha'ul's Defense to the Crowd

21 [40] Having received permission, Sha'ul stood on the steps and motioned with his hand to the people. When they finally became still, he addressed them in Hebrew:

In Hebrew, literally, ***"in the Hebrew language,"*** which could have been either the **Aramaic** heard more often in public or the **Hebrew** still spoken in public but more often at home.

22 [1] "Brothers and fathers! Listen to me as I make my defense before you now!"

Brothers and fathers. **Stephen**, **Sha'ul's** former enemy, used the exact words to address an unfriendly audience (Acts 7:2). The fact that **Sha'ul's** circumstances here and his speech have several other features in common with **Stephen's** gives a certain sense of closure (Acts 7:58). [Maybe that is where to phrase *"what goes around, comes around"* was coined.]

[2] When they heard him speaking to them in Hebrew, they settled down more, so he continued: [3] "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city and trained at the feet of Gamli'el in every detail of the Torah of our forefathers. I was a zealot for God, as all of you are today.

Born in Tarsus. ***Sha'ul*** was born a **Hellenistic Jew**; by announcing this, he increases his identification with his **Asian** accusers. ***But brought up in this city***. He also identifies with the **Jerusalemites**, probably the majority of the crowd. ***And trained at the feet of Gamli'el***. On **Gamli'el** himself, see Acts 5:34. **Jewish tradition** says nothing about **Sha'ul's** apprenticeship with the most distinguished **rabbi** and **scholar** of his time. Neither the **Talmud** nor any early **midrash** says anything about him—a fact that cries out for an explanation. (When talking to the **Jewish Rabbi** where we lived in California, he told me that **Sha'ul** was the most despised **Biblical** character in the **Jewish** community.)

[4] I persecuted to death the followers of this Way, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. [5] The Cohen HaGadol and the whole Sanhedrin can also testify to this. Indeed, after receiving letters from them to their colleagues in Dammesek, I was on my way there in order to arrest the ones in that city, too, and bring them back to Yerushalayim for punishment.

This second report of **Sha'ul's** coming to trust in **Yeshua** diverges in some details from those in Acts 9:3–19 and Acts 26:13–18.

[6] "As I was traveling and approaching Dammesek, around noon, suddenly a brilliant light from heaven flashed all around me! [7] I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Sha'ul! Sha'ul! Why do you keep persecuting me?' [8] I answered, 'Sir, who are you?' 'I am Yeshua from Natzeret,' he said to me, 'and you are persecuting me!' [9] Those who were with me did see the

light, but they didn't hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. [10] I said 'What should I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go into Dammesek, and there you will be told about everything that has been laid out for you to do.' [11] I had been blinded by the brightness of the light, so my companions led me by the hand into Dammesek. [12] "A man named Hananyah, an observant follower of the Torah who was highly regarded by the entire Jewish community there,

Hananyah (Ananias) was an observant follower of the Torah who was highly regarded by the entire Jewish community there. In other words, the fact that he was a **Torah-true Jew** can be verified by whoever wants to do so. This fact about **Hananyah**, not reported in Acts 9:10–17, is relevant for **Sha'ul's** present audience. (Another instance of **Sha'ul's** appeal to objective verifiability is when he answered those who doubted whether Yeshua had been resurrected; see 1 Corinthians 15:5–8).

[13] came to me, stood by me and said, 'Brother Sha'ul, see again!' And at that very moment, I recovered my sight and saw him. [14] He said, 'The God of our fathers (Exodus 3:15) ***determined in advance that you should know his will, see the Tzaddik and hear his voice;***

The Tzaddik, or "the Righteous One," where **Stephen** used this term for **Yeshua** the **Messiah**. In Isaiah 53:11, **God** speaks of ***"my righteous servant,"*** who will ***"make many righteous."***

[15] because you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. [16] So now, what are you waiting for? Get up, immerse yourself, and have your sins washed away as you call on his name.'

Immerse yourself. The Jewish practice in the **mikveh**, for proselyte baptism and other ritual purifications, is self-immersion, in contrast with the common present-day **Christian** baptismal practice of being immersed by someone else.

[17] "After I had returned to Yerushalayim, it happened that as I was praying in the Temple, I went into a trance,

It happened that as I was praying in the Temple, I went into a trance; the ecstasy was unusual, but **Sha'ul's** praying in the **Temple** area was normal **Jewish** behavior. This fact, which **Sha'ul** mentions casually, without emphasis, is strong evidence that **Sha'ul** continued his usual **Jewish** practices after coming to faith in **Yeshua**.

[18] and I saw Yeshua. 'Hurry!' he said to me, 'Get out of Yerushalayim immediately because they will not accept what you have to say about me.' [19] I said, 'Lord, they know themselves that in every synagogue I used to imprison and flog those who trusted in you; [20] also that when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I was standing there too, in full agreement; I was even looking after the clothes of the ones who were killing him!' [21] But He said, 'Get going! For I am going to send you far away—to the Goyim!' " [1]

The **Lord** tells **Sha'u**l to leave ***Yerushalayim*** because the **Jewish** people there will not respond to his message. **Sha'ul** immediately trots out his **Jewish** credentials, objecting that the **Jews** of **Jerusalem** ought to accept what he says now because they know how diligently he opposed the **Believers** in the past. But **Yeshua** repeats his command, **"Get going!"** (v. 21).

In our next post, we will continue to learn about **Sha'ul's Arrest and Trial**.

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[1] Acts 21:40–22:21.