

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 166

Sha'ul's Appears Before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa ~ Part 6

We continue in the **Book of Acts**. **Sha'ul's Appears to the Roman Authorities** beginning in Acts 25:23.

Sha'ul Presented to an Audience

25²³ So the next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with much pageantry; they entered the audience room accompanied by military commanders and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Sha'ul was brought in.

The entrance of **Agrippa** and **Bernice** must have been quite an occasion, with the honored guests and other people forming an elaborate entourage.

24 Festus said, "King Agrippa and all of you here with us, do you see this man? The whole Judean community has complained to me about him both in Yerushalayim and here, crying that he shouldn't be allowed to remain alive.

Sha'ul's appearance before **Agrippa** had several similarities to **Yeshua's** appearance before **Herod Antipas**.

25 But I discovered that he had done nothing that deserves a death sentence. Now when he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.

Festus had not previously made it known publicly that he thought **Sha'ul** was innocent. Since **Sha'ul** had made his appeal to **Caesar**, **Festus** was now free to admit, without repercussion, that he believed the charges were groundless.

26 However, I have nothing specific to write to His Majesty about him. This is why I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa—so that after we have examined him, I might have something to write. 27 It seems irrational to me to send a prisoner without also indicating what the charges against him are."

Festus found the case not only groundless but perplexing. He hoped **Agrippa** would be able to help him think of a way to specify to the emperor the **charges** laid against **Sha'ul**.

Sha'ul Tells of His Mission ~ Part 1

26¹ Agrippa said to Sha'ul, "You have permission to speak on your own behalf." Then Sha'ul motioned with his hand and began his defense:

Sha'ul began his defense, not in a judicial sense, for he is not being tried before **Herod Agrippa II** (see Acts 25:13). Since he has already appealed to **Caesar** (Acts 25:11), it is before him that he will be making a formal defense in court. Instead, **Sha'ul** is "defending" his whole life, his **Gospel**, his **Lord**. From **Sha'ul's** (and **Luke's**) viewpoint, he is doing even more than that: he is making use of an extraordinary opportunity to proclaim the **Gospel** to yet another kind of audience, the ruling elite (compare Luke 21:12–15). His listeners see him as a prisoner, but he sees himself as a bringer of **Good News**. That **Sha'ul's** picture of the situation

is correct is seen in the responses of **Festus** (25:24) and **Agrippa** (25:25–29), for they relate not to **Sha'ul's** guilt or innocence but to the **Gospel** message. **Sha'ul's** speech may be outlined thus:

- (1) **Introduction** (26:2–3),
- (2) **Sha'ul** the zealous **P'rushim** (26:4–8),
- (3) **Sha'ul**, the zealous persecutor of **Messianic Jews** (26:9–11),
- (4) **Sha'ul** confronted by **Yeshua the Messiah** (26:12–18),
- (5) **Sha'ul**, the zealous preacher of **Yeshua** (26:19–20),
- (6) **Sha'ul's** arrest by zealous unbelieving Jews (26:21),
- (7) **Sha'ul** focuses his zeal on the *I-thou* encounter of the moment, as he offers his hearers salvation through trusting **Yeshua the Messiah** (26: 22–23, 25–27, 29).

The pivot point in **Sha'ul's** life, as well as in his speech, is part (4), his confrontation with **Yeshua**. The pivot in the lives of his hearers is part (7), his present proclamation of the **Gospel**, with its choice between obeying **God** or not. **Sha'ul's** zeal, the single-minded pursuit of his purpose in life, contrasts with the weak-kneed and indifferent superficiality of the **Roman** aristocrats, as portrayed in chapters 25 and 26: 24–32.

² "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate that it is before you today that I am defending myself against all the charges made against me by Jews, ³ because you are so well informed about all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. ⁴ "So then! All Jews know how I lived my life from my youth on, both in my own country and in Yerushalayim. ⁵ They have known me for a long time, and if they are willing, they can testify that I have followed the strictest party in our religion—that is, I have lived as a Parush.

Sha'ul can take it as a given that *all Jews know, ... and if they are willing, they can testify* about him (for evidence of this, see Acts 21:21 and possibly Acts 28:21–22). There had not yet been an effort to expunge **Sha'ul** from the history of the **Jewish** people (Acts:22-3), although, by implication, some Jews would already have refused to vouch for him. **In my own country, Cilicia**—and in particular, the city of **Tarsus. In Yerushalayim**, where **Sha'ul** had studied under **Rabban Gamli'el** (Acts 22:3). **I lived as a Parush, a P'rushim. Sha'ul** lived as a **P'rushim** in the past, and he continued doing so after he became a believer (Acts 23:6, Galatians 1:14, Philippians 3:5). By emphasizing, for the benefit of the gallery (**Agrippa** already knew it; see 26:2–3), that the **P'rushim** are *the strictest party of our religion*, all the more does he imply that as a **Messianic Jew**, he remained **Torah-observant** (see Acts 13:9, 21:21).

⁶ How ironic it is that I stand on trial here because of my hope in the promise made to our fathers! ⁷ It is the fulfillment of this very promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they resolutely carry on their acts of worship night and day; yet it is in connection with this hope, your Majesty, that I am being accused by Jews! ¹

How ironic! An informed Jew like **Agrippa** can appreciate the irony; this is why **Sha'ul** calls his attention to it by addressing him directly. **Agrippa** himself may not cherish the hope of resurrection, but he knows very well that **our twelve tribes** do.

Due to the length of this topic, we will continue the topic in our next post.

In our next post, we will continue to learn about **Sha'ul's Appearances Before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa**.

¹ Acts 25:23-26:1-7.