

Ask The Rabbi – March 1, 2022

Question:

Who is Sha'ul?

Response:

Who is Sha'ul – The Path of Two Rabbis

Sha'ul is a person who is most misunderstood by many believers, yet there is a great deal written about him in the New Covenant that provides us with many details as it pertains to his life, practices and beliefs. Thus it is surprising to this day that Sha'ul is still mischaracterized, misunderstood and misrepresented. Tonight's journey will look at Sha'ul and a contemporary of his. These are two rabbis who started off under the same schooling yet would travel two very different paths in their lives.

There once was a prominent Rabbi named Gamli'el, who had two students: Rabbi Sha'ul of Tarsus (A student) and Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai (Influenced by his school of teaching).

Two disciples, Two very different paths. Two very different outcomes.

Who is Gamli'el I (the mentor) – Acts 5:34 (a talmudic rabbi) Prominent Rabbi found in Talmud.

- First with the Title of Rabban, meaning “our master” or “our great one”
- One of great wisdom who garnered respect of many
- Grandson of Hillel, leader of the school of his disciples. One of two primary schools of teaching.
- A moderate, as witnessed by his response to the confrontation found in Acts 5:34-39

Act 5:34 But one of the members of the Sanhedrin rose to his feet, a Parush named Gamli'el, a teacher of the Torah highly respected by all the people. He ordered the men put outside for a little while

Act 5:35 and then addressed the court: "Men of Isra'el, take care what you do to these people.

Act 5:36 Some time ago, there was a rebellion under Todah, who claimed to be somebody special; and a number of men, maybe four hundred, rallied behind him. But upon his being put to death, his whole following was broken up and came to nothing.

Act 5:37 After this, Y'hudah HaG'lili led another uprising, back at the time of the enrollment for the Roman tax; and he got some people to defect to him. But he was killed, and all his followers were scattered.

Act 5:38 So in the present case, my advice to you is not to interfere with these people, but to leave them alone. For if this idea or this movement has a human origin, it will collapse.

Act 5:39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them; you might even find yourselves fighting God!" They heeded his advice.

What do we know about Rabbi Sha'ul of Tarsus?

1. Born of Jewish parents - Acts 23:6; Philippians 3:3 -5

Act 23:6 But knowing that one part of the Sanhedrin consisted of Tz'dukim and the other of P'rushim, Sha'ul shouted, "Brothers, I myself am a Parush and the son of P'rushim; and it is concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I am being tried!"

Php 3:3 For it is we who are the Circumcised, we who worship by the Spirit of God and make our boast in the Messiah Yeshua! We do not put confidence in human qualifications,

Php 3:4 even though I certainly have grounds for putting confidence in such things. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for putting confidence in human qualifications, I have better grounds:

Php 3:5 b'rit-milah on the eighth day, by birth belonging to the people of Isra'el, from the tribe of Binyamin, a Hebrew-speaker, with Hebrew-speaking parents, in regard to the Torah, a Parush,

2. A Roman Citizen – Acts 16:38; 22:25 – 27 (two names Acts 13:9)

Act 16:38 The officers reported these words to the judges, who became frightened when they heard that Sha'ul and Sila were Roman citizens.

Act 22:25 But as they were stretching him out with thongs to be flogged, Sha'ul said to the captain standing by, "Is it legal for you to whip a man who is a Roman citizen and hasn't even had a trial?"

Act 22:26 When the captain heard that, he went and reported it to the commander, "Do you realize what you're doing? This man is a Roman citizen!"

Act 22:27 The commander came and said to Sha'ul, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes," he said.

Act 13:9 Then Sha'ul, also known as Paul, filled with the Ruach HaKodesh, stared straight at him and said,

3. A prominent member of the Pharisees – Acts 7:57 – 60; 8:1; 23:6; 26:5;

Act 7:57 At this, they began yelling at the top of their voices, so that they wouldn't have to hear him; and with one accord, they rushed at him,

Act 7:58 threw him outside the city and began stoning him. And the witnesses laid down their coats at the feet of a young man named Sha'ul.

Act 7:59 As they were stoning him, Stephen called out to God, "Lord Yeshua! Receive my spirit!"

Act 7:60 Then he kneeled down and shouted out, "Lord! Don't hold this sin against them!" With that, he died;

Act 8:1 and Sha'ul gave his approval to his murder. Starting with that day, there arose intense persecution against the Messianic Community in Yerushalayim; all but the emissaries were scattered throughout the regions of Y'hudah and Shomron.

Act 9:1 Meanwhile, Sha'ul, still breathing murderous threats against the Lord's talmidim, went to the cohen hagadol

Act 9:2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Dammesek, authorizing him to arrest any people he might find, whether men or women, who belonged to "the Way," and bring them back to Yerushalayim.

Act 23:6 But knowing that one part of the Sanhedrin consisted of Tz'dukim and the other of P'rushim, Sha'ul shouted, "Brothers, I myself am a Parush and the son of P'rushim; and it is concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I am being tried!"

Act 26:5 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.

4. Torah observant his entire life – Acts 16:3; 21:23 – 26; 25:8

Act 16:3 Sha'ul wanted Timothy to accompany him; so he took him and did a b'rit-milah, because of the Jews living in those areas; for they all knew that his father had been a Greek.

Act 21:23 So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow.

Act 21:24 Take them with you, be purified with them, and pay the expenses connected with having their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that there is nothing to these rumors which they have heard about you; but that, on the contrary, you yourself stay in line and keep the Torah.

Act 21:25 "However, in regard to the Goyim who have come to trust in Yeshua, we all joined in writing them a letter with our decision that they should abstain from what had been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled and from fornication."

Act 21:26 The next day Sha'ul took the men, purified himself along with them and entered the Temple to give notice of when the period of purification would be finished and the offering would have to be made for each of them.

Act 25:8 In reply, Sha'ul said, "I have committed no offense — not against the Torah to which the Jews hold,

not against the Temple, and not against the Emperor."

5. A student of Gamli'el – Acts 22:3

Act 22:3 "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.

6. Employed – 1 Corinthians 9

A passion for Adonai and Torah, following the teachings of traditional Judaism as he understood it.

Considered the movement within Judaism that believed Yeshua was the Messiah, to be a threat to traditional Judaism for which he was fully immersed. He believed that what he was doing was correct and of Adonai.

A funny thing happened on the road to Damascus...Acts 9

- **An encounter with Yeshua, causing physical blindness**

Act 9:3 He was on the road and nearing Dammesek, when suddenly a light from heaven flashed all around him.

Act 9:4 Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Sha'ul! Sha'ul! Why do you keep persecuting me?"

Act 9:5 "Sir, who are you?" he asked. "I am Yeshua, and you are persecuting me.

Act 9:6 But get up, and go into the city, and you will be told what you have to do."

Act 9:7 The men traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Act 9:8 They helped Sha'ul get up off the ground; but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So, leading him by the hand, they brought him into Dammesek.

- **Hananyah knew of his reputation**

Act 9:13 But Hananyah answered, "Lord, many have told me about this man, how much harm he has done to your people in Yerushalayim;

Act 9:14 and here he has a warrant from the head cohanim to arrest everyone who calls on your name."

Act 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, because this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name to the Goyim, even to their kings, and to the sons of Isra'el as well.

- **Hananyah interceded and healed Sha'ul of his physical and spiritual blindness**

Act 9:17 So Hananyah left and went into the house. Placing his hands on him, he said, "Brother Sha'ul, the Lord — Yeshua, the one who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Ruach HaKodesh."

Act 9:18 In that moment, something like scales fell away from Sha'ul's eyes; and he could see again. He got up and was immersed;

- **After his transformation, he began proclaiming Adonai's truth about Messiah**

Act 9:19 then he ate some food and regained his strength. Sha'ul spent some days with the talmidim in Dammesek,

Act 9:20 and immediately he began proclaiming in the synagogues that Yeshua is the Son of God.

Act 9:21 All who heard him were amazed. They asked, "Isn't he the man who in Yerushalayim was trying to destroy the people who call on this name? In fact, isn't that why he came here, to arrest them and bring them back to the head cohanim?"

Act 9:22 But Sha'ul was being filled with more and more power and was creating an uproar among the Jews living in Dammesek with his proofs that Yeshua is the Messiah.

Additional information about his experience found in his letters and his own recounts later in Acts.

- What happened after his encounter – Galatians 1:15 – 17

Gal 1:15 But when God, who picked me out before I was born and called me by his grace, chose
Gal 1:16 to reveal his Son to me, so that I might announce him to the Gentiles, I did not consult anyone;
Gal 1:17 and I did not go up to Yerushalayim to see those who were emissaries before me. Instead, I immediately went off to Arabia and afterwards returned to Dammesek.

What happened during this time?

- A new perspective regarding Torah and Adonai.
- Preparation for taking the Jewish Messiah to the nations.

Just as Messiah revealed the truth about Himself to His talmadim, found in Torah and the Prophets, I believe the same thing occurred during this time with Sha'ul

It would be 3 years before he would travel to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders of the Messianic Community.

If he were to go to up to Jerusalem, immediately after, would he have been accepted or would his reputation as a persecutor of the Messianic community hindered him?

Gal 1:18 Not until three years later did I go up to Yerushalayim to make Kefa's acquaintance, and I stayed with him for two weeks,

What is taught about his transformation: New name, new creation.

He would become the emissary to the nations (gentiles)

What is an emissary?

- A person sent on a special mission as a representative.
- Representing the interests of someone else

As an emissary to the nations, did Sha'ul stop being Jewish after his transformation from persecutor of the Messianic community to supporter of the Messianic community?

His actions speak to the contrary.

Upon his transformation, he went first to the synagogue – Acts 9:19 – 20

Act 9:19 then he ate some food and regained his strength. Sha'ul spent some days with the talmidim in Dammesek,

Act 9:20 and immediately he began proclaiming in the synagogues that Yeshua is the Son of God.

His passion was not lost in his transformation, but redirected.

The cities documented in Acts that he traveled to, upon his arrival went to the synagogue first, meeting with his Jewish brethren.

- Pisidian Antioch - Acts 13:14 – 17
- Thessalonica - Acts 17:1 – 2
- Corinth - Acts 18:1 - 4
- Ephesus - Acts 19:1 - 9

Others actions of Sha'ul, after his transformation:

It seems like Sha'ul is always battling his reputation:

Act 21:18 The next day Sha'ul and the rest of us went in to Ya`akov, and all the elders were present.

Act 21:19 After greeting them, Sha'ul described in detail each of the things God had done among the Gentiles through his efforts.

Act 21:20 On hearing it, they praised God; but they also said to him, "You see, brother, how many tens of thousands of believers there are among the Judeans, and they are all zealots for the Torah.

Act 21:21 Now what they have been told about you is that you are teaching all the Jews living among the Goyim to apostatize from Moshe, telling them not to have a b'rit-milah for their sons and not to follow the traditions.

Act 21:22 "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

- **Help others fulfill the requirements of the vow they have taken: Read Numbers 6**

Act 21:23 So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow.

Act 21:24 Take them with you, be purified with them, and pay the expenses connected with having their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that there is nothing to these rumors which they have heard about you; but that, on the contrary, you yourself stay in line and keep the Torah.

- **Instruction to others regarding Passover:**

1Co 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know the saying, "It takes only a little hametz to leaven a whole batch of dough?"

1Co 5:7 Get rid of the old hametz, so that you can be a new batch of dough, because in reality you are unleavened. For our Pesach lamb, the Messiah, has been sacrificed.

1Co 5:8 So let us celebrate the Seder not with leftover hametz, the hametz of wickedness and evil, but with the matzah of purity and truth.

- **He lived according to what he believed and wrote to others:**

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God's powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who keeps on trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile.

Rom 1:17 For in it is revealed how God makes people righteous in his sight; and from beginning to end it is through trust — as the Tanakh puts it, "But the person who is righteous will live his life by trust."

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai – A talmudic rabbi who studied under Gamli'el

- Prominent Rabbi transforming Traditional Judaism.
- Convened Council of Yavneh – Life after the Temple
- Prominent within Talmudic writings

A Spiritual Crisis:

When Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai fell ill, his disciples went in to visit him. When he saw them he began to weep. His disciples said to him: Lamp of Israel, pillar of the right hand, mighty hammer! Wherefore weepst thou? He replied: If I were being taken today before a human king who is here today and tomorrow in the grave, whose anger if he is angry with me does not last for ever, who if he imprisons me does not imprison me for ever and who if he puts me to death does not put me to everlasting death, and whom I can persuade with words and bribe with money, even so I would weep.

Now that I am being taken before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who lives and endures for ever and ever, whose anger, if He is angry with me, is an everlasting anger, who if He imprisons me imprisons me for ever, who if He puts me to death puts me to death for ever, and whom I cannot persuade with words or bribe with money — nay more, when there are two ways before me, one leading to Paradise and the other to Gehinnom, and I do not know by which I shall be taken, shall I not weep? B'rakhot 28b

The angst, uncertainty conveyed.

Two Rabbi's from the same school of teaching, following two very different paths.

One Rabbi was the primary influence behind a transformed Judaism, one without a Temple.

The other was instrumental in presenting Adonai's truth of Messiah to the Jewish people and to the nations. Sha'ul was once fully immersed in traditional Judaism, but it took a life changing encounter with Yeshua to change the path he was on.

Messiah spoke of two paths:

Mat 7:13 "Go in through the narrow gate; for the gate that leads to destruction is wide and the road broad, and many travel it;

Mat 7:14 but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Was He foreshadowing the two paths that the Jewish people would end having to choose?

- Traditional Judaism transforming into Rabbinic Judaism vs. Messianic Judaism path

Was He foreshadowing the two paths within the body of Messiah.

- New testament only authority, Torah done away with path vs. Properly understood Torah and Messiah as final sacrifice and eternal High Priest path

Was He foreshadowing the path of the unbelieving and unaccepting world, in relation to believers.

Sha'ul's path was different from that of Zakkai:

Act 28:30 Sha'ul remained two whole years in a place he rented for himself; and he continued receiving all who came to see him,

Act 28:31 openly and without hindrance proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Yeshua the Messiah.

He would continue on this path without the fear that Zakkai expressed.

Unlike the 12 talmadim, his credentials were different: A pharisee, trained in Torah, both written and oral.

His calling was different – go to the goyim (nations), yet he never forgot his origin – Romans 11:1

Contrary to the consensus, Sha'ul didn't stop being Jewish upon his transformation.

Rom 11:1 "In that case, I say, isn't it that God has repudiated his people?" Heaven forbid! For I myself am a son of Isra'el, from the seed of Avraham, of the tribe of Binyamin.