

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Forty-Third Week - Fifth Day

SAUL, SAVED BY GRACE

*"Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.' And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" Acts 9:13-20).*

We should lose much of the advantage that the narrative of Saul's conversion was doubtless intended to convey if we neglect the conclusive testimony it affords to the truth and power of the gospel. Saul (or rather the Apostle Paul) himself was so deeply conscious of this that he used it as a favorite argument in his preaching; and without mentioning the repeated allusions to it in his epistles, it forms the main subject of two out of the five discourses preserved in the Acts of the Apostles.

An eloquent writer observes: "Next to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the descent of the Holy Ghost, the gospel history has no testimony which equals the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. It has been felt in all ages; and many a reflective mind, hitherto unmoved, has yielded to the power of this page of the gospel."<sup>1</sup> Monod certainly alludes here to Lord Lyttelton and his book *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*. From its study he became a sincere convert from skeptical or uncertain views. Lyttelton's book has given the world a memorable and candid work in which the proofs for Christianity are most convincingly produced; and the substance of his argument, with some additional remarks interspersed, may be fitly presented to our readers.

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<sup>1</sup> *St. Paul: Five Discourses*. By the Rev. Adolphe Monod. Translated by the Rev. W. G. Barrett. London, 1853.

A person who attests such things of himself as the Apostle Paul did in relating his conversion, must be one of two things: First, he is either an impostor (one who *sought to deceive*) or an enthusiast (one who *was himself deceived* by the fraud of others), or, second, he is one who *declared the truth* of what happened and thereby proved that Christianity is a Divine revelation.

That Saul was not an impostor can be shown by proving that he had no rational motives nor any means to carry on such a masquerade. If he expected to gratify his ambition or advance his temporal interest by assuming the face of a convert, he was greatly mistaken; for the death of Christ had made no impression upon the chief priests and rulers from whom alone he must look for promotion. No, they had instead begun a severe persecution against the followers of Christ, and one in which Saul himself took an active part.

What could possibly be his motive in such a masquerade? Surely not the hope of increasing his wealth, for we find that the consequence of taking the part he did was the loss not only of all he had but of all hope of acquiring more. Those whom he left behind were the dispensers of wealth, dignity, and power in Judea while those to whom he went were indigent men, oppressed and kept down from all means of improving their fortunes. Reputation and honor too were forsaken by him, as the sect he embraced lay under the greatest and most general contempt of any then in the world.

But perhaps it was the love of power that prompted his behavior. But power over whom? Over a flock of sheep driven to the slaughter and whose Shepherd had been murdered but a short time before? We know instead that he assumed no peculiar preeminence in the church. On the contrary, he declared himself the least of them, and less than the least of all saints. Neither did he try to make any changes in government or civil affairs. He did not concern himself with legislation, formed no commonwealths, raised no sedition, and affected no temporal power. Obedience to rulers was the doctrine he preached to the churches he planted; and what he taught others he practiced himself.

It is clear that by embracing the gospel Saul had nothing to gain but everything to lose. And without having the absolute conviction of Christianity being a Divine revelation, he would have been considered a mad man to embark on such a path; and if he made others profess it by fraud and deceit, he must have been worse than mad. No man with the least spark of humanity in his heart could subject his fellowmen to so many miseries as he knew must inevitably follow. Nor could any man with the smallest ray of reason expose himself to share such miseries with those he deceived in order to advance a religion which he knew to be false.

As Saul had no rational motive, neither had he any rational means of making such a masquerade successful. He had no associates. Not even the apostles were in any alliance with him. It is therefore impossible that he should contend alone with the power of the magistrates, the influence of the priests, the prejudices of the people, or the wisdom and pride of the philosophers.

By the same kind of reasoning it can be shown that Saul was no enthusiast. He had none of the usual distinguishing features of such a character. He did, indeed, possess a warmth of temper, but it was under the control of his judgment at all times. Neither melancholy, ignorance, credulity, vanity, nor self-conceit could be imputed to him. Besides, a mere enthusiast could never perform real miracles as the Apostle Paul did so many times.

Now if Saul were not deceived, it is still less likely that he should be deceived by others. It was impossible for the disciples of Christ to conceive of turning their persecutor into an apostle, and especially to do this by a fraud at the very time of his greatest fury against them and their Lord. Even if they had thought of such a fraud, they could not have produced a blinding light at the time of the noon-day sun. And certainly no fraud of others could have enabled Saul to produce the miracles he did after his conversion.

It thus follows that what Saul spoke concerning his conversion and his experiences afterward indicate that the Christian religion is what it claims to be--a Divine revelation. His change, sudden and complete, becomes unintelligible without the miraculous evidence. "If the gospel is true, if Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if God has interposed, then all is explained. God is not prodigal of miracles; but we can easily understand that He will have recourse to them in order to furnish such a demonstration of the truth of the gospel and to accredit such a minister. But if God did not interpose, if Jesus Christ is not his Son, how is this transformation of character to be explained?" (Monod).