

# The Conversion of Saul and Two Spectacular Miracles by Peter

A Study in Acts Chapter 9

**T**hen the churches  
throughout all  
Judea, Galilee, and  
Samaria had peace  
and were edified.  
And walking in  
the fear of the Lord  
and in the comfort  
of the Holy Spirit,  
they were multiplied.



~Acts 9:31 NKJV

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## Acts Chapter 9

### The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus “is the greatest event recorded in Acts next to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.”<sup>1</sup> The Church’s greatest persecutor became the Church’s greatest Apostle, and the labors of this one man would result in the furtherance of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. The man who was commissioned to wipe out Christianity became its greatest spokesman and propagator. What a testimony to the transforming grace and power of God (Rom. 1:16)!

#### Acts 9:1-2

Most often in this chapter we shall refer to Paul as “Saul,” since Luke referred to him in this way in Acts chapter 9. See the transition in Acts 13:9. From that point on Luke refers to Saul as Paul.

Saul’s practice was to persecute Christians and chase after them wherever they would be, even in “foreign cities” (see Acts 26:11). Rome allowed the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin) to have authority over Jewish congregations even outside of Palestine. The leaders of the synagogues in Damascus would need to cooperate with the Sanhedrin.

The high priest at this time was probably Caiaphas.<sup>2</sup> Saul asked the high priest for letters to authorize him to go 150 miles north and east to the great ancient city of Damascus where many thousands of Jews were living. Among these Jews were many born again Hebrew Christians who had come to the Messiah by genuine faith in His finished work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Saul had heard reports that there were many Christians in Damascus and that they were multiplying in number. He believed this movement must be stopped and smashed before it should get out of hand. Some estimate that Saul was in his thirties at this point in his life. As Haman the Agagite wanted to exterminate all Jews from the face of the earth in the days of Esther (Esther 3:9, so Saul of Tarsus wanted to exterminate all Jews who believed in Christ.

Saul describes the Christians as being “of this way.” “The Way” was none other than Jesus Christ who said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6), and the believers were identified with Him. Several times in the book of Acts the disciples were described by this expression (Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). It was not until later, at Antioch, that people of the way became known as Christians (Acts 11:26).

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<sup>1</sup>Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>Caiaphas was the high priest during the Lord’s public ministry, death and resurrection. He continued as the high priest until about 37 or 38 A.D. James Boyer in his *New Testament Chronological Chart* places the conversion of Saul around 32 or 33 A.D.

That was apparently the only name given to early Christianity: “Of this way”—and that is what Christianity is; it is a way! It is not just fire-insurance for eternity, not simply a method of saving us from eternal judgment; but it is a way of blessing, righteousness and gladness right here on earth.<sup>3</sup>

Saul’s mission was to round up the believers and bring them bound back to Jerusalem. He approached this mission with zeal, and he is described almost like a destructive fire-breathing dragon: “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.” Breathing is something we do every moment of every day, and the use of this word in connection with Saul’s war on believers indicates that persecuting disciples of Jesus was his constant obsession. “Slaughter” indicates his desire to kill them. And these were not mere empty threats, as believers were actually killed under his reign of terror (Acts 26:10). Moreover, Saul did not temper or soften his persecution due to gender considerations. Believing women were in as much danger as believing men.

Saul’s conversion was not gradual. He did not gradually warm up to the truths of the gospel. He did not see the truth revealed little by little. He was not a seeker like the eunuch of Acts 8 or like Cornelius of Acts 10. No, when Christ blinded him by the glorious light on the road to Damascus Saul was a fierce persecutor and hater of believers. His conversion was sudden and instantaneous. It was almost as if God grabbed him, shook him and convinced him on the spot as to who He was! It was a remarkable change. This “should encourage us not only to love our enemies and to pray for those who spitefully use us, but also to seek the conversion of our bitterest opponents. God arrested the man who did more than any other to stamp out Christianity and brought him to His side.”<sup>4</sup> Saul’s conversion was self-described as a “pattern” conversion (1 Tim. 1:16). If God can save the chief of sinners, then He can save anyone!

### **Acts 9:3**

Damascus (in the Roman province of Syria) was about 150 miles from Jerusalem, a five or six-day journey. It was an ancient city. We are told that Abraham’s servant was from Damascus, two thousand years earlier (Gen. 15:2). Saul was probably accompanied by the Temple Guard, a Jewish police force.<sup>5</sup> As Saul approached Damascus and was near to the city, there suddenly shone round about him a light from heaven.

Why doesn’t our Lord arrest people in this manner today? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if He would appear suddenly in glorious light to the world’s religious leaders? Keep in mind that every Christian is a miniature Christ: a representative of Christ who points to Christ by his life and by his lips. As each believer does this, he is a light reflector. The light is shining around the world: “Ye are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14,16). The Lord Jesus is not here on earth visibly, but He

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<sup>3</sup>H. A. Ironside, *Acts*, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup>J. Anderson, *What the Bible Teaches—Acts* [Ritchie New Testament Commentaries], p. 98.

<sup>5</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, (Henderickson, Peabody, MA 1994), p. 111.

is here through each of us who know Him, in order to accomplish the infinite, eternal purposes of His Heavenly Father towards those who are lost. Think of your own conversion. You came to know the Lord Jesus as your Savior as the result of some light reflector praying for you or witnessing to you or handing you a tract or in some way attracting you to the Savior. The Lord Jesus did not appear personally to any of us. But this spectacular miracle did happen to Saul of Tarsus two thousand years ago.

This light appeared to him at midday or high noon (Acts 22:6; 26:13), and the brilliance of the light resulted in Saul falling to the ground (Acts 22:7). High noon is when the sun's light is most brilliant, and this supernatural light far surpassed that ("more than the brightness of the sun"—Acts 26:13). This is the first of six different times that Christ appeared to Saul of Tarsus. In addition to the blinding light and the voice from God, Saul actually saw the risen Lord on this occasion (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8).

What happened on the road to Damascus was unique. Saul's conversion is unlike any other conversion. Nor has such an event taken place since then. That it will be repeated on a larger scale in a future day is assured by the Word of Prophecy. The heavens will be opened once more. Out of the opened heavens there will again shine forth the Glory of the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. In His Glory, He will appear the second time. And when He comes in the clouds of heaven there will be still His blinded people on earth, a remnant of them, and like Saul they will behold the glorious vision. Then will be fulfilled what is written in Zechariah 12:10-14....Those who pierced Him, His own, will see Him in that day and that will mean a wonderful salvation for the whole nation, for all Israel living in that day.<sup>6</sup>

### **Acts 9:4-5**

We learn from Acts 26:14 that the Lord spoke to Saul in Aramaic ("in the Hebrew tongue"). For the repetition of Saul's name ("Saul, Saul"), compare also the Lord speaking to Abraham (Gen. 22:11), to Jacob (Gen. 46:2), to Moses (Exodus 3:4), to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), to Martha (Luke 10:41), and to Simon Peter (Luke 22:31). Saul is the seventh and last such double-naming by God found in the Scriptures. Often it marked a turning point or a significant event in the person's life.

Prior to this encounter Saul believed that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified and was dead, even if there were some confusion about where the body of Jesus was. Here on the Damascus road Saul was in total shock as he met the living Christ, proving that He was everything He claimed to be. This was the great turning point of his life, as it is with anyone who meets the Lord Jesus and sees Him for who He really is.

Jesus applied "the goads" to him (Acts 26:14).<sup>7</sup> Pricks or goads were used to encourage beasts of

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<sup>6</sup>Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup>This reference to "pricks" or "goads" is not found in certain Greek manuscripts here in Acts 9:5, but the same expression is found in Acts 26:14: "*kick against the pricks.*" This was a Greek proverb for useless resistance; i.e., it was useless for Paul to persecute the Church—he was only hurting himself. *Pricks* (i.e., goads) were long, wooden rods with a sharp point used to

burden to move as they should. If the ox should kick in rebellion, he would only be hurting himself. So also, Saul's fighting against the Lord was only self-damaging.

He didn't say, "Who art Thou?" but he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" Intuitively he knew that he was talking to the Lord, by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit who always represents and implements the work of the Lord Jesus. This was not a self-induced hallucination, nor was he talking to a mere angel. He spoke directly to the Lord.

The Lord's response: "You are persecuting Me because you are persecuting members of My body." At this moment Paul received his first lesson in Church truth. When you hurt the body of Christ, the Head feels it! We learn more of this in 1 Corinthians 12, that we are all members of one body and each part has a unique and distinct function. The Church, the body of Christ, is an irreducibly complex organism where every part needs every other part, and we all need the Head, none other than our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18).

This conversion experience was so significant and life-changing to Paul that He mentions it repeatedly in the New Testament:

Acts 22:1-16  
Acts 26:1-20  
1 Corinthians 9:1  
1 Corinthians 15:8  
1 Timothy 1:12-16  
Galatians 1:16

Something very special happened on that day on the road to Damascus with world-changing consequences.

### **Acts 9:6**

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"<sup>8</sup> You cannot begin the Christian life any better than Saul did here. He began by being totally committed to the will of God. "Lord, You name it; I'll do it." Saul began the Christian life with an attitude of absolute surrender. He did not just begin well, but from everything we know about the Apostle Paul, he continued this attitude of absolute surrender all through his life to the very day when Nero put him to death. "Lord, you name it; I'll do it. Whatever You say, I will do."

"God had put Jesus on the throne of the universe; Saul put Him on the throne of his

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prod oxen while plowing" [*Ryrie Study Bible*, under Acts 26:24]. Shamgar slew 600 men with an ox-goad (Judges 3:31).

<sup>8</sup>The Greek manuscript support for this phrase is not strong, but there is no question that Saul spoke these words based on Acts 22:10, "What shall I do, Lord?" There is no textual problem in Acts 22:10. Saul addressed Jesus as "Lord," and was willing to do whatever the Lord wanted him to do. The fact that Saul addressed Jesus as "Lord" is significant because "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). This is a strong indication that Saul was saved on the Damascus road, not later at his baptism.

heart.”<sup>9</sup>

This is not Lordship salvation: “Lord, I’ll do whatever you want me to do so that I might become saved.” No, this is Lordship sanctification, “Lord, I’ll do whatever you want me to do because I am saved! Because I am saved I am now a love slave of Jesus Christ, and my greatest delight is to serve Him and do His will.” We are saved and set apart for the service of our wonderful Lord, who has bought us with a great price. It is our joy and constant delight to do what He wants us to do. “I delight to do Thy will, O my God” (Psalm 40:8).

“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” We are reminded of Isaiah’s conversion experience, “I have seen the Lord. I’m devastated. I am undone. Lord send me” (Isaiah 6). The first thing that a true convert thinks is, “Lord, how can I serve you? How can I honor you?” “I can’t pay for my conversion, but I can demonstrate my love and appreciation for You by serving You and doing Your will. Just tell me what to do.”

The Lord told Saul to go into the city of Damascus and there he would learn what he should do. This is interesting. Why didn’t the Lord say, “Saul, just sit down and I’ll talk to you in detail and explain all that is involved in My will for your life.” God most often uses a human instrument. On rare occasions He may use an angelic instrument. But very rarely does He directly tell His servants all that they are to do. He normally uses someone to inform, to describe, to implement the divine message.

“It shall be told thee what thou must do.” This is what the Christian life is all about. It is not doing what we wish; it is our Master, the Lord Jesus, telling us what we should do. How we must harken to His voice! “Speak Lord, for Thy servant is listening” (1 Sam. 3:10).

### **Acts 9:7**

Saul was privileged to identify the One speaking to him in that glorious light. The ones who were with him as witnesses to this miracle were not allowed to see or to identify who Jesus really was.

The men who accompanied Saul heard a voice but saw no man. In Acts 22:9, we learn that the men around Saul were able to see the great light but they did not hear the voice of the One who spoke to Saul. The distinction is that although they heard sounds (Acts 9:7), they could not understand what was being said.<sup>10</sup> The verb “hear” in Acts 22:9 can mean “to hear with comprehension,” and thus may be translated, “[they] did not understand the voice...” (see New American Standard Bible). This is similar to John 12:29 as the Father spoke from heaven, but the people that stood by heard a sound like thunder and did not perceive the message of the words. Compare also Daniel 10:7. Daniel saw a vision. The men around him did not see the vision, but they knew something awesome was happening because a great trembling or terror fell upon them.

Keep in mind that the Lord was speaking to Saul, not to these other men. It was Saul who needed

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<sup>9</sup>John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, p. 176.

<sup>10</sup>The careful historian Luke wrote both Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9, and obviously he saw no contradiction between the two passages.

to understand what the divine voice was saying, not these other men.

### **Acts 9:8**

He saw no man. This does not mean that he did not see Jesus who appeared to him, but it means that following his vision he could not see anyone else due to his blindness. He had to be led as a blind man to Damascus. What a contrast! The man who traveled to Damascus with the intent of furiously persecuting those of the way is now led into that same city blind and helpless.

These men who led him were obviously Jewish and were engaged in persecuting believers as Saul was. What happened to them? Did they ever come to the Saviour? Was Saul able to effectively explain to them who Jesus of Nazareth really was? We are left wondering about this. At least they functioned in one important ministry in the providence of God—they were able to explain that something objective happened to Saul. It was not just a subjective experience. They saw the light. They heard some sounds. It was spectacular. It was something that happened outside of Saul's own mind, which is a very important point. Religious liberals and unbelievers look at a passage like this and conclude, "It was all something that this Jew from Tarsus dreamed up in his own mind. He just imagined it or had some sort of hallucination." Some even think he was a pious fraud who invented this fake news story in order to help people to become religious. A great effort has been made to explain how Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle, but this effort collapses under its own weight. This is why Lord Lyttelton, some 200 years ago, wrote a magnificent treatise on the conversion of the Apostle Paul—unanswerable evidence for the truth of Christianity. As an apologetic for the Christian faith, it is rivaled only by the resurrection of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

### **Acts 9:9**

Saul was blind for three days and he fasted during that time period. You can imagine what was going through his mind and racing through his conscience during those three days. His whole world had been turned upside down and he had to rethink everything. "I have persecuted the Church of God. I have persecuted Jesus, the Son of God. I have completely rejected the true means of salvation. I have arrested people and killed people for believing in Jesus." He was haunted and overwhelmed by these awful realities. He was beginning to learn the truth of Romans 7:18, "In me ...dwelleth no good thing." All his claim to fame he counted as loss and as dung (Phil. 3:1-8). Everything that he ever stood for and worked for and strove for had been demolished. He had three days and nights to think and to pray and readjust to these new, life-changing realities.

### **Acts 9:10**

Ananias was a reputable, highly respected Jew well known among the Jewish people in Damascus as we learn from Acts 22:12. It's possible that he was one of the leaders among the believers at Damascus and perhaps he was one of the men that Saul had especially targeted. A man that Saul

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<sup>11</sup>See Appendix 1 where Lyttelton's brilliant treatise is reproduced as it appeared in *The Fundamentals*.

planned to **harm** ended up being the man who would greatly **help** him. Ananias was simply a humble servant of Christ, and God spoke to him in a vision. Ananias was not an apostle. No apostle—not Peter, John or any of the others—was involved in Saul’s conversion. Saul’s apostleship was not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:1). “Ritualistic Christendom, with its claims of apostolic succession and authority, finds this hard to explain.”<sup>12</sup>

### Acts 9:11

The Lord directed Ananias to a particular street known as “Straight.” That street is still to be found in Damascus. Damascus, one of the oldest cities in the world, is still a significant city today. It has stood for over three thousand years. The street called Straight is a principal thoroughfare running through the city from east to west. It was in contrast to many crooked streets in the city. This same term “straight” is used in Luke 3:4-5: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight...the crooked shall be made straight.” The crooked being made straight is a reference to moral transformation, and certainly Saul of Tarsus, abiding on a street called Straight, was a transformed man due solely to the fact that he had met Jesus Christ. The city of Damascus was a great commercial trade center where caravans would crisscross and carry their wares and their goods. On that street lived a man names Judas; this is where Saul was staying. How wonderful to learn of Saul’s initial activity as a saved man: he was praying. What a change in Saul! Instead of **persecuting** he was **praying**! Such unceasing, fervent prayer would be a key characteristic of his entire Christian life (Rom. 1:9; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3-4; Col. 1:3; etc.).

### Acts 9:12

Saul had a vision on the road to Damascus, and here on Straight street he had another vision about Ananias. God gave him assurance that he would soon receive his sight. The Saul/Ananias connection was brought about by a double vision. Each of these men had a vision.<sup>13</sup> Ananias was expecting to see Saul and Saul was expecting to see Ananias. God delights in getting the right man to the right place at the right time to accomplish His all-wise purposes.

### Acts 9:13

“Lord, let me tell you about this man. Don’t You understand how bad this person is and what harm he has done to Your people? Lord, would You please sit down. Let me give You some needed counseling about this matter!” But before we judge Ananias too severely, do we ever argue with the Lord and question what He tells us to do? The Lord did not rebuke Ananias but merely told him of the wonderful ministry that He had in store for Saul, His chosen instrument. This was sufficient to end all of Ananias’ questions and fears.

This is the first place in the New Testament where believers in Christ are called “*saints*.” Believers are holy and set apart for God’s service. “Saints” would become a very common term for believers

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<sup>12</sup>Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 178.

<sup>13</sup>So also Acts 10 where both Peter and Cornelius had visions.

in Paul's epistles (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1, etc.).

### **Acts 9:14**

Ananias was hesitant to obey the Lord due to Saul's reputation as a great enemy of Christ's disciples. This hesitance to obey the Lord was nothing compared to the hesitancy of the Apostle Peter to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Peter rejected three times what God told him to do. We can understand why Ananias was very hesitant, in light of Saul's past history.

Ananias described the believers of Damascus as those "that call on Thy Name." Paul used the same terminology in 1 Corinthians 1:2—"with all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord." Compare also Genesis 4:26—"...then began men to call upon the Name of the LORD."

### **Acts 9:15**

Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles. He went first to the Jews, but ultimately and predominantly he ministered to the Gentiles. Peter's ministry was especially to the Jews, the circumcision. Each man had a different sphere of ministry and a different focus, and each one was blessed by God. Paul became an Apostle on a different level. Some wrongly think that the twelfth apostle after Judas defected was the Apostle Paul. This is impossible because the replacement for Judas had to have been with Jesus since the baptism of John and all through those three and a half years until His death and resurrection (Acts 1:22). Only Joseph (Justus) and Matthias met that qualification.

Paul was an Apostle in a special sense. "Am I not an Apostle?...have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). In Acts 14:14 we are told that Barnabas and Paul were Apostles ["sent ones"], probably a reference to the fact that this missionary team was **sent out** by the Spirit of God and by the Church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-2). There were different ways in which the term "Apostle" was used. An "apostle" simply means one who is *sent forth*. There were different ways in which God sent different people to do different things. There were twelve actual Apostles, in the ultimate sense of the term, and their names will be on the twelve foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. They are called "the twelve Apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). Paul was not part of that group, but Matthias was the replacement for Judas. There were other men who were "apostles" in the sense that they were sent by God on various missions.

Paul's Apostleship was unique. He was a divinely appointed, divinely commissioned Apostle, just like the Twelve, though he was not one of the Twelve. So also, Paul was an Apostle (like the Twelve after Christ's ascension) who was a "gift" (Eph. 4:7-12) from the heavenly, glorified Head to His Body. Paul was part of the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20), a recipient and dispenser of divine revelation, with the divinely authenticating signs of an Apostle (1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 3:5; 2 Cor. 12:12).

Saul was a chosen vessel unto the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:15; compare Gal. 1:15). This was a precious and yet somewhat of a frightening thing for God to say of someone. So also it is a frightening thing for Israel to be called the chosen people. I'm sure many Jews might want to say, "Lord, please unchoose us! Ever since you chose us everybody hates us. You have been chastening us and we have been persecuted everywhere we go, and this all has been extremely difficult." You and I have been

chosen also in a special way in Christ, and that doesn't necessarily mean that we will be comfortable and happy all the rest of our days. God's chosen people are not carried to glory on a bed of roses.

Our Lord told His disciples what to expect concerning the difficulties which would lie ahead. See Luke 12:11; Luke 21:12, Acts 5:41 (the Twelve), and Acts 9:23,29.

Paul, God's chosen vessel, delighted in using this same term, as in 2 Timothy 2:21, "a vessel meet for the Master's use," or in 2 Corinthians 4:7, of an earthen vessel indwelt by God.

Some vessels have more honor than others (2 Tim. 2:20). Some are more fragile than others. Some are more beautiful, more useful, more ornamental than others. But Christ Jesus wants all that we have and are in His blessed service. Develop your resources, Christian. Enlarge your capacities. Cultivate your talents. Praise God for every ability you possess. Dedicate all without reserve to the work and testimony of the King of kings.<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting that Paul's witness is described as "**bearing Christ's name**" or carrying Christ's name. What a privilege to bring the very name of Christ and the Person that name represents to other people who desperately need to know Him. We do not carry or promote our own name. No one needs to learn about us. It's not about us; it's all about Him. Paul did not suffer for promoting his own name and his own cause. He suffered because He proclaimed Christ and His good news. "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:16).

We who name the name of Christ (2 Tim. 2:19) have the responsibility to carry that name to others. Some time later, at Antioch, believers would be called "Christians," bearing the very name of Christ (Acts 11:26). We are identified with His name. How careful we ought to be so that we do not bring shame upon that worthy name by our carnal conduct. A true witness is one who causes others to think about God, to think about the lovely Person of the Lord Jesus. Wherever we go, we are bringing the Lord Jesus with us. We are to point clearly to Him by our words and works. Christ, the Head, is in heaven and the world cannot see Him today, but the unsaved world can see the members of His body as we conduct ourselves in their midst. We are the only Christ that the world can see. "*Take the name of Jesus with you, child of sorrow and of woe—It will joy and comfort give you, take it then wherever you go*"—Lydia Baxter.

Paul carried the name of Jesus to three groups:

1) **Gentiles.** Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:8). His three missionary journeys, while not neglecting Jewish evangelism, were primarily directed to the Gentiles.

2) **Kings.** We have examples of this in the book of Acts: Paul before governor Felix (Acts 23-24), Paul before King Agrippa (Acts 25-26), and Paul before Caesar himself (Acts 25:12).

3) **Children of Israel.** When Paul went into a city his custom was to visit the Jewish synagogue at

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<sup>14</sup>Charles J. Woodbridge, *Standing on the Promises—Rich Truths From the Book of Acts*, p. 62.

the earliest opportunity. He had a great love for the Jewish people (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1), and his gospel went to the Jew first (Rom. 1:16). Later in the book of Acts we will see Paul visiting the great city of Jerusalem to give a powerful message there to his kinsmen according to the flesh (Acts 21-23).

Notice that the Gentiles are listed first and the children of Israel are listed last. While Paul had a wonderful ministry to his Jewish brethren throughout his life, yet his primary ministry was to the uncircumcised Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-9).

### **Acts 9:16**

Paul, God's chosen vessel, would be shown how greatly he would suffer for the cause of Christ and for the sake of His great Name! The Saul who had caused so much suffering upon the Church of God was now chosen by God to embark upon a life of great suffering for the Saviour's sake.

Saul of Tarsus was "an Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). He represented the Jewish people who had been given so much light; yet they sinned against that light even to the point of crucifying the Son of God. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). They refused to come to the light lest their deeds should be reprov'd and exposed (John 3:20). To whom much is given, much is required. Isaiah said that Israel would suffer double for all her sins because she has received vastly more light than any other nation (Isaiah 40:2). Saul of Tarsus had fantastic privileges, sitting at the feet of Gamaliel. He was the greatest student of the greatest teacher at that time in Israel. He had mastered the Old Testament, and should have long since recognized that Jesus fulfilled all the descriptions in the Old Testament of the Messiah. Paul was enormously guilty before God for rejecting so much light and truth. He was told that he would greatly suffer for the sake of Christ. He could never say, "I don't deserve this." Paul understood the grace of God and he knew that he deserved far worse. Paul, like the other disciples, could rejoice that he was counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). What are we worthy of? We are worthy of suffering for His sake. Paul would suffer in Damascus and later he would suffer in Jerusalem, which began a lifetime of suffering for the cause of Christ.

Since Paul was an expert on the subject of suffering, we should pay special attention to his teaching regarding suffering: Romans 8:17-18; 2 Corinthians 1:5-6; Philippians 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:4; 1 Timothy 4:10; 2 Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29, etc. God graciously told Paul in advance about the great suffering that he would endure for Christ's sake. This would prevent Paul from being discouraged because he would know that suffering was part of God's plan for His life, having been told this from the beginning. The same is true for every faithful believer. We should not be surprised at the trials and afflictions that come our way (1 John 3:13).

### **Acts 9:17**

Ananias was sent to help Saul. They did not have to be introduced to each other; God has already paved the way by means of the visions each man had received. Ananias brought Saul good news that he would receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. First putting his hands on him and then addressing him as "Brother Saul," Ananias lovingly welcomed this former enemy into the family of God. In the Christian brotherhood, past sins are no longer an issue, and we accept people for who they are in Christ Jesus. The feared enemy of Ananias was now his dear brother.

Being filled with the Spirit means that in a special way Saul would be controlled by the Spirit. The moment Saul believed, he experienced Spirit baptism and became a member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). But now he is strengthened, enabled and equipped to be an effective witness for Jesus, even though he is a brand new convert. Someone so new to the faith can rarely be such an effective witness for the Lord.

Paul was not ordained for the ministry by Ananias. Paul explained in Galatians 1:1 that he was not ordained by anybody except God Himself. It was God who made him an Apostle. Ananias was there simply to explain to Paul what Jesus would do through him.

Following this event, we learn no more about Ananias. Luke does not mention him again in the book of Acts, and Paul never mentions him in his epistles. God used Ananias in a special way at the start of Paul's Christian life to help and befriend him.

God has His servants everywhere. Here at Damascus was a quiet, unsung believer of whom we would never have heard had it not been for this incident; he was to step on stage, say his few lines, do his tiny act in connection with the whole mighty drama, and go offstage never to be heard of again. But the Lord knew all about him: knew his name and address, knew his humble faith and secret fear.<sup>15</sup>

## Acts 9:18

It is hard to describe exactly what happened in this miraculous recovery from blindness. The term "scales" is used and the word comes from the Greek word meaning "to peel." This implies that something was covering the eyes, some sort of flaky substance, that needed to be peeled off. We are not to suppose that literal scales fell off because Luke says, "**as it had been** scales." The idea seems to be that Saul received his sight suddenly, as would be the case if some physical impediment had been suddenly peeled off. The restoration of Saul's physical sight is a wonderful picture of the sin-blinded sinner receiving sight. Saul would be sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:17-18). "Once I was blind, but now I can see."

When brother Ananias touched Saul's blinded eyes and the scales fell away, his whole outlook had changed. Instead of hating Jesus, he loved Him. Once a persecutor of the faith, he now became a professor and a propagator of the faith. Once a despiser of the Lord, he was now a disciple of the Lord. Once a destroyer, he was now a devotee. Once an assailant, he would soon become an apostle. Once he had held the clothes of Stephen's executioners. Now he was ready himself to be slain for Jesus. Saul was converted. He became a "new creature in Christ."<sup>16</sup>

The question will arise later as to exactly when Saul was saved (Acts 22:16). Some argue that he was not saved until he was baptized in water. Here we notice that Saul was filled with the Spirit

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<sup>15</sup>John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, pages 178-179.

<sup>16</sup>Charles Woodbridge, *Standing on the Promises—Rich Truths From the Book of Acts*, pages 61-62.

prior to his baptism in water. Saul was baptized in water because he was saved; he was not baptized in water in order to be saved. Water baptism is an outward picture of inward realities that have already taken place.

### **Acts 9:19**

Saul's fasting came to an end (compare verse 9) and he received needed nourishment and gained strength. Problems can arise because a person's physical needs have not been met. A solid meal and a good night of sleep can make a big difference in a person's overall well-being.

Twice in this chapter we are told that Saul was strengthened (see also verse 22). Later he would say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Any strength that we have to obey God's Word and fulfill the Great Commission has to come from above and cannot be just conjured up from within ourselves. God must do it and God will do it in the right way.

Saul was with the disciples which were in Damascus. He was found with like-minded believers. His original intent was to imprison these believers; now he delighted in being with them. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). These believers probably had known that Saul was on his way to their city to apprehend them. We wonder if they may have prayed for his salvation, and were now rejoicing in answered prayer.

### **Acts 9:20**

Saul wasted no time in obeying the Great Commission. Immediately, after his baptism, Saul began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues.<sup>17</sup> He was originally commissioned by the high priest to go to these synagogues to arrest any of "this way" (Acts 9:1-2), but now he was obeying a higher commission to present the gospel of Christ to his fellow Jews.

This is the only place in the entire book of Acts where Jesus is called the "Son of God." However, in Acts 10:36 He is declared to be "Lord of all" (compare Luke 2:11). Saul was proclaiming something absolutely spectacular: "This One whom we hated and whom we rejected and whom we crucified and whose followers we have been persecuting and imprisoning and killing—this One is the Son of God." The Jews knew what that term meant.

Jehovah's Witnesses say the term "Son of God" means that He is not God but that He is merely the son of God. If someone asks you, "Who is your father?" you would have to acknowledge that you came later than your father. You are his son. You originated from him and postdated him. So in the heretical view of Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus came later than God due to the fact that He was created by Jehovah. Though they acknowledge Him to be an exalted angel, they deny that He is God.

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<sup>17</sup>The KJV says he preached "Christ...that He is the Son of God," but most textual authorities say that he preached "Jesus...that He is the Son of God." Those who knew the Old Testament would know that Christ or Messiah must be of the same nature as God (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6), but the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God was the revolutionary truth which transformed Saul at his conversion. This same truth he immediately preached to others.

However, as Jesus used the term “Son of God,” it clearly meant that He was *equal with God*, and the Jews understood who He claimed to be and considered it to be blasphemy and worthy of death (John 5:17-18; 10:29-31; 19:7). They picked up stones to stone Him because He claimed to be the Son of God, making Himself equal with God. He had the same nature as God which is what “Son of God” indicates.<sup>18</sup>

### **Acts 9:21**

The one who came to Damascus with the intent to destroy the disciples of Christ has now become one of them! They were truly amazed. What a change God had wrought! Paul later described it in this way, “But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me” (Gal. 1:23-24).

### **Acts 9:22**

After Saul was saved, he gained not only physical sight but spiritual sight. He quickly understood how the many passages about the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible applied to Jesus. Saul proved to the Jews at Damascus from the Scriptures that Jesus, the One they crucified, was the Christ, the very Messiah Himself (compare Acts 17:2-3). We are told that the Jews were “confounded.” The verb means that they were confused, perplexed, stirred up or thrown into consternation. The word is used of the Jews at Pentecost who were confounded when they heard Galilean Jews speaking in their own native dialects (Acts 2:6). It is used of an assembly being stirred up and confused (Acts 19:32) and of the entire city of Jerusalem that was stirred up against Paul (Acts 21:31). Imagine the confusion and disruption that Saul caused when he entered the synagogues demonstrating from the Scriptures that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. And the one proving these things was the very one who had been waging fierce persecution against the disciples of Jesus. As an illustration, imagine how the intellectual world of today might be confounded if either Richard Dawkins, the atheist, or Bill Nye, “the science guy,” were to be saved and then go everywhere lecturing on the scientific evidences for creationism and pointing to Christ as God’s only hope for mankind!

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<sup>18</sup>For a full defense of the deity of Christ which also forcefully answers Jehovah’s Witnesses’ claims, see <http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/doctrine/deity.pdf>.

## **Paul's Conversion - A Model For Others**

Paul has told us that his conversion was to serve as an example and model for those who would later believe on Christ: *"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting"* (1 Timothy 1:16). Consider the following:

- 1) Paul had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ which changed his life forever, a genuine conversion experience.
- 2) Paul immediately recognized that Jesus was Lord, and that he was to do whatever his Lord wanted (Acts 9:6 KJV and Acts 22:10). He surrendered to the will of His Lord.
- 3) Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, controlled by Him (Acts 9:17). He was a spiritual man from the beginning of his Christian walk.
- 4) Paul was a man of prayer from the beginning and throughout his life (Acts 9:11). The one persecuting was now the one praying.
- 5) Paul had a remarkable testimony of how God's grace had totally transformed his life (Acts 9:21).
- 6) Paul knew from the beginning that the Christian life would be very difficult and would involve suffering; yet this did not deter him from the right pathway (Acts 9:15-16).
- 7) Paul was baptized in water, in obedience to the Lord's command (Acts 9:18).
- 8) Paul joined himself with the disciples wherever he was located (Acts 9:19, 26).
- 9) Paul had a burden for souls and immediately preached Christ to unsaved Jews in Damascus (Acts 9:20, 22). He was a bold witness wherever he went, even though threatened by death (Acts 9:27, 29).
- 10) Paul was edified and strengthened in the things of God, growing in the grace and knowledge of his Saviour (Acts 9:22).

May these things be true in the life of every blood-bought child of God!

### **Acts 9:23**

"After many days" indicates a prolonged period of time. We learn from Galatians that three years went by and during part of that time Paul went to Arabia to be personally instructed by the Lord and then returned to Damascus. We are not told exactly where in Arabia this was. Perhaps he went down to the Sinai Peninsula, even as Elijah did. We can be sure that Paul meditated and searched

the Scriptures, and no doubt spent much time in prayer for illumination and help. He also received direct revelation from the Lord (Gal. 1:11-12).

<b>Paul’s Early Travels According to Acts 9</b>	<b>Paul’s Early Travels According to Galatians 1</b>
<p>Paul is converted near Damascus (9:1-7).</p> <p>Paul is brought to Damascus and spends a certain number of days (9:19) with the disciples in Damascus (9:8-19).</p> <p>Paul immediately preaches to unsaved Jews in the synagogues of Damascus (9:20-22).</p> <p>A lengthy period of time takes place, “many days” (9:23). What happened during this lengthy period is revealed in Galatians 1.</p> <p>Paul is in Damascus (presumably his second visit to this city) and must escape for his life (9:23-25).</p> <p>Paul goes to Jerusalem for the first time (9:26-29).</p> <p>Paul goes to Caesarea and then to Tarsus (9:30). This is the last we read about Paul until Acts 11:25.</p>	<p>After his conversion, Paul did not go immediately to Jerusalem. Instead he went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus. The time spent in Arabia and in Damascus (the second time) is said to be three years. We assume that most of this time was spent in Arabia because fierce opposition to the gospel would not allow him to stay for long in Damascus (1:17-18).</p> <p>After these three years (“many days”—Acts 9:23) Paul went to Jerusalem for the first time where he saw Peter and James (1:18-19).</p> <p>After this Paul went to Syria and Cilicia. Cilicia was a province of Asia Minor with Tarsus as its capital (1:21). This harmonizes with Acts 9:30.</p>

The Jews took counsel to kill him. He became public enemy number one! This confirmed Paul’s calling. He was told that he would suffer for Christ’s sake (v. 16). So already in Damascus before he even gets out of town, they planned to kill him.

#### **Acts 9:24**

Somehow Saul knew of their murderous plot. God protects His own. As George Whitefield once said, “Christ’s servant is immortal until his work is done.” The Jews who opposed Saul watched the gates, assuming that he would try to escape through one of the gates. Instead Saul would foil them by escaping without passing through any of the gates.

#### **Acts 9:25**

His escape by way of a basket is described in more detail in 2 Corinthians 11:32 where Paul was describing some of his sufferings: “In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city

of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me, and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.” This king was Aretas the 4<sup>th</sup>, the king of Nabatea who reigned from 9 B.C. to 40 A.D., a very long reign in that region which today is Jordan. It would be fascinating to see a video tape of this escape, as the Apostle to the Gentiles was lowered in a basket from the wall of Damascus.

The term “basket” was used of a large basket to carry food (Matt. 15:37; Mark 8:8, 20). This fascinating incident reminds us of how the Hebrew spies escaped from Jericho with the help of Rahab (Josh. 2:15).

Was Saul wrong to flee his persecutors? Not at all; he was actually obeying the Lord’s directions, “When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another” (Matt. 10:23). If Saul had remained in Damascus he would have faced certain death. His time to bravely face death in Rome would come in the distant future, but for now God had much for him to do, and the time of his departure was not at hand (compare 2 Tim. 4:6).

### **Acts 9:26**

After being persecuted in Damascus, Saul went to Jerusalem. From a human point of view it would seem that Jerusalem would be the most dangerous city Saul could visit. However, Saul was more interested in the will of God than he was in his own personal safety. Indeed, being in the will of God is the safest place anyone can be!

In Jerusalem Saul attempted to join himself with the disciples, but they were afraid of him and thought he was merely pretending to be a disciple so that he could do them harm. “I’m born again now. I’ve met Jesus. He talked to me. I’ve been going around telling people about Him and how He is indeed the Messiah foretold by the prophets.” Understandably they did not believe him at first, a response similar to the initial reaction of Ananias (Acts 9:13-14).

### **Acts 9:27**

Barnabas was the great mediator who was able to convince the Apostles that Saul’s faith was genuine.<sup>19</sup> Just as Saul had Ananias as a friend in Damascus, so now he had Barnabas as a friend and sponsor in Jerusalem. Barnabas was known as “the son of consolation” (Acts 4:36), a gracious, godly, humble, loving disciple of the Lord. We learned in Acts chapter 4 that he sold property to help the Jerusalem Church. He was a Levite from Cyprus. It’s as if he had said, “Brother Saul, you understand that your reputation in Jerusalem is not very lovely. You created this problem yourself. Please be patient with the saints and I’m going to help you. Come with me and I will bring you to the Apostles.” What an experience that must have been! When the Apostles were beaten for their testimony back in Acts 4, I wonder if Saul of Tarsus was one of those who helped beat them?

What did the Apostles think of Saul? At first they had mistrust and suspicions. Was he some sort of spy? Was he genuine? Barnabas assured them: “Don’t be afraid and don’t panic. He has seen

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<sup>19</sup>By Apostles, it is meant particularly Peter and James (Gal. 1:18-19).

the Lord in the way (on the road to Damascus) and God spoke to him and he preached boldly in Damascus in the name of Jesus.” This marks the beginning of a lifelong friendship between Paul and Barnabas, only to be marred for a time by their contentious disagreement over Mark (Acts 15:36-40).

### **Acts 9:28**

Thanks to the mediation of Barnabas, Saul was able to be with the Apostles and was accepted by them as a true disciple of the Lord.

In Galatians chapter 1 we have Paul’s explanation of what happened on this occasion. “For ye have heard of my conduct in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God and wasted it and profited [advanced] in the Jews’ religion above many of my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days” (Gal. 1:13-18). This is highly instructive. Saul of Tarsus spent two weeks with Peter in order to mastermind all the details of the life and ministry and words and miracles of the Lord Jesus, including the details of His betrayal, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. It could be that later he shared many of these details with Luke, the penman of the third gospel.

“But other of the apostles saw I none, except James the Lord’s brother” (Gal. 1:19). James was not one of the Twelve, but he was an Apostle in the fullest sense.<sup>20</sup> He did not come to know the Lord until after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7), and later he became the leader in the great Church in Jerusalem. James had a remarkable experience. He had spent close to thirty years with the Son of God in the same home in Nazareth, but as an unbeliever (John 7:5). None of His half brothers believed in Him prior to the resurrection. It is amazing to consider what it must have been like to grow up in a home with a sinless elder brother!

So Saul learned from Peter and also from the half brother of Jesus some things that he desperately needed to know about the Savior who had confronted him.

“Now the things I write to you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia and was unknown by face unto the Churches of Judaea which were in Christ. But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me” (Gal. 1:20-24).

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<sup>20</sup>James was a true Apostle. The Apostles referred to in Acts 9:27 were Peter and James (Gal. 1:18-19). Thus James is lumped with Peter under the identical term “Apostles.” Nothing is said here to suggest that the apostleship of James was inferior to the apostleship of Peter, though he was not one of the Twelve.

## Acts 9:29

Saul disputed against the Grecians. Keep in mind that Saul himself was a Grecian. These were Hellenistic Jews, Greek-speaking Jews, who had killed Stephen. And these Hellenistic Jews wished to slay Saul just as they had killed Stephen. For the second time Saul is being threatened with death for his faith and for his preaching (see verse 23). It is interesting that Saul, who once held the garments of those who stoned Stephen, was now taking Stephen's place in seeking to convince the Hellenistic Jews that Jesus was the Christ. The unbelieving Jews were pleased that they had gotten rid of Stephen, but a greater than Stephen was now in their midst, and they desired to kill him also.

## Acts 9:30-31

The coastal city of Caesarea was the Roman capital of the Holy Land where the Roman governor lived. Philip the evangelist also dwelt in Caesarea with his wife and four daughters (Acts 8:40; 21:8). Saul set sail to Tarsus, his home city where he remained for a number of years.

The Church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had a season of peace.<sup>21</sup> A key reason for this was that their chief persecutor was now on their side! This is the first time we learn that Galilee, the region where Jesus grew up, had believers gathered in Christ's name. We learned about God's working in Samaria in the previous chapter and how God used Philip in a wonderful way to preach the Word to them.

Notice what Luke tells us about these Churches:

- 1) They had peace; even in the midst of great trouble believers can have peace in Christ (John 16:33).
- 2) They were edified and built up in their most holy faith (Jude 20).
- 3) They were walking or living in the fear of the Lord, afraid of doing anything that might displease their Lord who was the Head of the Church. Local Churches are healthy when their members are God-fearing.
- 4) They were walking or living in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the very One who is called the Comforter. He was the divine Being called to their side to help, comfort, encourage and strengthen them. The Spirit of God was intimately involved with the Church—empowering, teaching, convicting, etc. How involved is the Church today with the Holy Spirit? How much are we allowing Him to guide and teach and fill us?

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<sup>21</sup>The KJV says "the churches had **rest**," but it is the common Greek word for "peace." Note also that the KJV has plural "Churches," but most textual authorities have the singular, "So **the Church** throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace..." (Acts 9:31, NASB). If this reading is correct then Luke is referring, not to various local assemblies, but to the Church as a whole (one Church represented by many local assemblies). There were a number of local assemblies in Judea, Galilee and Samaria, but here they are all referred to as "the Church," if this reading is correct. This would also contradict the view held by some Baptists that the term "Church" always and only refers to local assemblies.

If God the Holy Spirit were to suddenly remove His presence from us (which is not possible—John 14:16-17), would anything be different or would we merely carry on as usual? How we need to realize that without Him we can do nothing!

5) They were multiplied. They had a heart to reach out to others with the gospel and God blessed them greatly and increased their numbers.

We do not hear from Saul of Tarsus for a number of years! What is he doing there in Tarsus? Tarsus was a city of great learning. It had a great university, exceeded in greatness only by the university at Athens and by the university at Alexandria. It was a center of learning. Saul memorized some of the poetry of philosophers in that region of the world (Cilicia). He benefitted intellectually and academically from the environment into which God placed him. What was going on during these years? Perhaps what happened to him there is what he described in Philippians chapter 3. “I have suffered the loss of all things” (Phil. 3:8). Most likely Saul was thrown out of the synagogue. Also Saul’s remarkable trip to heaven took place in this time frame, “over 14 years ago” (2 Cor. 12:2). He was caught up to the third heaven! Perhaps during this time he went out and planted some Churches. We learn later that there were Churches in Cilicia, and perhaps Saul was God’s instrument to found these Churches. We have yet to find out all the ways God used Saul during those years in Tarsus. Saul was an example and pattern to all who should later believe what Christ and Christ alone can do (1 Tim. 1:16).

Let us not underestimate by comparison our own conversion which was deeply supernatural. Not one of us was saved by human effort or human intellect, but only by the grace of God and by the Holy Spirit. Even though the circumstances in our conversions were not as spectacular as in the case of Saul, yet they were equally divine and will last forever. We do not read of Saul again until Acts 11:25. We now shift our focus from Saul to Peter, the leader of the Apostles, the one with whom Saul spent two weeks. For now we bid farewell to Saul of Tarsus who will return at a later time in Luke’s God-breathed record.

### **Acts 9:32**

As Luke writes this account, the attention is now focused upon Peter, as Saul, for a time, fades into the background. Peter was not confined to a ministry in Jerusalem. The Church in Jerusalem was now in good hands under the ministry of James, the half-brother of Jesus. Another of the Apostles, Thomas, according to very strong historical tradition, went as far as India to begin the great Marthoma Church in southwest India. Peter moved on into territories where there was significant hostility against the name of Jesus, even as he had faced opposition in Jerusalem from the Hellenistic Jews and others.

### **Acts 9:33**

Aeneas was a hopeless cripple, humanly speaking. He was paralyzed. He was a fitting picture of each of us as sinners. We all are spiritually helpless (unable to do one thing to improve our condition), hopeless, and without strength (Rom. 5:6). We are reminded of the paralyzed man in Mark 2 who was let down through a roof by four men. He was not only healed but his sins were forgiven (Mark 2:1-12; compare also John 5:1-9).

## Acts 9:34-35

This healing was supernatural, instantaneous and complete. There was no need for any kind of recuperation or physical therapy. Was Aeneas a believer? We are not told. If he had not been a believer, did he get converted because of this miracle? No, because no one is ever converted by a miracle, but only by hearing and believing the Word of God. No one ever was converted because Jesus healed him. We know of one occasion where there were nine men who were healed but were not converted! This happened was when Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one came back and thanked him, indicating that only one really believed in Him and made the extra effort to come back and praise Him for what He did (Luke 17:11-19).

The Lord healed tens of thousands of people in His ministry. Often large crowds are described and on more than one occasion it says that He healed them all (Matt. 12:15; Acts 5:16)! Certainly not every one of those people became born-again believers.

“Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” He is not dead, but He’s alive and able to heal this man! He is very active as the Head of the Church, His Body. He is functioning through the Holy Spirit today moment by moment. Most of our Bibles give the book of Acts this title: “The Acts of the Apostles.” The title should be changed to: “The Acts of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.” Luke tells us about what Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1), and this implies that the book of Acts tells us what Jesus continued to do and teach, through His chosen servants. In fact, in the Great Commission Jesus said, “Make disciples of all nations, and lo, I am with you until the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20). We have His blessed presence to enable us to fulfill this difficult command. Even though Christ was in heaven, He was working with His disciples on earth (Mark 16:20)! Without Him we can do nothing, and He is doing what only God can do, even in spite of us. Peter took no credit for this healing; it was done in the Name and by the power of the Lord.

In verse 35 we are surprised to read that “**all**” who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord. That all the people in this locality should turn to the Lord is remarkable, and one is perhaps reminded of what God did in Nineveh in the days of Jonah (Jonah 3:10). Turning to the Lord should be the testimony of every blood-bought believer (1 Thess. 1:9).<sup>22</sup>

## Acts 9:36

Joppa, a coastal city, is known today as Jaffa, a suburb of Tel Aviv. It was the principal seaport of

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<sup>22</sup>One should be cautious about verse 35 where it says that all these people turned to the Lord. Why did they turn to the Lord? Was it just because they saw a supernatural miracle? Were they genuinely converted? What does this really mean? We hope it means that the miracle was a wonderful attention-getter which ultimately led them to recognize the blessed Person and work of our Lord resulting in a Spirit-produced conversion as they genuinely trusted in Christ. Keep in mind that in John 2:23 there were people who believed in Jesus merely because they were impressed by His miracles. Such is not necessarily saving faith, although it may lead to saving faith, as in the case of Nicodemus.

Palestine, located about 10 miles northwest of Lydda. Joppa was where the timber cut for the Temple was brought in the days of Solomon (2 Chron. 2:16). Tabitha was a genuine believer, a disciple of the Lord Jesus.<sup>23</sup> The Greek form of her name was Dorcas. Both in Hebrew (Aramaic) and in Greek the name means a gazelle or a doe, representing a beautiful and graceful animal. She was known for her acts of mercy and kindness and generosity towards those who were needy. She exemplified the godly woman described in Proverbs 31 (see especially verse 20). Tabitha abounded with good works which revealed her abiding faith in Christ. You could see her faith by observing her works (James 2:14-26). Good works are faith made visible. Some of the good deeds which she did are mentioned in verse 39. She adorned herself with good works, which is fitting for women professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:10). She was “well reported of for good works” (1 Tim. 5:10). In all things she showed herself a pattern of good works (Tit. 2:7).

There is a tendency in evangelical circles to be suspicious of good works. We have reacted against the social gospel of good works so forcefully that we have sometimes gone to the other extreme. Good works are an essential part of Christianity. They do not earn salvation but they evidence salvation. Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). A truly saved person ought to have compassion for the sick, the poor, the oppressed, the weak. Dorcas did, and her compassion took on a practical character. Her zeal in doing what she could to alleviate suffering is noted by the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

### **Acts 9:37**

Tabitha was sick (weak, feeble, without strength) and died as the result of her illness. It was a common practice to wash a dead body prior to burial. After her loved ones washed her body they laid her in an upper room. Her lifeless body was treated with great respect and care. They were slow to bury her. Did they somehow think that Peter could do something for this lifeless woman?

### **Acts 9:38**

Lydda is where Aeneas was healed of a hopeless disease. Lydda was near to Joppa, a three hour trip on foot (ten miles). Joppa was on the Mediterranean coast; Lydda was not too far from the coast and in between Jerusalem and Joppa.

What did these disciples think that Peter could do for this dead woman? Did they believe he could raise her from the dead? Consider the possibility that Philip had already evangelized all these communities on his way from Gaza to Caesarea. In chapter 8 Philip had evangelized Samaria, and Peter came to do follow-up work. So here in Joppa it is possible that Philip had evangelized this region with Peter again doing follow-up work. You would think that this prominent Apostle would be the spearhead of everything, but it appears that Philip the Evangelist took the lead. These people had already been told by Philip not only who Jesus is, but also how He had empowered the Apostles to perform miracles to testify to the power and glory of their Saviour, the Lord Jesus. At any rate, they sent for Peter to come.

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<sup>23</sup>We were not told that Aeneas was a disciple, but it does say this about Dorcas.

<sup>24</sup>John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, p. 191.

In the upper room Jesus said, “The works (miracles) that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father” (John 14:12). You will not only raise the dead and heal the sick like I have done, but you will do something greater. Peter preached and 3,000 people were saved in one day. The Lord Jesus never had that kind of response. The Lord never planned to evangelize. He did not come to evangelize the world but to make it possible for us to do it by way of His finished work on the cross and His resurrection. By His death and resurrection He embodied the gospel which we now preach. He laid the foundation so that we could evangelize.

These people had already been told by Philip of the infinite glory of Jesus and of the authority He entrusted to these Apostles, especially to Peter. So they must have thought to themselves, “If Jesus could raise people from the dead, could not Peter?” It’s interesting that every time it is recorded that Jesus raised someone from the dead, Peter was there: 1) the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-15); 2) the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41-55); 3) Lazarus (John 11). Peter was a witness of all three of these spectacular miracles as the dead were brought back to life. These examples were not the first time people were raised from the dead. Both Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-22) and Elisha (2 King 4:32-35) did the same, hundreds of years earlier. Indeed, one man was raised from the dead when his body touched Elisha’s bones (2 Kings 13:20).<sup>25</sup> In the case of Tabitha, these people seemed to be expecting that God could use Peter to help this lifeless person come back from the dead!

### **Acts 9:39**

We assume that Dorcas was a widow. No mention is made of her husband. There was a group of other widows who were devoted to her and who had been the objects of her love and compassion. Dorcas had a special skill for making clothes and giving such as gifts to those in need. As Ironside said, she had a “consecrated needle” and used it for the blessing of other people.<sup>26</sup>

### **Acts 9:40-41**

Peter requested that they all leave the room, an action similar to what Christ did (Mark 5:40). After he prayed he said, “Tabitha arise.” This is very similar to what the Lord Jesus said to a young girl in Mark 5:41: “Talitha cumi,” the sense of the Aramaic being “Little maid, arise.” This may not have been the first time Peter raised someone from the dead (see Matthew 10:8).

### **Acts 9:42**

This was a spectacular confirmation of the Apostle Peter and the message he preached. What more could the Lord have done to establish and to confirm the foundation of the Church? According to Ephesians 2:20 the foundation of the Church was the Apostles and New Testament prophets. Jesus is the cornerstone, but the Church rests upon the Apostles and prophets. Why is this so? It was through these men that God gave His New Testament revelation, and there is no foundation more

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<sup>25</sup>See Appendix 3 for a listing of those who were raised from the dead in both the Old and New Testaments.

<sup>26</sup>Harry Ironside, *Acts*, p. 237.

solid than His Word. Everything you and I know about the Lord Jesus was written through the Holy Spirit by Apostles and their associates. Who wrote the four Gospels? There were two Apostles (Peter and John) and two associates (Mark who was close to Peter and Luke who was close to Paul). Luke actually wrote more verses in the New Testament (in Luke and Acts) than any other New Testament writer including Paul, even though he was a Gentile. He was an associate of the Apostles. The original Apostles had to be eyewitnesses of the works and words of the Lord Jesus in His public ministry in order to be part of the foundation for the Church (Acts 1:21-22). Witnesses are vitally important: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every matter be established" (2 Cor. 13:1). Jesus did not just have two or three, but He had twelve witnesses! And when one defected he was replaced by another man who had been a witness from the start of our Lord's public ministry. God had four times three witnesses (twelve in total)! This was God's way of saying, "Do not believe anybody except for My witnesses who were with Me and therefore are uniquely qualified to tell you who I am and what I have said and what I have done." Witnesses are so important in the mind and plan of God in the Bible. And the same applies to us. We are His witnesses (Acts 1:8). We have read and believed God's Word and we are able to tell others that we are personally involved and that we have tasted the heavenly gift and we desire to have others taste as well (Psalm 34:8; 1 Peter 2:3). We are not speaking of Christ as though we are outsiders. We are personally and deeply involved as a witnesses of the glory of God through the revelation of Holy Scripture as illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

And none of these apostolic witnesses were worthy. At first they all disbelieved in the resurrection of Jesus (Mark 16:14). Who could ever say that Peter was worthy? He denied the Lord three times in the courtyard. Later Peter was rightly blamed for rejecting Gospel truth, as Paul records in Galatians (1:11-16). When Judaizers came, supposedly from James, and said, "You Gentiles cannot be saved unless you become as Jews," Peter was to be blamed because he failed to defend the Gospel against this attack. Peter was not worthy and neither were the others. But they had seen the risen Lord, and prior to that they were with the Lord for three and a half years. By His grace, they were qualified to be His Apostles.

Even Saul of Tarsus, for those two weeks that he was with Peter, must have sat enthralled at what Peter told him about Jesus. These Apostles lived to see their miracles all ending. Before Jerusalem was destroyed in A. D. 70, all the miracles ended. The author of Hebrews, writing before Jerusalem was destroyed, said that the miracles were performed (past tense) by them (Heb. 2:3-4). Paul himself who died before A. D. 70 said, "Trophimus have I left at Miletus sick" (2 Tim. 4:20). He did not heal him, nor did he heal Timothy of his stomach ailments (1 Tim. 5:23). And Paul himself was not healed (2 Cor. 12:7-10). All the sign-miracles, with the exception of divine revelation, ended prior to 70 A.D.

The Lord accomplished spectacular things through His twelve Apostles and He confirmed their words and their works through sign-miracles. When blasphemous alternatives appear, such as the Da Vinci Code, we do not need to go and see a movie or read a book. All we need to do is listen to the witnesses that were there! The testimony of these men is self-authenticating because it was written by and is illumined by the Holy Spirit of God Himself.

### **Acts 9:43**

Peter ends up at Joppa in the home of Simon a tanner, a prelude to what is coming in chapter 10. Tanners were anathema (cursed) to Jews because they were in constant contact with the dead bodies of animals, resulting in ceremonial uncleanness. Simon lived by the sea, isolated from other Jews (Acts 10:6). Like Jonah, Peter found it extremely difficult to allow his Jewish prejudices to be modified by God. But the Lord would successfully break through these prejudices, for His glory and for the spread of the Gospel.

# Appendix 1

## OBSERVATIONS ON THE CONVERSION AND APOSTLESHIP OF PAUL

by Lord Lyttelton

*Analyzed And Condensed By J. L. Campbell, D. D.,  
Cambridge, Massachusetts*

The object of this paper is to present in an abbreviated form the famous argument of Lord Lyttelton in defense of Christianity based on the conversion of the Apostle Paul. A few words about the man himself and about the interesting circumstances in which this treatise was written will properly introduce the subject.

George Lyttelton was born at Hagley, Worcestershire, England, January 17, 1709, and died on Tuesday morning, August 22, 1773, aged sixty-four years. He belonged to a distinguished “family of long descent and gentle blood, dwelling for centuries on the same spot.” Educated at Eton and Oxford, he soon afterwards entered Parliament, “and for many years the name of George Lyttelton was seen in every account of every debate in the House of Commons.” From this, he advanced successively to the position of lord commissioner of the treasury, and of chancellor of the exchequer, after which he was raised to the peerage. He was also a man of letters and his closing years were devoted almost wholly to literary pursuits. He was a writer of verse as well as prose and Dr. Samuel Johnson has furnished us with his biography in his “Lives of the Poets.” Outside of his books, which comprise nine octavo volumes, his Memoirs and Correspondence make two additional volumes that were compiled and edited by Robert Phillimore in 1845.

The eighteenth century was the darkest period religiously in the history of England since the time of the Reformation. It was the age of the great deists, agnostics, rationalists and unbelievers, when “all men of rank are [were] thought to be infidels.” Like so many of the literary men of his time, George Lyttelton and his friend Gilbert West were led at first to reject the

Christian religion. On the Sabbath forenoon before he died, in an interview with Dr. Johnson, Lyttelton said,

“When I first set out in the world I had friends who endeavored to shake my belief in the Christian religion. I saw difficulties which staggered me.”

In his biography of Lord Lyttelton, Dr. Johnson adds, “He had, in the pride of juvenile confidence, with the help of corrupt conversation, entertained doubts of the truth of Christianity.” His intimacy with Bolingbroke, Chesterfield, Pope and others of the same kind had no doubt influenced him in this direction. T. T. Biddolph tells us that both Lyttelton and West,

“men of acknowledged talents, had imbibed the principles of infidelity. \*\*\* Fully persuaded that the Bible was an imposture, they were determined to expose the cheat. Lord Lyttelton chose the Conversion of Paul and Mr. West the Resurrection of Christ for the subject of hostile criticism. Both sat down to their respective tasks full of prejudice; but the result of their separate attempts was, that they were both converted by their efforts to overthrow the truth of Christianity. They came together, not as they expected, to exult over an imposture exposed to ridicule, but to lament over their own folly and to felicitate each other on their joint conviction that the Bible was the word of God. Their able inquiries have furnished two of the most valuable treatises in favor of revelation, one entitled ‘Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul’ and the other ‘Observations on the Resurrection of Christ.’”

West’s book was the first published. Lyttelton’s work appeared at first anonymously in 1747, when he was thirty-eight years of age. The edition which lies before me contains seventy-eight compact pages. It is addressed in the form of a letter to Gilbert West. In the opening paragraph he says, “The conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation.” Dr. Johnson remarked that it is a treatise “to which infidelity had never been able to fabricate a specious answer.” Dr. Philip Doddridge, who became Lyttelton’s most intimate religious friend, speaks of it as “masterly,” and, “as perfect in its kind as any our age has produced.” Testimonials of this kind might be multiplied indefinitely.

Let us now turn to an examination of the book itself. Lyttelton naturally begins by bringing before us all the facts that we have in the New Testament regarding the conversion of St. Paul; the three accounts given in the Acts; what we have in Galatians, Philippians, Timothy, Corinthians, Colossians and in other places. (Acts 9:22-26; Galatians 1:11-16; Philippians 3:4-8; 1 Timothy 1:12,13; 1 Corinthians 15:8; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1, etc.) Then he lays down four propositions which he considers exhaust all the possibilities in the case.

- 1.** Either Paul was “an impostor who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive;” or
- 2.** He was an enthusiast who imposed on himself by the force of “an overheated imagination;” or
- 3.** He was “deceived by the fraud of others;” or, finally,
- 4.** What he declared to be the cause of his conversion did all really happen; “and, therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation.”

### **1. PAUL NOT AN IMPOSTOR**

More than half his argument (about forty pages) is devoted to the first of these propositions, which is really the key to the whole situation. Is this story of Paul’s conversion so often repeated in Acts and Epistles a fabrication, put forth by a designing man with the deliberate purpose and intention of deceiving?

Lyttelton at once raises the question of motive. What could have induced him while on his way to Damascus, filled with implacable hatred against this whole sect, to turn around and become a disciple of Christ?

- 1.** Was it wealth?

No, all the wealth was in the keeping of those whom he had forsaken; the poverty was on the side of those with whom he now identified himself. So poor had they been, that those among them possessed of any little property sold whatever belonged to them in order to provide for the dire necessities of the rest. Indeed, one of the burdens afterwards laid upon Paul was to collect means for those who were threatened with starvation. Such was the humble condition of these early Christians, that he often refused to take anything from them even for the bare necessities of life, but labored himself

to provide for his scanty needs. To the Corinthians, he writes, “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and we toil working with our hands.” (1 Corinthians 4:11,12. See also 2 Corinthians 12:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:4-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8, etc.) In his farewell to the elders of Ephesus, he appeals to them as knowing it to be true that, “I coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel. Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (Acts 20:33,34). He forsook the great Jewish hierarchy with its gorgeous temple and its overflowing treasuries, where his zeal in putting down the hated sect of the Nazarene would have been almost certainly rewarded with a fortune. He cast in his lot among the poverty-stricken disciples of Jesus Christ, among whom it was his ambition to be poor. Near the end of his life he presents to us the picture of an old man shivering in a Roman dungeon and pathetically asking for a cloak to be sent him to cover his naked and suffering limbs during the severity of an Italian winter.

## **2. Was it reputation?**

No; those with whom he united were held in universal contempt; their Leader had been put to death as a criminal among thieves; the chiefs of the cause that he had espoused were illiterate men. On the other hand, the wisest and the greatest men in all the land indignantly rejected the teachings of this new sect. The preaching of Christ crucified was to the Jew a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. There was no reputation for the great disciple of Gamaliel in parting with his splendid honors and identifying himself with a lot of ignorant fishermen. He would only be execrated as a deserter and betrayer of the Jewish cause, and he might rest assured that the same bloody knife that slew the Shepherd of the scattered flock would soon be unsheathed against himself. All the reputation that he had so zealously built up was gone the hour that he went over to the new religion, and from that day on contempt was his portion. He was accounted as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things. (1 Corinthians 4:13).

## **3. Was it power he was after?**

We know what men have done to get into positions of prominence and dominion over their fellows. Mahomet, the popes, and many others, put forth spiritual claims so as to promote thereby their own temporal ends. How was it with Paul? His whole career was marked by a complete

absence of all self-seeking. He had no eye to worldly ambitions. He interfered with nothing, “in government or civil affairs; he meddled not with legislation; he formed no commonwealths; he raised no seditions; he affected no temporal power.” He assumed no pre-eminence over other Christians. He regarded himself as not worthy to be called an apostle, as less than the least of all saints, as the chief of sinners. Those engaged in like work he called “fellow-laborers” and “fellow-servants.” Even if the truth was spread by those hostile to him, through “envy and strife,” so long as Christ was proclaimed, “therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Philippians 1:18). He did not lord it over the churches, even over those that he himself had founded. To the Pauline party in Corinth he exclaims,

“Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13).

“We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Those who, from selfish motives seek for influence over people pander to them and flatter them [as, e.g. did Absalom]. There was nothing of this with Paul. He rebuked the churches unsparingly for their sins, and did not hesitate, if need be, to incur their displeasure. Disclaiming all pre-eminence and position and power, he preached Christ and Him crucified as the head, and hid and buried self behind the cross. Earth to him was nothing. His eye was fixed on “the recompense of reward” (Hebrews 11:26).

#### **4. Was his motive the gratification of any other passion?**

Impostors have pretended to receive divine revelations as a pretext in order that they might indulge in loose conduct. Was it so here? No; for all Paul’s teachings were in the most absolute antagonism to any such purpose. “His writings breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, order, and government, with the utmost abhorrence of all licentiousness, idleness, or loose behavior under the cloak of religion.” Writing to the Thessalonians, he utters the challenge,

“Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:10).

“We wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we took advantage of no man” (2 Corinthians 7:2).

The whole teaching of the Apostle is in the sternest and most uncompromising hostility to everything but the highest and holiest ideals.

### 5. Was it a pious fraud?

That is to say, did Paul pretend to receive a divine revelation in order to give him prestige in advancing the teachings of Christianity? But Christianity was the one thing he had set out to destroy. To become a Christian was to incur the hatred, the contempt, the torments and the violent deaths suffered by Christians in that day. Why then this sudden change in Paul's own views regarding the unpopular teachings of the Nazarene? Would he have endured "the loss of all things" and exulted over it, for what he knew was a fraud? Would he have spent a life of the most arduous toil to induce others to make every earthly sacrifice while he knew that behind it all he was practising a delusion? It would be an imposture as unprofitable as it was perilous, both to himself the deceiver and to the others whom he deceived. The theory confutes itself. Only the sternest conviction that he had received a divine revelation could have induced Paul to pass through what he himself had suffered, or to have asked others to do the same.

*"If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable" (1 Corinthians 15:19).*

But had he practiced a deception, he could not have successfully carried it out. Men sometimes act capriciously. Suppose that Paul "just did it" without any motive that can be imagined; then he must have ignominiously failed in his attempt to perpetuate such a fraud. How could he, e.g., have become such an adept in the mysteries and secrets of the new religion as to be an authority and an apostle of it, if he had to depend for his special knowledge on information received from men who knew well by bitter experience that he was their capital enemy? It must have come in another way, and his own account makes it plain.

*"For neither did I receive it (the Gospel) from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12).*

Had he fabricated the story of his conversion he would certainly have located it in a place so remote or hidden that there could be no witnesses to refute. [Joseph Smith, e.g., and the golden plates of the Book of Mormon]. Instead of that the miracle of Paul's conversion, with its great light from

heaven exceeding the brightness of the sun, is placed in the public highway near Damascus; at noonday, when their senses could not be deceived, and when all the accompanying soldiers and commissioners were with him on the spot. Had there been a shadow of disproof, how promptly the Jews in Damascus would have nipped the falsehood in the bud by the testimony of the witnesses who were present with Paul at the time. Or, when the Apostle stood on the castle stairs in Jerusalem and told the whole story, why did not the Jewish authorities silence him at once and forever by showing that nothing of the kind had ever taken place, and proved it by the abundant evidence of the competent witnesses who were with him — if it were not true? It was an event that took place before the eyes of the world, and would be made at once a matter of the strictest scrutiny. And the truth of the fact was so incontestably established that it had become a matter of common knowledge. The Jews said the utmost they could against Paul before the Roman court, and yet Paul appealed directly to King Agrippa in presence of Festus as to his own personal knowledge of the truth of the story.

“For the king knoweth of these things, unto whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this hath not been done in a corner” (Acts 26:26)

— “a very remarkable proof both of the notoriety of the fact, and the integrity of the man, who, with so fearless a confidence, could call upon a king to give testimony by him, even while he was sitting in judgment upon him.” Moreover, how came it that Ananias went to meet such an enemy in Damascus, if the story of his conversion was made up? If Paul was an impostor, then all his miracles were simply tricks or sleight-of-hand. Nevertheless, he, a despised and hated Jew, set himself to the appalling task of converting the Gentile world — teaching doctrines that shocked every prejudice and at which they were wont to mock in derision. Arrayed against him were the magistrates with their policy and power, the priests with their interests and craft, the people with their prejudice and passions, the philosophers with their pride and wisdom. Could he by feats of jugglery in presence of a shrewd, hostile people strike Elymas the sorcerer, blind; heal a cripple at Lystra; restore the pythoness at Philippi; shake open with a prayer the doors of a prison; raise the dead to life, etc., So that thousands were converted and great pure churches renouncing all sin and dishonesty, established throughout the Roman world? Our author shows that this

would be impossible without divine help and therefore he concludes that he has proven

- (1) that Paul was not a cheat telling a trumped-up story about his conversion, and
- (2) if he were, he could not have succeeded.

## **2. PAUL NOT AN ENTHUSIAST WHO IMPOSED ON HIMSELF**

This second argument covers twenty pages. Was Paul a deluded enthusiast whose overheated imagination imposed on him so that he imagined to be true that which had never really taken place? Lord Lyttelton makes an analysis of the elements that enter into the make-up of a man of this type. He finds these to be five.

- (1) Great heat of temper.

While Paul had intense fervor, like all great men, yet it was everywhere governed by discretion and reason. His zeal was his servant, not the master of his judgment. He possessed consummate tact which proves self-control. In indifferent matters he became “all things to all men;” to the Jews he became a Jew, to them that are without law as without law, to the weak he became weak — all, that he might gain some. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). “His zeal was eager and warm, but tempered with prudence, and even with the civilities and decorums of life, as appears by his behavior to Agrippa, Festus and Felix; not the blind, inconsiderate, indecent zeal of an enthusiast.”

- (2) Melancholy.

He regards this as a prominent mark of misguided zeal. He finds nothing of it in Paul. There is great sorrow over his former ignorant persecution of the Church, but there are no gloomy self-imposed penances such as melancholy fanatics inflict upon themselves. He had a desire to depart and be with Christ, but there was nothing morbid about it. It was all based on the revelation that he already had of the rewards that awaited him in the life to come. He tactfully met the Athenians adroitly claiming to be the interpreter of “The unknown god” whose altar they themselves had erected. He never hesitated to avert injustice by claiming his privileges as a Roman citizen. He was the very antithesis of gloominess. In whatever state he was, he had learned to be content. Neither his actions, nor his writings, nor his

interested greeting and salutations, show the slightest tincture of melancholia.

**(3) Ignorance.**

This charge could not be laid up against the Apostle. Brought up at the feet of the great Gamaliel, he appeared to be master not only of Jewish, but also of Greek (and Roman) learning.

**(4) Credulity.**

As a resident of Jerusalem, Paul could not be a stranger to the fame of the miracles wrought by Jesus. He had the facts of the resurrection of our Lord, of Pentecost and all the miracles wrought by the Apostles up till the death of Stephen. Far from being credulous, he had barred his mind against every proof and refused to believe. “Nothing less than the irresistible evidence of his own senses, clear from all possibility of doubt, could have overcome his unbelief.”

**(5) Vanity or self-conceit.**

Vanity and fanaticism usually go together. Men of this type flatter themselves that on account of their superior worth they are the recipients of extraordinary favors and gifts from God, and of these they make their boast. There is not one word in his Epistles, nor one act recorded in his life, in which the slightest mark of this appears. When compelled to vindicate his apostolic claim from wanton attack he does it effectively, but in the briefest way and with many apologies for being compelled to speak thus of himself. (2 Corinthians 11:1-30). When he had a vision of heaven, he modestly withheld his own name and covered it up in the third person. For fourteen years he observed absolute silence in regard to this special mark of the divine favor. (2 Corinthians 12:1-12). Would this be the way a vain man would act? Neither is Paul that planteth, nor Apollos that watereth, anything, but God who gives the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:4-7). Instead of self-conceit, he writes of himself in terms of the most complete abnegation. Everywhere it is “not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10). His modesty appears on every page.

**(6) But now suppose that in some way wholly unaccountable, Paul had actually been swept away by enthusiasm at the time, and imposed on himself, by imagining the events that took place.**

Lyttelton's reply is that such a thing was impossible. He here uses the argument that has since been employed so effectively to dispose of Renan's vision theory of the resurrection of our Lord. In such circumstances men always see what they expect to see. An imagined vision will be in accord with the opinions already imprinted on one's mind. Paul's purpose was clearly fixed. At his own request he had been clothed with authority to persecute the Christians, and he was now on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus on this very errand. He looked upon Christ as an impostor and a blasphemer who had justly been put to death. All his passions were inflamed to the highest degree against His followers. He started on his northward journey

“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1).

“And being exceedingly mad against them. I persecuted them even unto foreign cities” (Acts 26:11)

“There was the pride of supporting a part he had voluntarily engaged in, and the credit he found it procured him among the chief priests and rulers, whose commission he bore.” In these circumstances a wild enthusiast might indeed imagine he saw a vision, but it would be one urging him onward to do the thing which he had started out to accomplish. With nothing having happened to change his opinions or alter the bent of his mind, it would be as impossible for him, in a moment, to have imagined the complete revolution that is recorded in the New Testament as it would be for a rapid river to “carry a boat against the current of its own stream.” We might add, as well expect the mighty rushing river itself, without any cause to stop in its course and rush violently backward up a steep mountain side, as to expect the whole current of Paul's thought and feeling and imagination and purpose to be instantly reversed without any cause. It could not take place. And it would have been just as impossible for all those who were with him to have experienced the same delusion, for they also saw the light above the brightness of the noonday sun and they heard the voice from heaven, although they understood not the words. But suppose it were a meteor that burst upon them? How then account for the words that Paul heard speaking in the Hebrew tongue and the dialogue which followed? How account for his going to a certain spot in Damascus, in accordance with instructions here received? How account for the knowledge that Ananias had, and that led to their interview? How account

for the miracle after three days whereby Paul's blindness was healed? And how account for the mighty works and wonders afterward wrought by Paul, all consequent on this first revelation? [Following the suggestion of, perhaps, Krenkel, a New England professor is credited with teaching that at his conversion Paul had simply an epileptic attack. But, had all the company that were with him a like attack at the same instant, for they all saw something? And, moreover, no disorder of this or any other kind can account for the facts in the case. Paul's marvelous life-work revolutionized the history of his age, and his influence is powerfully felt yet, after nearly two thousand years, all over the world. One is almost tempted to say that if such is the result of an attack of epilepsy, what a pity that such a professor as this had not a similar attack. Then possibly he, too, might yet be heard from in the world].

### **3. PAUL WAS NOT DECEIVED BY OTHERS**

This third possible solution Lyttelton dismisses with a single page. The fraud of others could not have deceived him; for,

- (1) It was morally impossible that the disciples of Christ could have thought of such a fraud at the instant of Paul's greatest fury against them.
- (2) It was physically impossible for them to do it. Could they produce a light brighter than the midday sun; cause him to hear a voice speaking out of that light; make him blind for three days and then return his sight at a word, etc.? There were no Christians around when the miracle of his conversion took place.
- (3) No fraud could have produced those subsequent miracles which he himself actively wrought and to which he so confidently appealed in proof of his divine mission.

### **4. CHRISTIANITY A DIVINE REVELATION**

Our author considers that he has furnished sufficient evidence to show

- (1) that Paul was not an impostor deliberately proclaiming what he knew to be false with intent to deceive;
- (2) that he was not imposed upon by an overheated imagination, and

(3) that he was not deceived by the fraud of others. Unless, therefore, we are prepared to lay aside the use of our understanding and all the rules of evidence by which facts are determined, we must accept the whole story of Paul's conversion as literally and historically true. We have therefore the supernatural, and the Christian religion is proved to be a revelation from God.

Endeavoring as closely as possible to follow the original and yet considerably in my own language, I have sought to give the essence of Lord Lyttelton's matchless argument which has been blessed to thousands of doubting souls. May this outline lead to candid examination, as such an examination should inevitably lead to Him whom Paul saw in the midst of the glory near the gate of Damascus.

## Appendix 2

### The Conversion of the Apostle Paul

[*Albert Barnes' Notes, Under Acts 9:19*]

We have now passed through the account of one of the most remarkable conversions to Christianity that has ever occurred—that of the apostle Paul. His conversion has always been justly considered as a strong proof of the Christian religion. For,

- 1) This change could not have occurred by any want of fair prospects of honour. He was distinguished already as a Jew. He had the best opportunities for education that the nation afforded. He had every prospect of rising to distinction and office.
- 2) It could not have been produced by any prospect of wealth or fame by becoming a Christian. Christians were poor; and to be a Christian then was to be exposed to contempt, to persecution and to death. Saul had no reason to suppose that *he* would escape the common lot of Christians.
- 3) He was as firmly opposed to Christianity before his conversion as possible. He had already distinguished himself for his hostility. Infidels often say that Christians are prejudiced in favour of their religion. But here was a man, at first a bitter infidel, and a deadly foe to Christianity. All the prejudices of his education, all his prospects, all his former views and feelings, were opposed to the gospel of Christ. He became, however, one of its most firm advocates and friends, and it is for infidels to account for this change. There must have been *some* cause, some motive for it; and is there anything more rational than the supposition that Saul was convinced in a most striking and wonderful manner of the truth of Christianity?
- 4) His subsequent life showed that the change was sincere and real. He encountered danger and persecution to evince his attachment to Christ; he went from land to land, and exposed himself to every peril and every form of obloquy and scorn, always rejoicing that he was a Christian, and was permitted to suffer *as* a Christian, and has thus given the highest proofs of his sincerity. If such sufferings and such a life were not evidences of sincerity, then it would be impossible to fix on any circumstances of a man's life that would furnish proof that he was not a deceiver.

- 5) If Paul was sincere; if his conversion was genuine, the Christian religion is true. Nothing else *but* a religion from heaven could produce this change. There is here, therefore, the independent testimony of a man who was once a persecutor; converted in a wonderful manner; his whole life, views, and feelings revolutionized, and all his subsequent career evincing the sincerity of his feelings and the reality of the change. He is just such a *witness* as infidels ought to be satisfied with; a man once an enemy; a man whose testimony cannot be impeached; a man who had no interested motives, and who was willing to stand forth anywhere, and avow his change of feeling and purpose. We adduce him as such a witness; and infidels are *bound* to dispose of his testimony, or to embrace the religion which *he* embraced.
- 6) The example of Saul does not stand alone. Hundreds and thousands of enemies, persecutors, and slanderers have been changed, and every such one becomes a living witness of the power and truth of the Christian religion. The scoffer becomes reverent; the profane man learns to speak the praise of God; the sullen, bitter foe of Christ becomes his friend, and lives and dies under the influence of his religion. Could better proof be asked that this religion is from God?

## **Appendix 3**

### **Biblical Accounts of People Raised From the Dead**

#### **Old Testament Times:**

1. Elijah raised the son of the Zarephath widow from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-22).
2. Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman from the dead (2 Kings 4:32-35).
3. A man was raised from the dead when his body touched Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:20, 21).

#### **People Raised from the Dead by Christ:**

1. Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain from the dead (Luke 7:11-15).
2. Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Luke 8:41, 42, 49-55).
3. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44).

#### **People Raised from the Dead by the Apostles:**

1. When Christ sent the disciples out to preach, He told them to do four things: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons" (Matthew 10:8). We assume that they did what they were told and that some people were raised from the dead, but the Bible does not give specific examples. Since Judas was included in this group that was sent forth (v. 4), it is possible that he too raised someone from the dead.
2. Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-41).
3. Eutychus was raised from the dead by Paul (Acts 20:9, 10).

### **Three Unique Cases:**

#### **1) Many Saints Rose from the Dead at the Resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 27:50-53).**

Matthew is the only Gospel writer who tells us of certain saints who came out of their graves (verses 52-53). There was an earthquake which took place at the time of Christ's death (verse 51). This earthquake caused the rocks to split and the graves to be opened, but Matthew is careful to explain that the bodies of these saints did not come out of their graves until "after His resurrection" (verse 53), which indicates that Christ's resurrection took place first (compare 1 Cor. 15:20). These risen saints went into Jerusalem and appeared to many people, letting them

know that Christ's victory over death also guarantees that His believers will have victory over death.

This is all that Matthew tells us about this remarkable event, so we need to be careful not to be dogmatic about what the Scripture does not reveal. When the Bible is silent we need to be silent. Or, if we have a theory about what we think might have happened, we need to be careful to make sure people understand that it is just a theory.

There are two possible ways of understanding the timing of when these believers were raised up:

- 1) They were raised up from the dead on the day that Christ died, but their bodies remained in their tombs until after Christ's resurrection;
- 2) They were raised up from the dead after Christ's resurrection at which time they went into Jerusalem and appeared to many, even though their tombs were opened three days earlier, at the time of Christ's death.

The Greek grammar is somewhat inconclusive; either view is possible.

The better understanding seems to be that these saints did not rise up from the dead until after Jesus had been raised, even though prior to that, on the day of Christ's death, many of the tombs were opened as the result of the supernatural earthquake. [Alford and Jamieson/Fausset/Brown support this understanding.] It does not make sense that they were raised up at the time of Jesus' death and sat around for three days in the tombs before finally coming out and going into the city. It is more reasonable to say that they were raised up after Jesus' resurrection even though their tombs were opened prior to this. This would harmonize with the fact that Jesus was "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20; compare Acts 26:23), which would seem odd if these believers were raised ahead of His resurrection.

We are not told where they went after they entered Jerusalem.

This passage does not answer the question as to whether these saints were raised like Lazarus and the other examples given above, only to die again, or whether they were raised up in a resurrection body never to die again. We are just not told. It seems probable that they were raised up in resurrection bodies, then after they appeared to people in Jerusalem they were taken to heaven. This makes sense because we never hear about these people again. However, the passage just does not give enough details to prove this.

It seems that God wanted to demonstrate to people that Christ's resurrection would guarantee the resurrection of His believers, and He accomplished this amazing miracle to prove this point. "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19).

## **2. The Two Witnesses Will be Killed and Raised Back to Life (Revelation 11:7-12).**

These two men will be killed by the "Beast" (Antichrist) and three and a half days later will be raised from the dead and then they will ascend to heaven.

## **3. The Beast (Antichrist) will be healed of a deadly wound caused by a sword (Rev.**

13:3,12,14).

Interpreters differ in their understanding of this, but if this man actually dies as the result of a sword wound, then this will be another example of a resurrection from the dead. However, in this case it will be done by the power of Satan.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Christ's Unique Resurrection:**

**Jesus rose from the dead  
in a glorified, resurrected body  
(Matt. 28:5-8; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:5,6),  
never to die again  
(Rom. 6:9; Rev. 1:18).**