

THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

STONES SPEAK UP

SEVERAL YEARS AGO the *Saturday Evening Post* carried a very interesting story entitled Battle by Bible. Listen to what its author, John Hix, has to say:

“They tell this one to the men at the Army’s Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, these days—the strange incident in which the Bible supplied not merely inspiration, but a precise plan of battle, to the British in the Near East under General Allenby, in 1918.

“The British, out to capture Jericho, knew they must first eliminate a Turkish garrison at the village of Michmash. A frontal attack was decided upon, despite the heavy casualties it would inevitably entail. What happened after that constitutes one of the most unusual episodes in military annals.

“On February thirteenth, the eve of the attack, the British chief of staff outlined to his officers the plan for taking Michmash by direct assault. One of the officers, Major Petrie, started inwardly. The name of the village was familiar to him. After the meeting Petrie retired to his quarters to try to sleep. But the word “Michmash” kept running through his brain. Where had he encountered it? Suddenly he had the answer—the Book of Samuel, in the Bible. Quickly he located the passages he wanted, in Samuel I, chapters 13 and 14. Petrie rushed to the quarters of the commanding officer. Rousing him from sleep, he excitedly announced his find.

“It was the Biblical account of how Jonathan had taken Michmash from the Philistines nearly thirty centuries before. Various landmarks were mentioned; two sharp rocks which indicated a pass; a plot of ground overlooking the town. On a hunch, the commander sent scouts out to look for the landmarks. They returned with the report that they were all there.

”That night Petrie and the commander pored over the Biblical passages and completely changed the British plan of attack. Just before daybreak a small force set out for the plot of ground above Michmash. At dawn they emerged from hiding, with loud cries. The Turks poured from their huts, saw the men on the strategic ledge behind them. Confused and terrorized, they were easily subdued. Michmash was taken with amazingly few casualties, and the door to the Near East opened for a great British victory.”

Now, of course, such accuracy in a very ancient collection of writings may rather surprise you.

But to a Christian, accuracy of that kind is precisely what one ought to find in the Bible, since it is more than just a book which has come down to us from remote times: in his opinion it is the Word of the living God. And, consequently, he is not startled when, as in the capture of Michmash during World War I, its uncanny reliability is vividly illustrated. He knows that God is altogether true, and therefore, cannot be the Author of falsehood. And so he reasons that if the Bible has indeed been divinely inspired, it must, like the Eternal Spirit who guided its writers, be altogether true. And this line of reasoning has lately been powerfully vindicated by the findings of archaeology. By means of this science the supernatural accuracy of the Bible has been overwhelmingly demonstrated in recent times.

As James Orr puts it, before the advent of archaeology

“Comparatively few materials existed, outside the Bible itself, for testing the correctness of the statements of that book regarding the peoples, countries, and civilizations, with which its pages, in so many different ways, bring us into contact. What information about ancient countries was derived from outside sources—as, e.g., from the Greek historian Herodotus—was late, confused, contradicted the Bible as well as confirmed it, and, of course, was freely used by unbelievers to discredit the authority of the Bible. By a singular providence of God, the state of things is very different now. Sixty years ago we were in the dark; now we are comparatively in a blaze of light. As if by magic, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, other ancient lands, have yielded up their buried palaces, their monuments, their long-lost libraries, a voice has gone up rebuking the scorner, and bearing a testimony, as emphatic as it was unlooked for, to the credibility of Holy Writ.”

— *The Bible Under Trial*

For instance, because of archaeological findings, no skeptic can ever again sneer at the account of the conquest of Jericho by the Israelites. Previously, mocking unbelievers took keen delight in pointing out the amusing absurdity of this narrative related in Scripture.

“And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him . . . And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before him; but the rereward came after the ark of the Lord, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp; so they did six days. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times.

“And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city . . . So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city” (Joshua 6:2-20).

What sport the skeptic once had with this story! The outstanding archaeologist, Professor John Garstang, who did not have the least concern about proving the truth of the Bible, carried on prolonged research at the site and discovered that, exactly as the Bible says, the city was thoroughly burned and destroyed while in occupation; and he also discovered that, exactly as the Bible says, the walls, somehow collapsing of their own accord, fell outwards, even though they were fifteen feet high and ten feet thick. In his own words:

“There remains no doubt that the walls fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over their ruins into the city.”

Archaeology has likewise demonstrated the literal truth of another narrative in the Bible which formerly was the butt of much skeptical irony — the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by a deluge of fire and brimstone, in the course of which the wife of Lot was encased in salt. Dr. A. Rendle Short, British surgeon, says:

“The Dead Sea has no outlet. The Jordan and other streams that flow into it bring down water and dissolved mineral salts; the water evaporates from the surface, and the salts become so concentrated that they are deposited in crystalline form in and around the lake. There is a stratum of rock salt 150 feet thick which can be traced for six miles. Overlying it is a layer of sulphur which can be lit with a match. Large quantities of bitumen (asphalt) used to exist around the lake; much has been taken away, but some remains. There is enough oil to cause an oil company, just before the Great War, to commence operations. The “slime pits” of Genesis 14 no doubt refer to the excavations for asphalt. It will be observed that the whole area is highly peculiar. If by some act of God the gases generated in such a region became ignited, it is not at all surprising that fire and brimstone were rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah, that masses of salt hurled into the air may have covered over Lot’s wife, and that the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. Kyle says a rupture of the strata is plainly visible. According to Alexis Mallon (1929), the site of Sodom shows that it was destroyed by a great fire, and never again occupied. Let us say in passing that we are not all disposed to explain away a miracle. It was by an act of God that Lot was warned and enabled to escape, and that the catastrophe occurred as it did and when it did.”

If however, you are still inclined to doubt the literal truth of the Bible at this point, I suggest that you ponder a statement made by Commander Joseph B. Lynch of the United States Navy after he and a party of experts had carefully investigated the region of these cities. Here is his statement:

“It is for the learned to comment on the facts which we have laboriously collected. Upon ourselves, the result is a decided one. We entered upon this sea, with conflicting opinions. One of the party was skeptical, and another, I think, a professed unbeliever of the Mosaic account. After twenty- two days’ close investigation, if I am not mistaken, we were unanimous in the conviction of the truth of the Scriptural account of the destruction of the cities of the plain.”

So overwhelmingly has archaeology demonstrated the amazing accuracy of Scripture that several noted scholars who started out in skepticism and doubt became convinced believers, forced by sheer weight of fact to accept the Bible as the Word of the living God.

I think of Dr. A. H. Sayce of England whom Prime Minister Gladstone refused to appoint (in 1882) as professor of history at Oxford University because of the radical way in which he criticized the Bible. Then Sayce went to the Far East and personally began to dig up Biblical ruins, and as he did so he gradually became convinced that the Bible was right and he was wrong. And at last in 1898 he said that he had come to be regarded — and I give you his own words — “as a representative of the Orthodox Party and a defender of Holy Writ.”

I think, too, of Sir William Ramsay, famous authority on the ancient world. In his important book, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, he tells how as a young professor he went to Palestine in order to study its antiquities for himself. At that time he did not accept the Bible as reliable history. He was especially persuaded that the Book of Acts in the New Testament was valueless as a factual record. He says, for instance, “At this point we are describing what reasons and arguments changed the mind of one who began under the impression that the history was written long after the events and that it was untrustworthy as a whole.” Studying the findings of archaeology for himself he, like Dr. Sayce, became convinced that the Bible was right and he was wrong. He became so convinced of the Bible’s accuracy that he finally declared to the whole world of modern scholarship,

“I take the view that Luke’s history is unsurpassed in regard to its trustworthiness . . . you may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian’s and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment.”

Sir William Ramsay accepted the Bible as the Word of the Living God, and dedicated all his brilliant talents to the service of the redeeming Christ whom the Bible proclaims.

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