

Answering Atheism

by Samuel Logan Brengle

The inspiration of the Bible is proved by experience, not by logic, and redeemed lives are the strongest proof of its inspiration.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Matthew 4:4, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 3:17

Topics: "Faith and History", "The Inspiration of Scripture"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle addresses the challenge of atheism by emphasizing the importance of understanding history to gain perspective on God's providence. He argues that a deep knowledge of history can prevent despair and cocksureness, allowing believers to see God's hand at work through time. Brengle highlights the need for personal experience and inner illumination to truly understand the Bible's divine inspiration, asserting that the Bible meets the spiritual needs of humanity. He encourages believers to live out their faith authentically, as redeemed lives serve as the most compelling evidence of the Bible's truth. Ultimately, he calls for a response to atheism not through debate, but through the demonstration of a Christlike life that reflects the transformative power of the Scriptures.

Transcript

A wide knowledge of history tends to sanity, to sobriety, and correctness of judgment of men and events, if we have seen God in history. We need such knowledge to give us perspective, to steady us, to save us from sharp judgments, to insure us against cocksureness on one hand and despair on the other. Without this wide, long view, we are like a tiny boat on a tempestuous sea, tossed like a ship on the waves, but with it we are more like a great ship that rides serenely over the billows.

To the casual observer the experience of the race seems tidal, always flowing and ebbing like the tides of the sea; or forever moving in a circle, getting nowhere, evermore coming back from whence it started, like the rivers rising out of and returning to the sea. The

One far-off divine event, To which the whole creation moves, and the slow but sure workings of Providence and the unfailing purpose and process of the Divine government are hidden from him.

When I was a child on the wide, bare, unprotected prairies of the Middle West, black clouds and fierce thunderstorms filled me with anxious fears and vague terror, but as I grew to manhood I saw them as a part of a vast and ordered whole, and they lost their power to create panic in me.

Once, when sick and prostrated in health, I was thrown into a state of mental and spiritual anxiety, amounting almost to torture, by the nation-wide excitement over a great prize-fight. I felt our American civilization was only veneered barbarism, and for a time it seemed to me that we were reverting to, and were to be swallowed up by, brutal, sensuous paganism; then, on my knees praying, I remembered the days when a thousand gladiators fought each other to the death in the Coliseum, or battled and struggled with and were devoured by wild beasts to make a Roman holiday, while the mobs of the city by the hundred thousand, headed by the Emperor, Senators, philosophers, noble ladies, and all the elite gloated over the cruel, bloody scene. Then in deep reverence and gratitude and glad trust I gave God thanks, as I saw how far He had led us on and was still leading, from those ghastly pleasures, those merciless days.

When I was a child the Civil War was raging; soldiers marched and counter-marched through our peaceful little valley and village; armies stormed and thundered across the land; proud cities were besieged and starved and fell before conquering hosts; fathers, brothers, sons were perishing in bloody combat, in fetid swamps and prison camps; homes were vanishing; funeral bells were ever tolling, tolling; mothers, sisters, wives, and orphans were ever weeping, weeping; the foundations of the social order seemed to be crumbling, and men turned their thoughts to the apocalyptic portions of Scripture and tried to interpret the times by their symbolisms, and turned their eyes to the clouds in expectation of the Saviour's bodily appearing, longing for Him to come and work out the Salvation which man himself, abasing his pride and yielding to the lordship of Jesus, under the leadership of the sanctifying Spirit, must work out for himself and his, or perish. It was years before the light of history enabled me to escape this bald interpretation of apocalyptic symbols and walk in quietness and peace and close attention to daily duty, while a world quaked and trembled in unparalleled hurricanes of war, assured that 'the heavens do rule,' and 'a Watcher and a Holy One ' in the heavens was interested in our perplexity and sore travail, and would guide us through the storm and tempest, purified and chastened, to a haven of peace.

History is repeating itself in spirit among us, and a society, a very militant society, for the propagation of Atheism has recently received letters of incorporation from the legislators of New York, and also an anti-Bible Society has been incorporated. And for its first year's budget it is asking for \$83,000, and offering life membership for \$1,000. Its avowed object 'is to discredit the Bible,' to 'make known its human origin, evolutionary formation, and its discreditable history; expose its immoral and barbaric contents; and lay bare its anti-scientific, anti-liberal, and irrational teachings.' Such is its program. It proposes to show that 'the Bible is the work of man.' 'The falsification by deliberate mistranslation is the sole basis of orthodoxy.' 'The inhuman character of the Bible -- God shall be offered in evidence against the Book.' 'The Bible patriarchs shall be shown to be a set of unmatched moral monsters.' 'The spirit of injustice and intolerance dominate the Bible.' 'The Sermon on the Mount consists mainly of romantic sentimentalism unrelated to reality.' 'The Bible is inimical to civilization. It must and shall be discredited.' 'The American anti-Bible Society has no religious tests for membership, except disbelief in the Bible as divinely inspired.' Help us free America from Bible-bondage.'

These are some tid-bits from its bulletin or manifesto. The Society for the Propagation of Atheism has already enlisted many young people and students, and societies of 'damned souls,' as they dub themselves, are flourishing in many of our schools and colleges. It is all a part of a nationwide, world-wide movement, awash of wide, sweeping waves of Atheism gushing forth from the heart of the Russian Revolution, something that The Army and all lovers of our Lord and of the Bible will have to face and possibly come into close and desperate grips with in the near future.

If these gentlemen were better acquainted with history, they might not be so cocksure of discrediting the Bible and banishing God from His throne. If we are acquainted with history we shall not be uncertain as to the final issue, but neither will we sit down in a fool's paradise and think we can drive back the waves of mocking, irresponsible, desperate unbelief by witty retort, by smart rejoinder, or by learned and masterly debate.

How shall we reply to their denial of the Divine elements of the Bible? How shall we prove it to be God-inspired? Is it a subject of proof or of faith? How can I be sure of it for myself, and how can I prove it to others? Paul says, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,' but that is an assertion, not a proof. It still has to be proved, if it can be.

I had studied the various arguments for the inspiration of the Bible by theologians, and since I had from my infancy up accepted the Bible as God's Book, they confirmed my unquestioning faith. But there came a time when I needed more than learned arguments to prove it to me. And not until God Himself came to my help was I wholly, invincibly convinced.

That which finally established my faith in the divinity of the Bible was opened eyes, an inner illumination of my own soul, which enabled me to behold wondrous things all through its sacred pages. 'Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law,' prayed the Psalmist. The Book is largely sealed to men with unanointed eyes and self-satisfied, or world-satisfied, hearts, and from men who turn from the paths of rectitude and 'stumble at the word, being disobedient.'

The pastor of the church of Laodicea became lukewarm as a result of getting rich and increasing in goods until he felt he had need of nothing; but knew not that he was 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.'

'I counsel thee,' said Jesus, 'to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see (Revelation iii. 5-18). The Book was sealed to him, and the revelations of the Lord were hidden from him, because of the self-imposed blindness or dimness of his spiritual eyes.

The final blessing that Jesus gave His disciples just before He ascended from them was the blessing of this inner illumination of opened eyes. 'Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures' (Luke xxiv. 45).

The sun does not need learned astronomical treatises to prove its existence, nor a candle of man's making to enable it to be seen. All it needs is that men should have eyes to see. It is its own evidence. So the Bible carries in itself its evidences of inspiration. 'I know the Bible is inspired,' said a great soul-winner, 'because it inspires me.' What the sun is in the world of material things, that the Bible is in the world of spiritual things. It is a lamp to the feet, a light unto the path of men whose spiritual eyes are open, and who will resolutely follow where it leads. Let us notice some of the assertions of the Book and find if they can be proved, not by argument but by life, by experience, for the Bible is but a venerable and curious bit of ancient literature to be read for pleasure or to gratify curiosity, if it does not answer to the deep needs of life, the hunger of the soul, the fears, the hopes, the aspirations, the questionings of the spirit in man.

'Man shall not live by bread alone,' said Jesus, 'but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Does the Bible feed the soul of man? All the saints and soldiers of Jesus of all the ages have been

nourished and have lived on the Word of God.

'I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food,' said Job. 'How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth,' wrote the Psalmist. 'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.' Thy words were found, and I did eat them,' said Jeremiah. 'And Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.'

Does the Bible help men to live finer, cleaner, saintly lives? It certainly does. The man who receives the word of God into his heart will stop sinning. 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee,' wrote the Psalmist. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word.' 'Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.'

Does the Bible offer hope to the sinner? The man who has wasted his life, scorned the voice of conscience, turned his back on light and goodness and God? It is the only Book in the world that does. It, and it alone, tells of a redeeming God, a Saviour from sin, a loving Heavenly Father who waits to welcome sinners.

'God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Ten thousand times ten thousand sinners saved by faith in the Saviour revealed in the Bible will testify to the truth of those words.

Does the Bible offer succor to tempted men and women? Does it comprehend our need? It does as no other book in the world does. It reveals an elder Brother who enters into the fellowship of our temptations. 'For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted' (Hebrews ii. 18). 'For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Hebrews iv. 15.) 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it' (1 Corinthians x. 13).

Does the Bible have any word for the toilers and burdened people of earth, the perplexed, the careworn? It does, sweet words of comprehension and assurance such as can nowhere else be found: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.'

Has the Bible any word for the persecuted, the maligned, the oppressed? Listen: 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in Heaven.' 'From Heaven did the Lord behold the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death.'

Has the Bible any word for those who are sore afflicted? 'He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard.' 'If we suffer we shall also reign with Him.' 'For our light affliction worketh for us,' worketh what? 'worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the

things which are not seen. Hallelujah!

'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'

Has the Bible a word for those whose eyes are dim with tears? 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'

For those who are in pain? 'Neither shall there be any more pain.'

Has it any word about the far future? 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.' 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.' 'And God shall wipe away all tears . . . and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying.'

1. How can I prove the inspiration of the Bible? By the way it answers to the heart of man. The key that fits an intricate lock was evidently made for that lock. The Bible meets me at every point of my moral and spiritual need; it fits my heart's intricate needs as the key fits the lock, and I doubt not, I exult to know that the Divine Hand that fashioned me gives me the Book, and His heart that loves me pours itself with fathomless comforts into my heart through the Book; but I cannot prove to you the divinity of the Book any more than I can prove to you that the sun is shining, that honey is sweet, that the song of the bird is melodious.

The inspiration of the Bible is proved by experience, not by logic. 'Meditate therein day and night' to obey, 'to do according to all that is 'written therein,' and you shall know, you shall taste its sweetness, behold its wonders, and hear in its words the whisperings of the everlasting Father to the heart of His child.

2. How shall I prove to others, to those who question, who doubt, who deny, that the Bible is a God-given, God-inspired Book? Shall I go to history, science, archaeology for proof? Yes, at the proper time and to the right people. But the most convincing proof of the inspiration of the Bible that I can offer to an unbeliever is a redeemed life, lived in the power and sweetness of the Spirit; a life that matches the Bible; a life of love, of prayer and faith and devotion; a life of joy and peace and patience and sweet goodwill to all men; a life full of good works matching a glad testimony to the saving, sanctifying, keeping power and ever living presence of the Lord Jesus; a life like that of a Convert from Heathenism, whose heathen neighbors said of him 'There is no difference between him and the Book.' He was a living Bible known and read of them all, and they saw and felt in him inspiration. He was inbreathed, indwelt of God, and through him they recognized inspiration in the Book.

Redeemed lives, drawing light and strength and inspiration from and matching the inspired Book are the unanswerable proofs of its inspiration.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, of Labrador, tells us that when a student in the University in England he lived with a professor who was a lecturer on the evidences of Christianity. This lecturer was in frequent controversy with infidels, but never converted one of them. They would meet in public debate, each supported by his friends and followers, who were confirmed in their opinions, but there was no changing of sides, no converts were made. It was heady, a rivalry of wits, a struggle for mastery, an intellectual fisticuffs to no profit. But one day one of the most doughty of these infidel debaters was stricken with fatal illness. His friends had no words of comfort, and left him to himself. Then a sweet, humble sister-Salvationist stepped in and nursed the dying man. She could not and she did not argue with him, but she revealed to him a

redeemed, Christlike life. Love was in her face, tenderness was in her touch, grace was on her lips, peace and joy in Jesus radiated from her, and lo! what encyclopedic knowledge which puffeth up, and vast learning and brilliant argument and eloquent speech had failed to do, a humble, inspired life did do. He was converted and died in the faith.

An infidel challenged a man of God to debate about religion. 'I accept your challenge on this condition,' replied the man of God, 'that I bring one hundred men with me to testify what faith in Christ has done for them, and you bring one hundred men to testify what atheism has done for them.' The challenger was nonplussed, withdrew the challenge, and there was no debate.

Meek and lowly, but glad and bold witnesses, who witness by lip and life and shining look, are the strongest, the unanswerable proof of the inspiration of the Book by which they live. The final proof will be given when the risen Jesus appears with crowns and thrones and kingdoms, honour, glory, and immortality for those who have believed and loved and followed Him to the end, and opens the dark gates of doom and banishes into 'indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish every soul of man that doeth evil.'

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