



GOD'S ANVIL

by

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“But the word of the LORD endureth forever.”

— I Peter 1:25

Years ago I saw a painting which I have never forgotten—a painting of a large anvil. Scattered on the floor around the anvil lay scores of shattered, smashed hammers and underneath that, the words of our text: **“The word of the LORD endureth forever.”**

“God’s Anvil,” I believe, is an appropriate metaphor for the Word of God which has endured the attacks of innumerable skeptics and unbelievers and yet still stands, unscathed, in spite of the onslaught of the ages. “Hammer away, ye hostile hands. Your hammers break, God’s anvil stands.” **“But the word of the LORD endureth forever.”**

Let us consider that great text and see how God, in a supernatural way, has sustained His Word down through the centuries against attacks from all classes and ranks of men. Numerous kings, with the scepter of state in one hand, have taken up the hammer of unbelief with the other and have attempted, with all of the power of government itself, to smash the anvil of God.

HEROD THE GREAT

For example, one of the early kings was Herod, who was sometimes called *the Great*. Herod the Great heard that the wise men had declared that the one who was to be ruler in Israel was to be born, and so he gathered them together to inquire of them where this prince should be born.” **And they [the wise men] said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of**

Judah: for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people of Israel.” (Matthew 2: 5–6). Thus said the prophet, thus declared the Word of God.

King Herod then took up the hammer of his might and sent forth his soldiers to destroy that promise and to nullify the prophecy. He had all of the children two years old and younger killed in all of the environs of Bethlehem. The king thought he had brought to naught the prophecy of the Word of God. However, God warned Joseph in a dream and he took the child and his mother and fled into Egypt. Thus the prophecy came to pass; the Word of God was fulfilled; He that was to rule His people came forth out of Bethlehem after all!

JULIAN THE APOSTATE

Or consider another king, four hundred years later. Constantine the Great made Rome a Christian empire. But he died, and his nephew, Julian, who had come to be known as Julian the *Apostate*, rose to the throne by bloody murder. He was determined to re-establish the pagan religions of Rome. So he set out to study the Scripture, specifically to disprove Christianity by bringing to naught its prophecies. When he saw the prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple, he determined that he would rebuild it and thus disprove the Scripture. He sent forth the money and men to do just that, but there was a great earthquake, which destroyed the work before it was hardly begun.

Undaunted, once more the work was begun. This time, out of the fissures of the earth came forth great clouds of gas which were ignited in huge explosions. So terrified were the workers that they fled the scene and refused, in spite of all inducements, to come back to rebuild the temple. Therefore, Julian was thwarted in his effort!

However, he went on, and at one time engaged in a great battle with the Persians on the site of what was once Babylon. There remained, jutting up into the air, the remnants of the great walls of Babylon. Now the prophet had declared that the walls would be utterly destroyed. Centuries had passed since this prophecy, and yet remnants of the walls still jutted into the sky—a silent proclamation that the prophecy had not been completely fulfilled.

The Persians used the walls as refuge and from their heights rained arrows down on the Roman soldiers, causing the loss of much life. Finally, when the Roman army subdued the Persians, Julian himself gave the order that never again would these walls be used to frustrate the power of Rome; they must be completely destroyed. And they were! Unwittingly, Julian fulfilled the prophecy of the Word of God that the walls of Babylon would be utterly destroyed. Centuries later, when archaeologists found the ruins of Babylon, they had to dig down in the earth to discover them. So again, the Word of God continues. “Hammer away, ye hostile hands. Your hammers break, God’s anvil stands.”

Or consider two modern-day rulers: Hitler and Mussolini. Both set themselves obstinately against the Church of Christ and His Word. Hitler, who called himself a pagan, determined to uproot Christianity. Mussolini declared that the Church would soon cease to exist. Yet the time came when Hitler’s charred body was found in a bunker in Germany and Mussolini hung by his feet in a public square! The Word of the Lord, indeed, endureth forever.

VOLTAIRE

Not only kings, but philosophers as well have lent their wit and wisdom in their attempt to destroy the Word of God. One of the most brilliant and caustic was the great Frenchman, Voltaire, who wrote an entire encyclopedia against Christianity and the Bible. Voltaire was quite sure that Christianity would soon be a thing of the past. Yet, after he died, his printing press and his house in Geneva were used by the Swiss Bible Society for the printing and promulgation of that Bible that Voltaire so much despised!

Or consider David Hume, a name which is probably synonymous with skepticism. That famous Scottish philosopher felt that he had undermined all certitude in the world concerning philosophy, religion, or anything else. Hume, with his razor-sharp mind, felt that after his writings, no one could be sure about anything and that the foundations of religion would most certainly be destroyed, and the Bible would soon become an ancient artifact remembered by few. But shortly after his death, David Hume's house in Edinburgh became the headquarters for the Scottish Bible Society from which went forth tens of thousands of copies of the "hated" book! "Hammer away, ye hostile hands. Your hammers break, God's anvil stands." **"The word of the Lord endureth forever."**

Not only have those who have taken up the hammer against the anvil of God found their hammers shattered and broken and all of their works come to naught, but there have even been those who have found that their hammers, having been broken, have taken up the sword, being transformed themselves. They have been changed into avid defenders of the very Word they once hated! Some who have started out to smash the anvil have ended up standing upon it with drawn sword, ready to take on any future antagonists.

SIR WILLIAM MICHAEL RAMSEY

One such man was the brilliant, erudite Sir William Michael Ramsey, famous authority on the ancient world. He was born into a house of skepticism and atheism, as his parents were also unbelievers. He was well-educated at Oxford; he was wealthy. He was determined that he would see the Word of God demolished by his wit. Unlike the philosophers who had sat in their easy chairs and had philosophized about religion, he himself would go to the source. So, with the spade of the archaeologist—a field in which he was well-trained—he would prove the Bible to be nothing more than the product of ambitious monks of the second or third century: simply a carefully constructed myth.

Ramsey decided, after much study, that the Achilles' heel of the New Testament was the book of Acts, because it included the three missionary journeys of Paul, with detailed accounts of names, places, and offices throughout the Roman world. He went to the Near East and began his work. The critical world was excited. Never had anyone been so prepared as was Sir William Ramsey! Indeed, there must have been some Christians who were somewhat intimidated by what might come from this great undertaking to destroy the Scripture.

That was in 1881. For fifteen years he labored indefatigably, following the route which Luke laid out in the book of Acts. At last, in 1896, he produced his first work: *St. Paul, the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*. In that book, much to the dismay of the critical world, he said that he had found Luke to be an astonishingly accurate guide for his journeys!

That was just the first of many books. For forty years Ramsey continued his studies, his excavations, and the writing of many other books—all to the increasing dismay and chagrin of the unbelieving world, but to the delight of Christians. He had found Luke to be an infallible guide, a prince of historians, accurate to the minutest detail. Finally, Sir William Ramsey committed his life to the Christ of the Scriptures which he had found to be unfailingly sure.

If Ramsey's first book was one of the astonishments of the nineteenth century, then certainly *Light From the Ancient East*, by Adolph Deissman, the German scholar and archaeologist, was one of the astonishments of the twentieth century. This time it was not England but Germany that sent forth its skeptical and highly-trained unbeliever to the Near East to disprove the Scriptures. Again, with the passing of the years, the untiring and unflagging digging in innumerable sites, finally produced material for the monumental work *Light From the Ancient East*, which showed once again that every find they had made only served to confirm the Scriptures. Skeptic and unbeliever, Adolph Deissman was also converted to Christ!

COLONEL ROBERT INGERSOLL

Rarely does a general get together with a colonel to discuss theology, but that is precisely what happened one day early in this century on a train passing through the Midwest. The colonel was Colonel Robert Ingersoll, the most famous skeptic and unbeliever of his day, who traveled through the country lecturing against the Bible. On this particular occasion he asked the general, who was a writer with great literary skills, why he didn't use his skills to demolish the "myth" presented in the Bible concerning Jesus Christ and to show Him up for what He really was—merely a man among men.

GENERAL LEW WALLACE

The general thought that it was a good idea, and some time later he began to gather all the historical materials he could find. As he searched, he found himself growing ever more astonished. He was amazed to discover that this Galilean peasant, reared in an obscure town called Nazareth out of which "no good thing could come," having never received any education, having never attended school—with no degrees or background of any sort—suddenly emerged from total obscurity, walked upon a mountain and delivered the most astounding statement on human ethics the world had ever heard.

This general's astonishment continued to grow and his amazement increased as he followed the life of this Jesus of Nazareth, until at last, there at the cross at Calvary, like the centurion, he bowed the knee and received Christ as his own Savior and Lord. He wrote his book. It did not present Jesus as merely a man among men, but rather as the incarnate God who was dwelling among men! What was the general's name? His name: General Lew Wallace. His book: *Ben Hur*, a story of the Christ, the divine Savior of men. "Hammer away ye hostile hands. Your hammers break, God's anvil stands."

These found that their hammer had been transformed into a sword. They began to defend the very Scriptures which once they had condemned!

THE CRITICS

We have considered some of those who have attempted to destroy the Scriptures and have found that their hammers have shattered. We have considered others who have found that their hammers have been transformed into a sword to defend the Scriptures. Let us now consider a few of the various attacks that have been made upon the anvil of God and what has happened to them.

The “assured results of higher criticism” is what they were called. This school of higher criticism began in the last century. It seemed the higher critics considered themselves called upon to demolish all traditional views concerning the Bible. For example, they said that it was quite obvious that Moses could not possibly have written the Pentateuch, because writing had not even been invented in his day.

It is interesting that about the time that higher criticism began, the science of archaeology began as well. The spade of the archaeologist has been the utter frustration of the higher critic, for it was discovered not long after that writing certainly existed in the time of Moses! It has been discovered in recent days that writing existed long *before* Moses. Recent discoveries have indicated that perhaps fifteen hundred years before Moses was born, writing was flourishing on the earth. This “assured result of higher criticism” was shattered.

NINEVEH

Then, of course, there was the wonderful and delightful joy the critics had with the biblical stories about the empire of Assyria and with its capital, Nineveh. They said that it never existed; that all of the supposed kings of Assyria and Nineveh were simply mythological characters—mythological kings of the mythological capital of the mythological empire of Assyria, which never existed anywhere but in the fertile minds of the writers of the biblical myths! How did they know that? Very simply: none of the secular historians ever mentioned Nineveh or Assyria or any of the kings. Therefore, whenever the Bible is thrown into conflict with secular historians, it is obvious to any “intelligent” person that the Bible is wrong and the secular historians are right! Why is that obvious? It is obvious when they begin with the presuppositions that supernaturalism cannot possibly be, and that there is no God; therefore, there cannot possibly be an inspired Scripture.

SIR HENRY LAYARD

But then, of course, there was Sir Henry Layard, who boarded a boat at Mosul and floated down the Tigris River to excavate at Nimrud. He and his men began to dig. They found a brick on which was inscribed the name of Shalmaneser III—one of the mythological kings of the mythological empire of Assyria. He sent it to a museum in London, where it was examined quite carefully and it was declared with absolute certainty to be fraudulent. It could not have really been Shalmaneser because, you see, he never existed. He was never the king of Nineveh and of Assyria, because such an empire never existed!

Layard then did a most impertinent thing. He had the utter temerity to dig up the whole city of Nineveh. The results proved to be extremely embarrassing to the “assured results of higher criticism,” for there in the great library of Nineveh were thousands of inscriptions dealing with

all the various kings of Nineveh and the whole history of the Assyrian empire. Again, another of the “assured results of higher criticism” crumbled!

THE HITTITES

The skeptics then transferred their attention from the Assyrians to the Hittites. The Bible mentions the Hittites forty times. Who are the Hittites? Well, they were, again, an imaginary people who dwelt in the midst of the pages of the Old Testament. Unfortunately, they never really lived, said the “assured results of higher criticism.” Then in 1906, Dr. Hugo Winckler uncovered the city of Boghos-Keni in central Turkey—the former capital of the “mythological” empire of the Hittites. In the last decade or so, other discoveries have shown that the Hittite empire was more vast in scope than anyone had ever conceived it to be—even larger than we would have gathered from the writings in the Bible. It was apparently the largest kingdom of its day. Yet, for centuries the skeptics were saying that it never existed. Another assured result bit the dust! “Hammer away ye hostile hands. Your hammers break, God’s anvil stands.”

JERICHO

Then there was the delightful story about Joshua, who fought the battle of Jericho, and about the people who walked around the city for seven days—and then the walls fell down flat! That was a nice story for Sunday school children, and it even made a nice song. Of course, as every “intelligent” person knew, it never really happened. However, Professor Garstang, a great archaeologist, arrived at the site of Jericho. He spent six years laboriously uncovering one layer after another of the city, until he arrived at ruins from the time of Joshua. So amazing were his discoveries that he wrote a startling statement, which he and two other archaeologists signed and sent to the amazed critical world. He said: “There remains no doubt that the walls fell outward so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over the ruins into the city.” Also, the city was subsequently burned, even as the Old Testament declares.

NUMBERING THE STARS

However, the critics were still not through with the Old Testament. They had other things to say, as they had been doing for many centuries. For example: the Bible says in Jeremiah 33:22, **“As the host of the heaven cannot be numbered ...”** Even the ancients didn’t believe that. Hipparchus, one of the early astronomers and philosophers, said that was obviously nonsense, because it was clear that there were precisely 1,022 stars in the heavens!

Of course Ptolemy, the great astronomer who lent his name to a view of the universe for over a thousand years, discovered that Hipparchus was not quite accurate. There were not 1,022 stars in the heavens—there were 1,026! Precisely 1,026! So the idea that “the host of the heavens cannot be numbered” was, of course, ludicrous in the extreme. Then there was the invention of the telescope and ever larger telescopes revealing ever greater numbers of stars, until Sir James Jeans made the statement that it was no good trying to count the stars, for they could not be numbered—as the Scriptures had declared!

BIRTH OF JESUS

There were attacks by skeptics on the New Testament as well. The birth of Jesus was a familiar target. Luke was declared to be a faulty historian in three main points concerning his account of the birth.

- First, said the scholars, there was no such thing as a census taken in Rome. There was no historical record of it.
- Second, Quirinius was not the governor of Syria in B.C. at the time Christ was born, but rather, as Josephus declared in 6 A.D.
- Third, people did not have to return to their ancestral homes for enrollment, as Luke had declared. This was obvious; it was the “assured results of higher criticism,” and we’re sorry, but you will just have to tear that page out of your Bible, for that, you see, is just not true.

But the spade of the archaeologist continued to turn. They found that the Romans did, indeed, have censuses. They began with the emperor Augustus and continued every fourteen years. It was discovered that Quirinius was governor of Syria twice, the first time beginning in 7 B.C. A papyrus was discovered in Egypt which contained these fascinating words: “Because of the approaching census, it is necessary that all those residing for any cause away from their homes should at once prepare to return to their own governments in order that they may complete the family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands may retain those belonging to them.”

It was precisely what Luke had declared! Once more, “the assured results of higher criticism” crumbled into the dirt. “Hammer away ye hostile hands. Your hammers break, God’s anvil stands.” **“The word of the Lord endureth forever.”**

POWER OF THE WORD

How powerful is that Word? It is a Word by which the Gospel is preached to you—a Gospel which can transform lives and societies. How true that is. One of the most remarkable examples of transformed lives is seen in that wonderful historical story *Mutiny on the Bounty*, a true story of the mutiny that took place on His Majesty’s ship, *Bounty*. Captain Bligh was overthrown and placed in a lifeboat with a few other men and set adrift. The sailors went back to the island they had come to love. Captain Bligh managed to return to England.

He got a ship and came back to take into chains those who had mutinied. But nine of the sailors had gone off to another island. It was a number of years later that what had happened to them was discovered by the outside world. When they landed on this other island, they degenerated fast. They sank into the very depths of degradation. There was rape and plunder and destruction. There was drunkenness and disease of all sorts. There was much murder and theft. Things became so bad that it seemed they would totally annihilate the whole settlement.

One man, Alexander Smith, discovered a New Testament at the bottom of one of the chests that they had brought off the ship. He began to read it. As he read it, he was converted to Christ. He then began to read it to the others, and as they heard it, first one and then another was converted to Christ. Nearly twenty years later, when this was finally discovered, a report was sent to London saying that the people were totally civilized. There was no crime, there no

disease, no drunkenness, and no theft. It was, indeed, a perfect example of civilization created out of utter chaos and sin by the Word of God—that Word which endureth forever.

Patrick Henry was a wonderful patriot and Christian. When he was on his deathbed, he expressed one great regret and that was that he had not spent more time studying the Word of God. It was the heaviest weight that rested on his heart as he approached the end of his life.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

What about you? God has protected and defended His Word throughout all of these many centuries that it might come down to you. However, there are some of you for whom it lies neglected on a table or a shelf, gathering dust. There are others of you who simply tip your hat to it, in the same way that Voltaire tipped his hat to the Church. Maybe you give it a moment or two in the morning and evening. My friend, I would urge you to consider that there is nothing in this world more valuable than the Word of God. I would urge you to give yourself to the serious study of that Word; that you may determine to read more of it; that you would hide it in your heart; that you would determine to live by it.

Some of you may never have discovered the Gospel—the “Good News” contained in it. **“By this word is the gospel preached,”** Peter tells us. So many people think that the Bible contains nothing but good advice. The main message of the Bible is Good News, not good advice. The Good News is that though we have all disobeyed the good advice, though we have sinned and transgressed the law of God, He loves us just as we are. In His infinite mercy He sent His Son to take our guilt upon Him, to suffer and die, and to freely offer us eternal life as a gift. That is such incredible good news that many people cannot grasp it. The gift of God is eternal life—the greatest glad tidings the world has ever heard for those who, repenting of their sins, will trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Do you have that blessed assurance today? The Word of God has endured forever to offer you the gift of eternal life, or to rise up against you in the judgment and condemn you should you remain impenitent and refuse to accept the grace that God has offered. I would urge you this day to embrace the Savior, to trust Him who died for you, to abandon all hope in your own goodness, to receive Christ as Lord and Master of your life. If you have not done that, my friend, do it today. That is why the Word of God has endured all down through the ages.

Century follows century — There it stands.
Empires rise and fall and are forgotten — There it stands.
Dynasty succeeds dynasty — There it stands.
Kings are crowned and uncrowned — There it stands.
Despised and torn to pieces — There it stands.
Storms of hate swirl about it — There it stands.
Agnostics smile cynically — There it stands.
Profane, prayerless punsters caricature it — There it stands.
Unbelief abandons it — There it stands.
Thunderbolts of wrath smite it — There it stands.
The flames are kindled about it — There it stands.
The arrows of hate are discharged against it — There it stands.

Radicalism rants and raves against it — There it stands.
Fogs of sophistry conceal it temporarily — There it stands.
The tooth of time gnaws, but makes no dent — There it stands.
Modernism tries to explain it away — There it stands.
An anvil that has broken a million hammers — There it stands.
—Rev. A. Z. Conrad

“Hammer away, ye hostile hands. Your hammers break, God’s anvil stands. The Word of the Lord endureth forever.”

PRAYER: Father, we thank Thee for that Word which shall never fail. We thank Thee for that Word which endureth through all generations. We pray, O God that we may prize it, that we may love it, that we may read it, that we may study it and hide it in our hearts that we may live by it, that we may die resting upon it, that we may rejoice in it throughout all of eternity. We make this prayer in the name of Him who is that central jewel of it, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sermon delivered by Dr. D. James Kennedy on September 29, 1985, at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

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