



# LINCOLN

*and the*  
*Bible*

Lincoln's use of the Bible reveals his knowledge  
of its words, his reverence for its teachings

By CLARENCE E. MACARTNEY



# LINCOLN

## *and the* *Bible*

CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY

The author, an authority on the Lincoln era as well as a theologian and preacher of wide reputation, lets the records speak for themselves. He finds much to substantiate the claims of those who maintain that Lincoln could never have said the things he said, done the things he did, or passed through the strain and rigors of national crisis without a substantial and deep-seated faith in the Supreme Being.

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LINCOLN

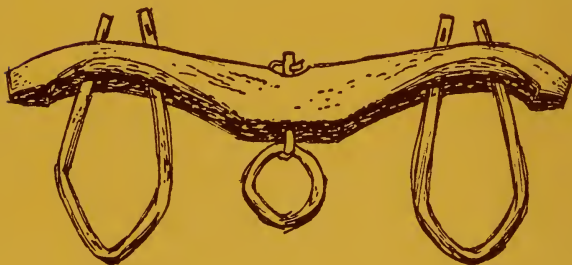
*and the*  
*Bible*

CLARENCE E. MACARTNEY



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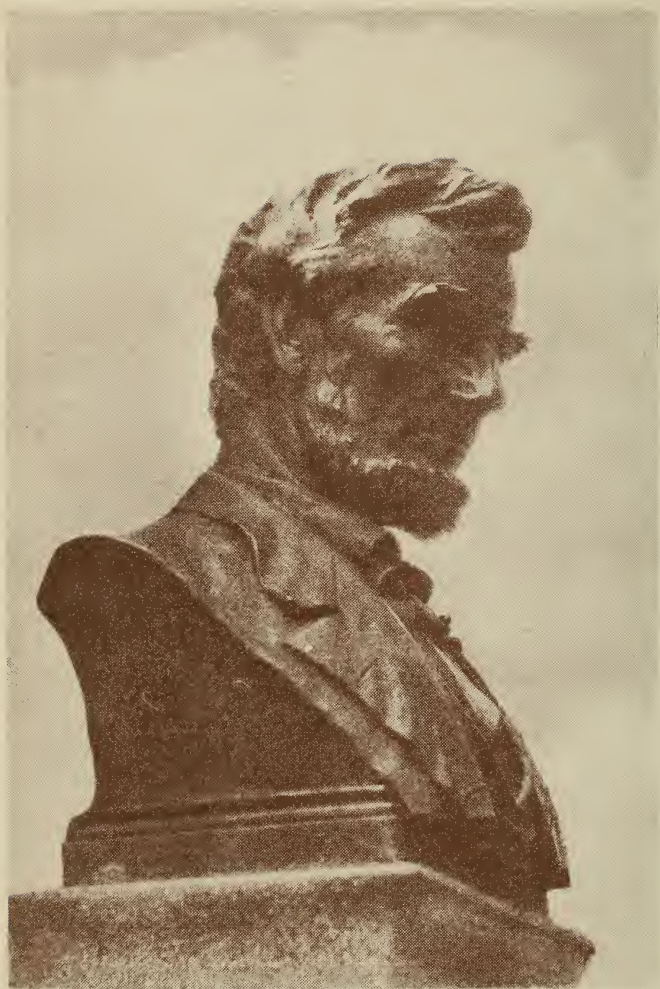
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**LINCOLN AND THE BIBLE**



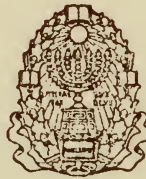
# LINCOLN

# and the Bible

by Clarence Edward Macartney

Author of

*Little Mac—The Life of General George B. McClellan,  
Lincoln and His Generals, Lincoln and His Cabinet,  
Highways and Byways of the Civil War*



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# LINCOLN AND THE BIBLE

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LINCOLN *and the Bible*

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It was a hot August day in 1858 at the little Illinois county seat of Ottawa, the first day of the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates in their contest for the senatorship from Illinois—a contest which was to have a far greater issue than the election of a senator. When Lincoln rose to take his turn and answer Douglas, the “Little Giant,” whose first name was Stephen, he took off his linen duster, which all travelers wore in that day, and, handing it to one of his backers on the platform, said in a voice which reached far out in the crowd about the stand: “Hold my coat while I stone Stephen!”

THE BOOK OF THE  
PEOPLE

There were few in the thousands listening to Lincoln that day who did not recognize at once the allusion to the first martyr, Stephen, and how, when he was stoned, “the witnesses laid down their

clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." But if Lincoln were to appear on a platform today in a debate with Douglas, and say what he did that day in 1858, his introductory remark about stoning Stephen would not raise the laugh that it did then, when the Bible was the book of the people, in Illinois and everywhere else in the United States. Now that can no longer be said. Today people would go away saying one to another: "What did Lincoln mean when he told that man to hold his linen duster while he stoned Stephen?" In 1858 the knowledge of the Bible and the ability to quote it was an effective and popular weapon of the political orator, and no one used that weapon more successfully than Lincoln.

Perhaps the most familiar and best-liked photograph of Lincoln is that which

**THE FAVORITE  
PHOTOGRAPH**

shows him reading the pages of a large book, with his son Tad standing by his side. The book looks like a Bible. It was not a Bible, however, but one of the old-time photograph albums. Lincoln told his friend Noah Brooks that he was concerned lest people would think he was pretending to read the Bible to Tad, and that thus the picture would go out as a false pretense. But Lincoln need not have been concerned on that score, for most of the people knew that he was, at that time at least, a constant reader of the Bible, and that he quoted frequently from its pages in his speeches, letters, and conversation.

**REFERENCES TO THE  
BIBLE**

Going through his speeches, state papers, letters, and recorded conversations, we discover that there are seventy-seven quotations from, or references to, the Bible. The majority of these are in

his speeches, with his conversation a close second. Most of the citations are from the four Gospels and the words of Jesus. Genesis comes second, while the Psalms and the book of Exodus are tied for third place. He quotes from twenty-two of the sixty-six books of the Bible, and sixteen of the twenty-two are books of the Old Testament.

There is no doubt about the familiarity of Lincoln with the Scriptures, or the readiness with which he quoted from them; but there is a difference of opinion as to how he gained this remarkable knowledge of the Bible. His second cousin Dennis Hanks, illegitimate son of Nancy Hanks, aunt of Nancy Hanks, Lincoln's mother, who was brought up with Lincoln in Indiana, held that "Lincoln didnt read the Bible half as much as [is] said," and that

"ABE READ THE  
BIBLE SOME"

although "he did read it, I though[t] he never believed it and think so still." <sup>1</sup> Sarah Bush Lincoln, Lincoln's most worthy step-mother, confirms Dennis Hanks' testimony: "Abe read the Bible some, though not as much as said." On the other hand we have the testimony of another Indiana companion of Lincoln, Nathaniel Grigsby, who, with Lincoln and the other boys, used to sing "carnal love songs" together. He said that Lincoln "was a great talker on the Scriptures and read it a great deal."

## A CABIN LIBRARY

Sarah Bush Johnston married Lincoln's father, Thomas Lincoln, in 1819, and brought to the lonely and neglected Indiana cabin at Gentryville a few books, but very worth-while ones: *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Sinbad the Sailor*, and

<sup>1</sup> Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, I, 72.

*Aesop's Fables*. Dennis Hanks tells us that "Thomas Lincoln brought the Bible in 1818, or 1819." It is possible, but not likely, that this was the first Bible that Lincoln saw in his first home. His father was an officer in the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, and for that reason it would seem unlikely that there would be no Bible in his home. Sarah Bush Lincoln, the step-mother who entered Lincoln's life when he was ten years old, could neither read nor write, but like other wilderness women she undoubtedly knew many of the passages of the Scriptures by heart and repeated them to her stepchildren.

The brief biographical sketch in *Honest Abe's Jokes* relates how his own mother drilled him in the Ten Commandments, especially her favorite commandments—the third, "Thou shalt not take the name of

THE TEN  
COMMANDMENTS

the Lord thy God in vain"; the fourth, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy"; and fifth, "Honor thy father and thy mother"; and the ninth, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

THE VOICE OF  
NANCY HANKS

This would agree with what Lincoln said one day to his friend Mrs. Rankin, at a Sunday-school Convention held at Petersburg, not far from New Salem, when the question was being discussed as to what age children were morally responsible and prepared to be taught the Bible. Lincoln told Mrs. Rankin that before he was able to read he had memorized verses of the Bible by hearing his mother repeat them as she went about her daily work in the Indiana cabin, and that when he read them as a man he seemed to hear the voice

of Nancy Hanks speaking them to him as of old.<sup>2</sup>

There was another source of biblical knowledge upon which undoubtedly Lincoln drew as a boy, and that was the preaching to which he listened at the Pigeon Creek Hardshell Baptist Church. The wilderness preachers were sometimes men of little education, but they did know the Bible, and they preached about the doctrines and characters of the Bible, and exhorted sinners and comforted saints in the noble language of the King James Bible. Lincoln had a remarkable memory, and frequently he would gather the boys about him and mimic the preacher. In doing so he had to employ the language of the Scriptures and talk about the personalities of

**THE WILDERNESS  
PREACHERS**

<sup>2</sup> Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln—The Prairie Years*, I, 416.



the Bible, for the preachers of that day, unlike so many of our day who are engrossed with international and social themes, preached about God, the soul, sin, redemption, regeneration, the bliss of heaven, and the punishments of hell. Lincoln never yielded to any of the revivals that swept the churches when he was a boy and a young man at Gentryville, or in his days at New Salem and Springfield, but he owed a debt of gratitude to those wilderness preachers who sank the language of the Old Testament and the New Testament into his mind and soul.

**QUOTING THE  
SCRIPTURES**

When Lincoln was practicing law at Springfield, he drove out one day with a printer, Gilbert J. Greene, to a farmhouse to draw up a last will and testament for a woman who was dying. When the document had been signed and witnessed, the

woman said: "Mr. Lincoln, won't you read a few verses out of the Bible for me?" One of the family brought in a Bible, but instead of reading from it, Lincoln quoted from memory the twenty-third psalm, and the beautiful sentences of our Saviour's farewell address to his disciples on the same night on which he was betrayed, beginning: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."<sup>3</sup> By that time in his life, at least, Lincoln was quite familiar with the Scriptures and could quote from memory many of the well-known passages.

At Washington he was, according to **HIS OWN BIBLE**

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

John G. Nicolay, one of his secretaries, "a constant reader of the Bible and had great faith in it." Among the books that lay on his desk in his office at the White House were the United States Statutes, Shakespeare's plays, and the Bible. Lincoln had long been in possession of an Oxford Bible, for on a photograph of himself which he sent in 1861 to the mother of his old friend Joshua Speed, he inscribed these words: "For Mrs. Lucy G. Speed, from whose pious hand I accepted the present of an Oxford Bible twenty years ago."

This was the same Bible to which he referred in a letter to Miss Mary Speed, September 27, 1841, when he was passing through the deep waters after he had failed to appear on the day set for his marriage to Mary Todd. "Tell your mother," he wrote, "that I have not got her present

PROMISE TO READ  
IT REGULARLY

[an Oxford Bible] with me, but I intend to read it regularly when I return home. I doubt not that it is really, as she says, the best cure for the blues, could one but take it according to the truth."

Lincoln's familiarity with the Bible is witnessed to by his conversation, letters, and speeches. But what about his faith in the Bible and in the Christ to whom the Scriptures bear witness? Here we enter a territory of dispute and controversy. Modernists, freethinkers, rationalists, and even infidels, have claimed Lincoln as one of their own; likewise orthodox and evangelical Christians. It is well to remember, when this subject is being discussed, that men's moods vary, and we must be guided by the general tone of a man's life and thought and speech. The published sayings of Napoleon will sometimes make him out

**WAS HE A  
BELIEVER?**

to be a devout believer in Christ, and some of the noblest tributes to Christ fell from the lips of the Corsican conqueror; but also from the same lips expressions of stark materialism and infidelity; for example, when he said, speaking of the soul and immortality: "Knock me on the head. Then where is my soul?" So among the sayings of Lincoln there are those which have the accent of skepticism, if not out-and-out unbelief, and others which seem to indicate that he was "not far from the Kingdom."

**"THAT'S MY  
RELIGION"**

As an illustration of the religious creed of Lincoln, his law partner Herndon heard him once remark that his religion was like that of an old man, Glenn, whom he had heard speak at a church meeting in Indiana, who said: "When I do good I feel good; when I do bad I feel bad; and that's my religion."

According to the account of Herndon, when Lincoln was living at New Salem he got hold of Volney's *Ruins* and Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, and read them both with great interest. There was a free-thinking group at New Salem, and this probably encouraged him to try his own hand at writing an antiscriptural and anti-Christian document. In this manuscript, which he intended to have published, he endeavored to show that the Bible was not a divine revelation and that Jesus was not the Son of God. He read from the manuscript one day to a group of hearers at the store where he was employed. Among the listeners was his employer, Samuel Hill, who was himself something of an agnostic and freethinker, but who, seeing the risk to Lincoln's political future if he were associated with such ideas, took the manuscript

**BURNING AN  
INDISCRETION**

out of his hand and threw it into the stove. "The book went up in flames and Lincoln's political future was secure."<sup>4</sup>

**SOURCE OF THIS  
STORY**

Herndon derived this information from an article in the *Manard Axis* of February 15, 1862, sent to him by the editor, John Hill, in June, 1865. John Hill was a political enemy of Lincoln, and a son of Samuel Hill, Lincoln's employer at Salem. John Hill himself, born in 1834, could have had no personal recollection of the book-burning incident, for, according to his story, Lincoln's book was burned soon after he had been sold out by a sheriff's sale in November, 1834. The story in the *Manard Axis* says that Lincoln himself repented of his infidel work and consigned it to the flames. The story as told by Hern-

<sup>4</sup> Herndon, *Life of Lincoln*, p. 355.

don makes Samuel Hill the one who threw the manuscript into the flames.

In 1864 Lincoln defeated Peter Cartwright, the famous Methodist preacher and circuit rider, for Congress. In this campaign there were rumors that Lincoln was an infidel. On August 11, some days after the election, Lincoln wrote to Allen N. Ford, editor of the *Illinois Gazette*, of Lacon, about an article which had appeared in that paper, saying:

**ACCUSATIONS OF  
PETER CARTWRIGHT**

Shortly before starting on my tour through yours and other northern counties of the district, I was informed by letter from Jacksonville that Mr. Cartwright was whispering the charge of infidelity against me in that quarter. I at once wrote a contradiction of it and sent it to my friends there with the request that they should publish it or not as in their discretion they might think proper,



having in view the extent of the circulation of the charge, as also the extent of the credence it might be receiving. They did not publish it. After my return from your part of the District, I was informed that he had been putting the same charge in circulation against me in some of the neighborhoods in our own, and one or two of the adjoining counties. . . . After some reflection I published the little handbill, herewith enclosed, and sent it to the neighborhoods above referred to.

In this handbill Lincoln said:

TO THE VOTERS OF THE SEVENTH  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

FELLOW CITIZENS:

REPLY TO PETER  
CARTWRIGHT

A charge having got into circulation in some of the neighborhoods of this district in substance that I am an open scoffer at Christianity, I have by the advice of some friends concluded to notice the subject in this form.

That I am not a member of any Christian church is true; but I have never denied the truth of the Scripture; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular. It is true that in early life I was inclined to believe in what I understand is called the "Doctrine of Necessity,"—that is, that the human mind is impelled to action or held in rest by some power over which the mind itself has no control; and I have sometimes (with one, two, or three, but never publicly) tried to maintain this opinion in argument. The habit of arguing thus, however, I have entirely left off for more than five years; and I add here I have always understood this same opinion to be held by several of the Christian denominations. The foregoing is the whole truth, briefly stated in relation to myself on this subject.

I do not think I could myself be brought to support a man for office whom I knew to be an open enemy of, and scoffer at, religion.

**THE SCOFFER  
CONDEMNED**

Leaving the higher matter of eternal consequences between him and his Maker, I still do not think any man has the right thus to insult the feelings and injure the morals of the community in which he may live. If then I was guilty of such conduct, I should blame no man who would condemn me for it; but I do blame those, whoever they may be, who falsely put such a charge in circulation against me.

A. LINCOLN <sup>5</sup>

**THE DOCTRINE OF  
NECESSITY**

In this handbill Lincoln declares, what all students of his life well know, that he was not a member of any Christian church. But he also declares that he believes in the truth of the Scriptures, and that he himself would not vote for any man who was a scoffer at religion. He states also that he

<sup>5</sup> Louis A. Warren, *Lincoln Lore*, No. 677, March 30, 1942.

had been inclined to believe in the "Doctrine of Necessity," and that he had frequently argued in favor of it, but not in recent years. He distinguishes between the doctrine of necessity and the doctrine of fatalism by saying that, as he understands it, this same opinion was held by several of the Christian denominations. Lincoln no doubt refers to the Presbyterians, to the Calvinistic Baptists, and to other branches of the Protestant church which held to the doctrine of Predestination. The first preaching to which Lincoln as a boy listened in the Pigeon Creek Hard Shell Baptist Church at Gentryville, Indiana, was undoubtedly Calvinistic, and laid much stress on the doctrine of Predestination.

Lincoln frequently expressed his faith in the doctrine of the divine sovereignty,

**BELIEF IN DIVINE  
SOVEREIGNTY**

and that God has a great and invincible plan which he is working out through the ages. He gave notable expression to that faith in his second inaugural address, when he said, "The Almighty has his own purposes." In a letter to Thurlow Weed, who had written to Lincoln praising him for the address, Lincoln wrote a comment on that great utterance:

**GOD GOVERNING  
THE WORLD**

I expect the latter to wear as well as, perhaps better than, any thing I have produced; but I believe it is not immediately popular. Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Abraham Lincoln, Complete Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, II, 661.

Lincoln was firmly convinced that he was an agent of divine Providence. In a conversation with L. E. Chittenden, register of the treasury, he said:

**AGENT OF  
PROVIDENCE**

That the Almighty does make use of human agencies, and directly intervenes in human affairs, is one of the plainest statements of the Bible. I have had so many evidences of his direction, so many instances when I have been controlled by some other power than my own will, that I cannot doubt that this power comes from above. I frequently see my way clear to a decision when I am conscious that I have no sufficient facts upon which to found it. But I cannot recall one instance in which I have followed my own judgment founded upon such a decision, where the results were unsatisfactory; whereas, in almost every instance where I have yielded to the views of others, I have had occasion to regret it. I am satisfied that when

the Almighty wants me to do or not to do a particular thing, he finds a way of letting me know it. I am confident that it is his design to restore the Union. He will do it in his own good time. We should obey and not oppose his will.<sup>7</sup>

**GOD IN HISTORY**

One of Lincoln's most beautiful letters is the one he wrote to the Quaker, Eliza P. Gurney, in which he thanked her for her prayers in his behalf. In this letter he said:

I am much indebted to the good Christian people of the country for their constant prayers and consolation, and to no one of them more than to yourself. The purposes of the Almighty are perfect and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war

<sup>7</sup> Chittenden, *Recollections of President Lincoln and His Administration*, p. 448.

long before this. But God knows best and has ruled otherwise. We shall acknowledge his wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile, we must work earnestly in the best light he gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends he ordains. Surely he intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.<sup>8</sup>

Here again Lincoln gives expression to his faith in the doctrine of the divine government and plan for the world.

This same note Lincoln strikes in a letter written to his closest friend, Joshua F. Speed, comforting him at the time of his anxiety about the health of his wife Fanny:

I hope and believe that your present anxiety and distress about her health and her

**COMFORTING A  
FRIEND**

<sup>8</sup> *Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, II, 573.



life must and will forever banish those horrid doubts which I know you sometimes felt as to the truth of your affection for her. If they can once and forever be removed (and I almost feel a presentiment that the Almighty has sent your present affliction expressly for that object), surely nothing can come in their stead to fill their immeasurable measure of misery. . . . Should she, as you fear, be destined to an early grave, it is indeed a great consolation to know that she is so well prepared to meet it. Her religion, which you once disliked so much, I will venture you now prize most highly.<sup>9</sup>

These citations are sufficient to show that Lincoln held to the doctrine of necessity, not in the fatalistic sense, but in the Christian sense of divine providence.

His inclination to skepticism followed Lincoln when he went to Springfield and

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 55.

began to build up his career as a lawyer and politician. Lincoln's friend and political manager James H. Matheny was employed in the county clerk's office, which was in the same building as the office of Stuart and Lincoln. Matheny says:

Lincoln would come into the clerk's office, where I and some young men . . . were writing or staying, and would bring the Bible with him; would read a chapter; argue against it. Lincoln then had a smattering of geology, if I recollect it. Lincoln often, if not wholly, was an atheist; at least bordered on it. Lincoln was enthusiastic in his infidelity. As he grew older, he grew more discreet, didn't talk much before strangers about his religion; but to friends, close and bosom ones, he was always open and avowed, fair and honest; but to strangers, he held them off from policy.<sup>10</sup>

**"ENTHUSIASTIC IN  
HIS INFIDELITY"**

<sup>10</sup> Lamon, *Life of Lincoln*, p. 488.

“AN AVOWED AND  
OPEN INFIDEL”

Lincoln's first law partner, John T. Stuart, wrote Herndon that he

was an avowed and open infidel, and sometimes bordered on atheism; . . . went further against Christian beliefs and doctrines and principles than any man I ever heard; he shocked me. . . . Lincoln always denied that Jesus was the Christ of God—denied that Jesus was the son of God as understood and maintained by the Christian Church.<sup>11</sup>

“HE HAD NO  
FAITH”

David Davis, one of the group of Illinois politicians who secured the nomination for Lincoln at the Chicago convention in 1860, said of him: “He had no faith in the Christian sense of the term . . . had faith in law, principles, causes and effects.” In addition to these statements we have the word of Mary Todd, Lincoln's wife:

<sup>11</sup> Herndon, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

Mr. Lincoln had no faith and no hope in the usual acceptation of those words. He never joined a church; but still, as I believe, he was a religious man by nature. He first seemed to talk about the subject when our boy Willie died, and then more than ever about the time he went to Gettysburg. But it was a kind of poetry in his nature, and he was never a technical Christian.<sup>12</sup>

The pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Springfield, where Lincoln had a pew, and where his wife worshiped, the Rev. James Smith, afterward appointed by Lincoln consul at Dundee, Scotland, composed a treatise in defense of the Christian revelation, which, he says, drew from Lincoln an acknowledgment that the argument was "unanswerable." But according to Lamon, Lincoln laid the manuscript

HIS WIFE'S PASTOR

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 359-360.

down on a table in his office and never again looked at it.<sup>13</sup>

**BELIEF IN THE  
SUPERNATURAL**

If Lincoln had a deep vein of skepticism in him, which none can deny, he had also a vein of belief in the supernatural. Lamon relates how on one occasion at the White House he began to talk about his dreams. He had noted that there were sixteen chapters in the Old Testament and four or five in the New in which dreams were mentioned. "If we believe the Bible, we must accept the fact that in the old days God and his angels came to men in their sleep and made themselves known in dreams." When Mrs. Lincoln asked him if *he* believed in dreams, he said he could not say that he did, but that he had one recently which had haunted him ever since. The

<sup>13</sup> Lamon, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

first time he opened the Bible after dreaming this dream it was at the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, which relates Jacob's dream at Bethel of the ladder, the top of which reached unto heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending. "I kept on turning the leaves of the old book, and everywhere my eye fell upon passages recording matters strangely in keeping with my own thoughts—supernatural visitations, dreams, visions, etc." <sup>14</sup>

The testimony of men like Herndon, and Lincoln's bodyguard, Lamon, does not tell the whole story about his religious belief. Over against these witnesses must be placed the statement that he made to the committee of colored people of Baltimore who presented him with a costly Bible. Calling the

THE BIBLE "THE  
BEST GIFT"

<sup>14</sup> Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln—The War Years*, IV, 243-44.

Bible "the best gift God has given to man,"  
Lincoln continued:

All the good Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it.<sup>15</sup>

**REASSURING HIS  
DYING FATHER**

When Lincoln learned that his father, Thomas Lincoln, was dying, he wrote a letter to his stepbrother John D. Johnston. In this letter he said:

I sincerely hope father may recover his health; but at all events tell him to remember to call upon and confide in our great and good and merciful Maker, who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of a sparrow and numbers the hair of our

<sup>15</sup> *Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, II, 574.

head, and He will not forget the dying man who puts his trust in Him.<sup>16</sup>

Lamon seizes upon this beautiful letter as a sure sign that Lincoln had no real Christian faith.

**AN UNWARRANTED  
INTERPRETATION**

If ever there was a moment when Mr. Lincoln might have been expected to express his faith in the atonement, his trust in the merits of a living Redeemer, it was when he undertook to send a composing and comforting message to a dying man. . . . But he omitted it wholly: he did not even mention the name of Jesus, or intimate the most distant suspicion of the existence of a Christ. . . . It is the Maker, and not the Saviour, to whom he directs the attention of a sinner in the agony of death.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 165.

<sup>17</sup> Lamon, *op. cit.*, p. 497.



This certainly is an interesting example of trying to make an unbeliever out of a man who could write so beautiful a letter and refer his dying father to the promises of Christ as found in his address to his disciples (Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 12: 6-7).

**FAREWELL TO  
SPRINGFIELD**

Nor can we forget Lincoln's farewell to the friends and neighbors at Springfield, spoken from the rear of the train as he was leaving for Washington, February 11, 1861. After saying that he had a task before him greater than that which rested upon Washington, he continued:

Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope

in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.<sup>18</sup>

It is impossible to read such a speech as this and believe that Lincoln had no real faith in God and in prayer, or that in so grave a crisis in the history of the nation and in his own life he pretended, for the sake of public policy, to speak the language of a faith which he himself did not hold. Certainly the Lincoln of the White House, when the nation was passing through its Gethsemane at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, and when he was kneeling in his own Gethsemane at the time of the death of his boy Willie, is a far different Lincoln than the one who was wont to walk into the clerk's office at Springfield, take out a Bible, read a passage, and then proceed to

**FAITH DURING  
THE WAR YEARS**

<sup>18</sup> *Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, I, 672.

ridicule it and attempt to disprove it in the presence of the young clerks and lawyers. No, the Lincoln of 1861 to 1865 is a man who constantly reads the Bible; is often on his knees; asks others to pray for him; and makes covenants with God, as he did before the battle of Antietam, when he vowed that if God gave the North victory and Lee's army was driven back into Virginia, he would signalize it by proclaiming the emancipation of the slave; and also during the battle of Gettysburg, when he told God that if he "stood by" Meade's army, he, Lincoln, would "stand by" God.

**NOT FAR FROM  
THE KINGDOM**

It is indeed true that the distinctive thing in the Christian faith, a consciousness of sin and a trust in the atoning and redeeming work of Christ on the cross, is lacking in the recorded utterances of Lincoln as to his faith. But signs are not wanting that

he was on his way to make a public confession of his faith in Christ when the assassin's bullet put an end to his probation.

When Lincoln ran for Congress in 1846 against the celebrated frontier preacher, Peter Cartwright, his old friend Mrs. Rankin, living near Salem, had an interesting conversation with him about the charges, current during that campaign, that Lincoln was an unbeliever. Deeply stirred, Lincoln answered, referring to his sorrow in the death of Ann Rutledge:

**FAITH DURING  
PERSONAL TRIALS**

There came into my life sad events and a loss that you were close to; and you knew a great deal about how hard they were for me, for you were, at the time, a mutual friend. Those days of trouble found me tossed amid a sea of questioning. They piled big around me. Through all I groped my way until I found a stronger and higher grasp of thought,

one that reached beyond this life with a clearness and satisfaction I had never known before. The Scriptures unfolded before me with a deeper and more logical appeal, through these new experiences, than anything else I could find to turn to, or ever before had found in them. I do not claim that all my doubts were removed then, or since that time have been swept away. They are not.

Probably it is to be my lot to go on in a twilight, feeling and reasoning my way through life, as questioning, doubting Thomas did. But in my poor, maimed, withered way, I bear with me as I go on a seeking spirit of desire for a faith that was with him of the olden time, who, in his need, as I in mine, exclaimed, "Help thou my unbelief."<sup>19</sup>

**STRUGGLES WITH  
DOUBT**

It is quite possible, indeed likely, that the struggle between doubt and faith in Lin-

<sup>19</sup> Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln—The Prairie Years*, I, 417. By permission of Harcourt, Brace & Co.

coln's soul had something to do with the deep melancholy which at times enveloped him. That was the conviction of Lamont:

The fatal misfortune of his life, looking at it only as it affected him in this world, was the influence at New Salem and Springfield which enlisted him on the side of unbelief. He paid the bitter penalty in a life of misery. <sup>20</sup>

Newton Bateman, superintendent for public instruction for Illinois, occupied a room adjoining and opening into the executive chamber of the capitol at Springfield, which Lincoln used as an office during the presidential campaign. According to Bateman, a few days before the 1860 election Lincoln came into his office, closed the door against intrusion, and took out a book

**ELECTION  
OF 1860**

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 504.

containing a canvass of the city of Springfield, showing that out of the twenty-three ministers of the gospel only three were going to vote for him, and that most of the prominent church members were against him. When Lincoln made this discovery he wept and declared he did "not understand it at all." Then he took out of his breast pocket a New Testament and, "with a trembling voice and his cheeks wet with tears," quoted it against his political opponents generally, and especially against Douglas. "Mr. Bateman," Lincoln said,

**THE COMING  
STORM**

I am not a Christian. God knows I would be one; but I have carefully read the Bible and I do not so understand this book [meaning apparently not that the Bible did not tell how to become a Christian, but that the Bible was against slavery]. These men well know that I am for freedom in the territories, free-

dom everywhere, as free as the Constitution and the laws will permit, and that my opponents are for slavery. They know this, and yet with this book in their hands, in the light of which human bondage cannot live a moment, they are going to vote against me. I do not understand it at all. I know there is a God, and that He hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming and I know that His hand is in it. If He has a place and work for me, and I think He has, I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God. I have told them that a house divided against itself cannot stand, and Christ and Reason say the same, and they will find it so.

When Bateman expressed surprise at these statements as to the truth of the Bible and the deity of Christ, and told

**HIS TRUE  
BELIEFS**



Lincoln that his friends generally were ignorant that he entertained such sentiments, Lincoln answered: "I know they are. I am obliged to appear different to them." <sup>21</sup>

WAS HIS RELIGION  
GOOD POLITICS?

Both Herndon and Lamon attack the truthfulness of the alleged statements of Lincoln to Bateman, declaring that they would make Lincoln out a hypocrite, pretending to Bateman to hold orthodox views as to the Bible and Christ, which he did not. Yet both of these biographers of Lincoln, and his close associates, one his law partner and the other his bodyguard at Washington, plainly intimate that in the interests of his political future Lincoln suppressed his freethinking and deistical ideas.

<sup>21</sup> Holland, *Life of Lincoln*, pp. 236-41.

Aspiring to lead religious communities, he foresaw that he must not appear as an enemy within their gates; aspiring to public honors under the auspices of a political party which persistently summoned religious people to assist in the extirpation of that which it denounced as the "nation's sin," he foresaw that he could not ask their suffrages whilst aspersing their faith. He perceived no reason for changing his convictions, but he did perceive many good and cogent reasons for not making them public.<sup>22</sup>

Commenting on the beautiful letter of Lincoln to his dying father, in which he certainly expresses faith in God and in the future life, Herndon said:

**HERNDON'S  
OPINION**

The question is, Was Mr. Lincoln an honest and truthful man? If he was, he wrote that letter honestly, believing it. It has to me

<sup>22</sup> Lamon, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

the sound and ring of an honest utterance. I admit that Mr. Lincoln, in his moments of melancholy and terrible gloom, was living on the border land between theism and atheism—sometimes quite wholly dwelling in atheism; in his happier moments he was swinging back to theism and dwelling lovingly there.<sup>23</sup>

**APPROVAL OF  
DENOMINATIONS**

Lincoln was not greatly disturbed, as so many Protestants are today, by the multiplicity of denominations, but thought it a good thing. In a conversation with Dr. Robert Browne one day, when someone lamented the number of sects, Lincoln said:

My good brother, you are all wrong. The more sects we have, the better. They are all getting somebody in that the others could not; and even with the numerous divisions we are all doing tolerably well.

<sup>23</sup> Herndon to Abbott, February 18, 1870.

**FREEDOM OF  
RELIGION**

It is not a certainty by any means that a quiet time is the best for progress. It is not so by any means in the progress of human liberty or the release of men from superstition and persecution under the forms of religion. The greatest achievements have always come in stirring, fighting times, like those of Luther, Cromwell, and the American Revolution. What we need is not fewer sects or parties, but more freedom and independence for those we have. The sects are all right and will get through all right in the end. God is going to be more merciful to men trying to do right than most people think. He is so much more familiar with human frailties than a little sect in any single organization can be, that there is scarcely room for doubt that He will deal more gently with blundering, sinning humanity than the sects would deal with one another. I would rather there were more than less, if one were to hold all the power.

Yet sects are right, and should hammer

away until they reach the best that is attainable. God intends that men should fight their way to better conditions, and not be lazy or timid, or expect that their passage would be an easy one through the world or beyond in ignorant idleness. We are often confronted with the fear of too many sects, as so many timid people among them so often dread, and wonder which is right and which is best among them. They are all right.

**HIS RELIGIOUS  
HERITAGE**

Think of what the sects drilling so many of us have passed through, mostly to our advantage, as responsible beings. Our people came from the good old Quaker stock, through Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kentucky. Circumstances took us into the Baptist sect in Indiana, in which several of our people have remained. While there, a good Methodist elder rode forty miles through a winter storm out of his way to preach my mother's funeral sermon at Spencer Creek. Here in Illinois we are with

the Presbyterians, where the Methodists are as thick as bees all about us.<sup>24</sup>

**THE BIBLE IN  
HIS SPEECHES**

Whatever ground for debate there may be as to just what Lincoln's religious faith was, there can be no doubt as to the way in which he made use of the Scriptures in his speeches and letters and in his conversation with his fellow men. The earliest published utterance of Lincoln was an address to the people of Sangamon County, March 9, 1832. In this address he spoke of the advantages of "at least a moderate education," so that a man could read the history of his own and other countries and thus appreciate the value "of our free institutions, . . . to say nothing of the advantages and satisfaction to be derived

<sup>24</sup> Robert Henry Browne, *Abraham Lincoln and Men of His Times*, II, 427-28.

from all being able to read the Scriptures.”<sup>25</sup>

LAST PUBLIC  
ADDRESS

As Lincoln's first public utterance paid a tribute to the Scriptures and the place of religion in the life of the people, so his last public address, delivered on April 11, 1865, to a crowd which had assembled around the White House to celebrate the tidings of the fall of the Confederacy, recognized the providence of God in the nation's life. At the close of this address Lincoln said: "In the midst of this, however, He from whom all blessings flow must not be forgotten. A call for a national thanksgiving is being prepared and will be duly promulgated."<sup>26</sup> Had, he lived to issue that thanksgiving call, there is little doubt that he would

<sup>25</sup> *Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, I, 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 672.

have had in it some appropriate passage from the Bible.

Lincoln's faith in the Bible deepened with the experiences of his life, especially the tragic experiences of his life at Washington. In a conversation with one of his close friends, Dr. Robert Browne, speaking of Paine's *Age of Reason*, he said:

COMMENT ON "THE  
AGE OF REASON"

I have looked through it, carelessly it is true; but there is nothing to such books. God rules this world, and out of seeming contradictions, that all these kind of reasoners seem unable to understand, He will develop and disclose His plan for men's welfare in His inscrutable way. Not all of Paine's nor all the French distempered stuff will make a man better, but worse. They might lay down tons and heaps of their heartless reasonings alongside a few of Christ's sayings and parables, to find that He had said more for the benefit of our race in one of them than there is in



all they have written. They might read His Sermon on the Mount to learn that there is more of justice, righteousness, kindness, and mercy in it than in the minds and books of all the ignorant doubters from the beginning of human knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

**ADDRESS TO A  
BIBLE SOCIETY**

In an address to the Bible Society of Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln said:

It seems to me that nothing short of infinite wisdom could by any possibility have devised and given to man this excellent and perfect moral code. It is suited to men in all the conditions of life, and inculcates all the duties they owe to their Creator, to themselves, and to their fellow men.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Browne, *op. cit.*, II, 426.

<sup>28</sup> From a letter of the Rev. James Smith, former pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, to William H. Herndon, January 24, 1867, published in the *Springfield Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 12, 1867.

At the time of the resignation of Salmon P. Chase as secretary of the treasury, Lincoln, in a conversation with L. E. Chittenden, register of the treasury, turning from political matters to religious, paid this tribute to the divine origin of the Bible:

**AUTHORITY OF  
THE BIBLE**

The character of the Bible is easily established, at least to my satisfaction. We have to believe many things which we do not comprehend. The Bible is the only one that claims to be God's book—to comprise His law—His history. It contains an immense amount of evidence of its own authenticity. It describes a governor omnipotent enough to operate this great machine, and declares that He made it. It states other facts which we fully do not comprehend, but which we cannot account for. What shall we do with them?

Now let us treat the Bible fairly. If we had a witness on the stand whose general story we

knew was true, we would believe him when he asserted facts of which we had no other evidence. We ought to treat the Bible with equal fairness. I decided a long time ago that it was less difficult to believe that the Bible was what it claimed to be than to disbelieve it. It is a good Book for us to obey; it contains the ten commandments, the golden rule, and many other rules which ought to be followed. No man was ever the worse for living according to the directions of the Bible.<sup>29</sup>

**SCRIPTURE IN AN  
EARLY ADDRESS**

The first record of a quotation from the Bible appears in the lecture Lincoln delivered to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, January 27, 1837. At the end of this lecture, and after one of his characteristic tributes to Washington, Lincoln said, referring to the principles which he had enunciated in his speech: "Upon these

<sup>29</sup> Chittenden, *op. cit.*, pp. 449-50.

let the proud fabric of Freedom rest as the rock of its basis; and as truly as has been said of the only greater institution, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18.)

A fragment from notes he had prepared for a lecture in 1850, with a reference to Niagara Falls, shows how he drew upon the Scriptures for illustrations: “When Columbus first sought this continent, when Christ suffered on the cross, when Moses led Israel through the Red Sea, nay, even when Adam first came from the hand of his Maker, then as now, Niagara was roaring here.”

One of the most notable pre-Civil War speeches of Lincoln was the address he delivered before the Washingtonian Temperance Society in the Second Presbyterian Church at Springfield, February 22,

**NIAGARA FALLS**

**EULOGY ON  
WASHINGTON**

1842. This is the speech which closed with the well-known eulogy on Washington:

Washington is the mightiest name on earth. On that name no eulogy is expected. It cannot be. To add brightness to the sun, or glory to the name of Washington is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name and in its native deathless splendor leave it shining on.

**USE OF BIBLICAL  
LANGUAGE**

This powerful address has repeated references to, and quotations from, the Bible. Speaking of the ravages of strong drink, Lincoln likened it to the "Egyptian Angel of Death, commissioned to slay, if not the first, the fairest born of every family." (Exod. 12.) Appealing to men to make war on this enemy of mankind, he cried out, "Come, sound the moral resurrection trump that these may rise and stand up,

an exceeding great army. 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' " (Ezek. 37.) Hailing the victories and transformations of the temperance army, he said:

Drunken devils are cast out by ones, by sevens, by legions; and their unfortunate victims, like the poor possessed who were redeemed from their long and lonely wanderings in the tomb, are publishing to the ends of the earth how great things have been done for them. [Mark 5.]

Nothing could have been more effective than the use Lincoln made here of Mark's dramatic story of how Christ healed the Gadarene possessed of the legion of devils, who lived "in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones."

Urging his hearers to join the Wash- **ON TEMPERANCE**

ingtonian Temperance Society, a movement which at that time was sweeping the country, and answering the objection which some were making that by joining such a society they would be confessing that they themselves were drunkards, Lincoln said:

Surely no Christian will adhere to this objection. If they believe, as they profess, that Omnipotence condescended to take on Himself the form of sinful man, and as such to die an ignominious death for their sakes, surely they will not refuse submission to the infinitely lesser condescension for the temporal, and perhaps eternal, salvation of a larger, erring, and unfortunate class of their fellow creatures.

**POLITICAL ISSUES**

In a speech in the legislature at Springfield in 1839, opposing a government banking measure, Lincoln spoke of Judas, "the

subtreasurer of the Saviour and his disciples," as an example of the danger of dishonesty in government administration. Lincoln strongly opposed the Mexican War as a measure devised by Polk's administration to extend the territory of slavery. Attacking the president in a speech in the House of Representatives, January 12, 1848, Lincoln said of Polk: "He is deeply conscious of being in the wrong; he feels the blood of this war, like the blood of Abel, is crying from heaven against him." (Gen. 4:10.)

Lincoln's most famous pre-Civil War address was that delivered on June 16, 1858, at Springfield, after he had been nominated for the United States Senate by the Republican state convention. This was the "House Divided Against Itself" speech. A short time before he delivered it

**"HOUSE DIVIDED"  
SPEECH**



Lincoln read the speech to his law partner Herndon. At the conclusion of the reading Herndon said to Lincoln: "The speech is a good one, written with great power, and will bring you prominently before the American people. It is in advance of the age, but deliver it just as you have written it." Subsequently Lincoln consulted others about the speech. Some liked it, some did not; some wanted this sentence struck out, and some that. In the presence of a group of men Lincoln again asked Herndon his opinion of it. Whereupon Herndon said: "Lincoln, deliver and publish your speech just as you have written it. It will make you president of the United States."<sup>30</sup>

THE WORDS OF  
JESUS

What made this speech famous was Lincoln's powerful use of the words of Jesus to the Pharisees, who, after he had

<sup>30</sup> Herndon, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

healed a blind and dumb man, charged him with being in league with Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. Answering them Jesus said: "If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end." (Mark 3:25-26.) Applying this to the national situation Lincoln said:

A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it to cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.<sup>31</sup>

This idea of a divided house and the result of such division had evidently been

**A FAMOUS  
ILLUSTRATION**

<sup>31</sup>*Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, I, 282.

in Lincoln's mind for some time, for as far back as 1855, writing to George Robertson, of Springfield, Lincoln said: "Our political problem now is, 'Can we as a nation continue together permanently, forever, half slave and half free?' The problem is too mighty for me. May God in His mercy superintend the solution."

**EARLIER USE OF  
THE METAPHOR**

In 1806, John Parrish, in a published comment on slavery, had made use of the same metaphor of the divided house: "A house divided against itself cannot stand: neither can a government or a constitution. This is coincident with the present Chief Magistrate's [Jefferson's] opinion in his notes on the state of Virginia."<sup>32</sup> There is, however, no reason to believe that Lincoln had ever read the words of Parrish.

<sup>32</sup> Masters, *Lincoln the Man*, p. 270.

He undoubtedly got the powerful illustration from his own reading of the Bible.

In his speeches in the campaign in 1858, when he ran against Douglas for the Senate, Lincoln frequently drew upon the Bible for telling illustrations. In these speeches he gave what he considered to be the scriptural warrant for opposition to slavery. Defenders of slavery pointed to its existence in the Old Testament dispensation, to the fact that there was no prohibition against it in the New Testament, but that, on the contrary, slaves were enjoined to be obedient to their masters, and that Paul himself sent the fugitive slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon at Colossae. As to the recognition of slavery in the Bible, Lincoln shrewdly pointed out that it was dangerous to attempt to

**SLAVERY IN  
THE BIBLE**

demonstrate that slavery was right by the Bible, for such slavery was the slavery of white men; whereas what the advocates of slavery maintained was that the slavery of a black man was right, but the slavery of a white man wrong.<sup>33</sup>

**THE HIGHEST  
STANDARD**

In a speech at the beginning of the campaign for the Senate Lincoln said that the standard to be sought after was that expressed by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48.) The Saviour, Lincoln said, did not expect any human creature to be perfect as the Father in heaven, but set that up as a standard. "So I say in relation to the principle that all men are created

<sup>33</sup> Speech at Cincinnati, September 17, 1859, *Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, I, 563.

equal, let it be as nearly reached as we can.”

In a speech at Springfield, July 15, 1858, referring to what Douglas had said about his having “a proneness for quoting Scripture,” Lincoln gave Douglas one more telling quotation from the Scriptures: THE LOST SHEEP

“Verily, I say unto you, there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety-and-nine just persons that need no repentance.”<sup>34</sup> And now if the judge claims the benefit of this parable, let him repent. Let him come up here and say: “I am the only just person, and you are the ninety-nine sinners!” Repentance before forgiveness is a provision of the Christian system, and on that condition alone will the Republicans grant him forgiveness.

<sup>34</sup> Here Lincoln did not quote exactly the words of Jesus in either Matt. 18:13 or Luke 15:7.

**THE CROCODILE  
BLUNDER**

In a speech in Kansas in December, 1859, Lincoln said of Douglas and his attitude toward slavery: "In the first place he never says it is wrong. He says he does not care whether it should be voted down or voted up." In a speech at Memphis and elsewhere Douglas, Lincoln said, told his audience that he was "for the negro as against the crocodile, but for the white man as against the negro." Lincoln made the most of this unfortunate comparison of Douglas, in which he appeared to liken the Negro's relationship to a white man to that of a crocodile to a Negro.<sup>35</sup> Lincoln thought that slavery was wrong, and that Christian charity forbade it:

Suppose it is true that the negro is inferior to the white in the gifts of nature. Is it not the

<sup>35</sup> *Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, I, 590.

exact reverse of justice that the whites should, for that reason, take from the negro any part of the little which he has had given him? "Give to him that is needy" is the Christian rule of charity; but "take from him that is needy" is the rule of slavery.<sup>36</sup>

SEEING BEHIND  
A GUINEA

In his eastern tour in 1860, speaking at New Haven on March 6, to show how money interests could blind men to the enormity of slavery, Lincoln told of a dispute a minister of one of the dissenting churches in England had with a minister of the Established Church over some point of doctrinal difference. To every argument of the dissenting minister the other answered: "I can't see it so."

The minister then opened the Bible and pointed his adversary to a certain passage;

<sup>36</sup> Fragments from *Notes for Speeches*, October 1, 1858.



but the other replied: "I can't see it so."

Then the minister pointed to a single word and asked: "Can you see that?"

"Yes, I see it," was the reply.

The minister then laid a guinea over the word and asked, "Do you see it now?"

Lincoln continued:

Whether the owners of this species of property do really see it as it really is, it is not for me to say. But if they do, they see it as it is through two billions of dollars, and that is a pretty thick coating. Certain it is that they do not see it as we see it.

#### **A SEVERE ATTACK**

Among Lincoln's strongest utterances on the subject of slavery and its iniquity was the letter he wrote to the Rev. Dr. Ide, the Hon. J. R. Doolittle, and the Hon. A. Hubbell, a committee of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, which had

presented to him certain resolutions of the society. Lincoln thanked them for

thus adding to the effective and almost unanimous support which the Christians are so zealously giving to the country and to liberty. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how it could be otherwise with anyone professing Christianity, or even having ordinary perceptions of right and wrong. To read in the Bible as the Word of God Himself that "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" [Gen. 3:19], and to preach therefrom, "In the sweat of other men's faces shalt thou eat bread" to my mind can scarcely be reconciled with honest sincerity. When brought to my final reckoning, may I have to answer for robbing no man of his goods; yet more tolerable even this than for robbing one of himself and all that was his. When a year or two ago those professedly holy men of the South met in the semblance of prayer and devotion, and in the name of Him who said, "As ye would that all

**THE GOLDEN  
RULE**

men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them," appealed to the Christian world to aid them in doing to a whole race of men as they would have no man do unto themselves, to my thinking they contemned and insulted God and His Church far more than did Satan when he tempted the Saviour with the kingdoms of the earth. The Devil's attempt was no more false and far less hypocritical. But let me forbear, remembering that it is also written, "Judge not lest ye be judged." [Matt. 7:1.]<sup>37</sup>

This is the severest and most intense utterance Lincoln ever made on the subject of slavery.

**CALLING A NATION  
TO PRAYER**

No president ever called the nation to prayer, fasting, and thanksgiving as often as Lincoln did. In his first proclamation of a national fast day, August 12, 1861, he called on the people to "acknowledge

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Dr. Ide and others, May 13, 1864.

and revere the supreme government of God, to bow in humble submission to his chastisements, to confess and deplore their sins and transgressions in the full conviction that 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' " (Ps. 111:10.)

Lincoln is the only president who, in a national proclamation, invoked the power and presence of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. He did this in the Thanksgiving Proclamation of July 15, 1863, after the battle of Gettysburg, when he called upon the people

**INVOKING THE  
HOLY SPIRIT**

to invoke the influence of his Holy Spirit to subdue the anger which has produced and so long sustained a needless and cruel rebellion, to change the hearts of the insurgents, to guide the counsels of the government with wisdom adequate to so great a national emergency, and to visit with tender care and con-

solution . . . all those who . . . have been brought to suffer in mind, body, or estate, and finally to lead the whole nation through paths of repentance and submission of the Divine Will back to the perfect enjoyment of union and fraternal peace.<sup>38</sup>

**A DAILY  
CUSTOM**

According to William Henry Crook, who for some years was one of President Lincoln's bodyguards:

The daily life of Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln usually commenced at eight o'clock, and immediately upon dressing the President would go into the library, where he would sit in his favorite chair in the middle of the room and read a chapter or two of his Bible. I think I am safe in saying that this was President Lincoln's invariable custom, at least it was such during the time I was on duty with him.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, II, 370.

<sup>39</sup> *Memories of the White House*, p. 15.

The ordinary daily speech of Lincoln was salted with timely and apt quotations from the Bible. If a public man were to quote the Bible today as frequently as Lincoln did in the Civil War Days, he would be charged with cant or hypocrisy. But not so then, for the Bible at that time was still the book of the people, which unfortunately it is not today. To a man who complained bitterly and carelessly against Stanton, the secretary of war, accusing Stanton of not carrying out the order that Lincoln had given two weeks before to have a man liberated from prison who was under sentence of death, but had been pardoned, Lincoln said: "If it had not been for me, that man would now be in his grave. Now, sir, you claim to be a philanthropist. If you will get your Bible and turn to the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs, the tenth verse,

you will read these words: 'Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.' "

Thomas F. Pendel, for many years a doorkeeper at the White House, continues this incident:

**CITING CHAPTER  
AND VERSE**

Whereupon the man got "huffy" and went away. But as he went out, he said angrily, "There is no such passage in the Bible." "Oh, yes," said Mr. Lincoln, "I think you will find it in the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs and at the tenth verse." This was late in the afternoon, and I thought no more of the occurrence. Next morning I was at Mr. Lincoln's office door as usual, about 8 o'clock, and heard some one calling out: "O Pendleton! I say, Pendleton, come in here." When I went inside Mr. Lincoln said to me, "Wait a moment." He stepped quickly into the private part of the house, through what is now the Cabinet Room, but which was then used as a waiting

room, and soon reappeared with his Bible in his hand. He then sat down and read to me that identical passage he had quoted to the philanthropist, and sure enough it was found to be in the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs, and at the tenth verse.

In those days I was not much of a Bible reader. But in 1865 I decided that all-important question whether or not I should be a follower of the Lord Jesus. I commenced reading a little old Bible that I had bought at a secondhand store and which had belonged to an old soldier. After this I always kept it with me at the White House, and would occupy my odd hours in reading from it. One day I came across that same passage which Mr. Lincoln had quoted to the angry philanthropist. The whole occurrence came back to me, and I thought what a just man was the president. He was not even willing for me to be in doubt as to his correct quotation of a Bible passage, but must needs take his precious time to prove himself right in my eyes.

**GREATNESS IN  
SMALL DETAILS**



How simplehearted, yet how truly great a man he was.<sup>40</sup>

**RAIN ON JUST  
AND UNJUST**

When General McClellan once complained to Lincoln that rain, mud, and heavy roads had bogged down his army, Lincoln remarked to John Hay that McClellan "seemed to think, in defiance of Scripture, that heaven sent its rain only on the just, and not on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45.)

**THREE HEBREW  
CHILDREN**

On a day when visitors at the White House were telling the president of the many dangers and perils and "breakers" which were threatening the nation and its cause, Lincoln cheered them up by telling them that it reminded him of the schoolboy who could never pronounce the names of

<sup>40</sup> Pendel, *Thirty-Six Years in the White House*, pp. 25-27.

the three Hebrew lads in the book of Daniel: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He had been repeatedly whipped for this, but without improvement. One day as they were reading through the chapter at school he saw that he would have to read these names again in his turn, and, putting his finger on the verse, he turned to his neighbor, an older boy, and whispered: "Here come those tormented Hebrews again!"<sup>41</sup>

In a letter to his friend Joshua S. Speed, when he was having his difficult love affair with Mary Todd, Lincoln wrote:

**STRENGTH FOR  
HIS SOUL**

I was always superstitious. I believe God made me one of the instruments of bringing your Fanny and you together, which union

<sup>41</sup> Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House*, p. 257.

I have no doubt He had foreordained. Whatever He designed He will do for me yet. "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord," is my text just now. (Exod. 14:13.)

Thus in one of the greatest texts of the Bible Lincoln found medicine and strength for his troubled soul.

**PARDONING A  
YOUNG DESERTER**

An old father came one day to beseech Lincoln to save his son who had been sentenced to be shot for desertion. Lincoln read the man a telegram from General Ben Butler protesting against executive interference with army court martials. Lincoln watched for a moment the anguish which showed itself in the face of the old father, and then, exclaiming, "By jingo, Butler or no Butler, here goes," took up a pen and wrote a presidential order that the son was "not to be shot until further orders from me."

But the father, when he read it, said: "I thought it was to be a pardon, but you say 'not to be shot until further orders,' and you may order him shot next week."

At this Lincoln smiled: "Well, my old friend, I see you are not very well acquainted with me. If your son never looks on death till further orders come from me to shoot, he will live to be a great deal older than Methusaleh." (Gen. 5:27.)

As the war was drawing to a close, Joseph Gillespie, of Illinois, asked Lincoln about his policy toward the South after the Confederacy had fallen. Lincoln said he thought certain heads ought to come off. "But, if it was left to me, I could not tell where to draw the line between whose heads should come off and whose heads should stay on." He had been reading a short time before the story of Absalom's

**LENIENT POLICY  
IN THE SOUTH**

rebellion and how David was fleeing from Jerusalem, and a man of the house of Saul, Shimei, cursed David as a bloody man and cast stones at him. David's nephew Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, said to David: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." But David restrained him and said: "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, 'Curse David.'" (II Sam. 16:5-14.) Lincoln felt that there had been enough killing on the field of battle and he had no desire to execute vengeance on the leaders of the Confederacy.

**SCRIPTURE ON  
THE GREENBACKS**

At a cabinet meeting the question was being discussed as to the propriety of having some religious motto printed on the greenbacks, like "In God we trust" on the

silver coins. Lincoln said: "If you are going to put a legend on the greenbacks, I would suggest that of Peter and John: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee.'" (Acts 3:6.)

Nothing could be more characteristic of Lincoln and his apt use of the Bible than what he said to the British minister, Lord Lyons, who was a bachelor, when he came to the White House to announce the betrothal of the Prince of Wales, afterward Edward VII, to the Princess Alexandra of Denmark. In company with Secretary of State Seward, Lord Lyons appeared at the White House and said to Lincoln: "May it please your Excellency, I hold in my hand an autographed letter from my Royal Mistress, Queen Victoria, which I have been commanded to present to your

**COUNSEL TO A  
BACHELOR**

Excellency. In it she informs your Excellency that her son, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, is about to contract a matrimonial alliance with Her Royal Highness the Princess Alexandra of Denmark." He then handed the letter to the president and awaited his reply. Lincoln read the letter through, and this was the answer he gave: "Lord Lyons, 'Go, and do thou likewise.'" (Luke 10:37.)<sup>42</sup>

**"ABOUT FOUR  
HUNDRED MEN"**

On the day after the convention of the dissenters and radicals at Cleveland, May 31, 1864, which nominated John C. Fremont for the presidency, Lincoln was listening to an account given him of the convention by a friend, and how, instead of the thousands expected there were just

<sup>42</sup> Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

about four hundred people. Hearing that, Lincoln took his Bible up from his desk and after a little search came upon the passage which told of David and the company which gathered about him at the cave of Adullam when he was pursued and persecuted by King Saul: "And everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men." (I Sam. 22:2.) Thus the president used his knowledge of the Bible to describe and ridicule the critics, complainers, and malcontents who had gathered about Fremont.

After reading one day in Henry Ward Beecher's *Independent* some very severe strictures on the policy of the adminis-

**"IS THY SERVANT  
A DOG?"**



tration, Lincoln flung the paper on the floor, exclaiming as he did so: "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" (II Kings 8:13.)

**SECOND  
INAUGURAL**

Lincoln's most elevated speech, and the one which he himself predicted would "wear better" than any other, was his second inaugural address. Some of the phrases of this noble utterance had been in the mind of Lincoln for a long time. Almost a year before, in a letter to A. G. Hodges, Lincoln said:

Now at the end of three years' struggle the nation's condition is not what either party or any man devised or expected. God alone can claim it. Whither it is tending seems plain. If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and wills also that we of the North, as well as you of the South, shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial

history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God.<sup>43</sup>

It was this idea of an overruling Providence and divine justice and retribution which found sublime expression in the second inaugural address, illustrated and confirmed by two passages of the Bible, one the words of Christ, the other the words of the psalmist: **"IF GOD WILLS"**

The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." (Matt. 18:7.) Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, until every drop

<sup>43</sup> April 4, 1864.

of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." [Ps. 19:9.]

**LASTING INFLUENCE  
OF THE BIBLE**

No man ever made better use of the Bible than did Abraham Lincoln. He spoke "in the grand simplicities" of the King James Version of the Bible. Its language, its history, its personalities appear in his speeches, his papers, and his conversation. In the time of personal affliction the Bible was his comfort and stay. When the nation was passing through the fiery furnace of tribulation and experiencing the judgments of God in the woe and suffering of the Civil War, it was Lincoln's faith in the triumph of righteousness and the character of God as taught by the Bible that strengthened him and upheld him.

TESTIMONY OF  
JOSHUA F. SPEED

Joshua F. Speed was one of Lincoln's closest friends. It was Speed who, in 1837, when Lincoln entered on the practice of law at Springfield, invited him to share a room and a double bed with him over the store which he kept at Springfield. Lincoln had come to the store to purchase bedding, the cost of which was \$17. He asked Speed to give him credit until Christmas, saying that if he succeeded as a lawyer, he would be able to pay the debt, and then added: "If I fail in this, I do not know that I can ever pay you." Speed said that as Lincoln said this to him, he thought he had never seen a sadder face. The generous Speed invited him to share the upstairs room with him, pointing to a pair of winding stairs which led from the store to the room. Lincoln picked up his saddlebags, walked up the stairs to the room, and after a little

came down, this time his face beaming with pleasure as he said, "Well, Speed, I am moved!"<sup>44</sup>

FROM SKEPTICISM  
TO FAITH

Speed, in the lecture which he gave on Lincoln, said that in his early life Lincoln was a skeptic, although

he was very cautious not to give expression to any thought or sentiment that would grate harshly upon a Christian's ear. For a sincere Christian he had great respect. He often said that the most ambitious man might live to see every hope fail; but no Christian could live to see his fail, because fulfillment could only come when life ended.

But in the summer of 1864, Speed said, he went to the Soldier's Home at Washington to spend the night with Lincoln:

"Speed, *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln and Notes of a Visit to California*, "Lecture on Abraham Lincoln," pp. 21-22.

As I entered the room, near night, he was sitting near the window intently reading his Bible. Approaching him I said, "I am glad to see you so profitably engaged."

"Yes," said he, "I am profitably engaged."

"Well," said I, "if you have recovered from your skepticism I am sorry to say I have not."

Looking me earnestly in the face, and placing his hand on my shoulder, he said, "You are wrong, Speed. Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a happier and better man." <sup>45</sup>

It is a well-known fact that Lincoln had **A PREMONITION** a premonition that he would not live out his second term and have the joy of seeing the complete restoration of the Union. He accepted this as part of the divine plan

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

for his life and for the nation, and was fond of quoting Hamlet's lines:

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.

**"MY WORK  
IS DONE"**

Long before, he had said to his law partner Herndon: "Billy, I fear that I shall meet with some terrible end." In the great oration which Bishop Matthew Simpson delivered at Lincoln's funeral in the oak-covered cemetery at Springfield, he disclosed the fact that Lincoln had frequently told him secretly: "I shall never live out the four years of my term. When the rebellion is crushed, my work is done."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> George R. Crooks, *Life of Bishop Simpson*, p. 402.

A VISIT WITH  
FATHER CHINIQUY

One of the most impressive records we have of how firmly Lincoln entertained the conviction that he would fall at the very time the war was coming to an end, and also one of the most impressive records of how he made use of the Bible, is related by Lincoln's friend the Rev. Charles P. Chiniquy.<sup>47</sup> Father Chiniquy paid his last visit to Lincoln on June 9, 1864. Lincoln took him with him in his carriage to visit several of the hospitals where wounded

<sup>47</sup> Father Chiniquy was pastor of a Roman Catholic parish in Kankakee County and was "proprietor" of a village called St. Ann's. In a sermon Father Chiniquy denounced one of his flock, a Frenchman, Peter Spink, as a perjurer. Spink sued Chiniquy for slander. The trial was held at Urbana, in Champaign County, and was attended by great crowds of people. All the testimony was in French. Lincoln was one of Chiniquy's lawyers. Through his efforts a settlement was made without the case going to the jury, and Father Chiniquy retracted his charges. Whitney, *Life of Lincoln*, pp. 53-55; Weik, *The Real Lincoln*, p. 162.



from the army of Grant in the campaign against Richmond had been brought. When they returned from the hospitals Lincoln invited Father Chiniquy to go with him into the White House. He left him in his study for a time, and then returned in great elation, saying that he had received word from Grant that he had compelled Lee to retreat again toward Richmond. After a little he said to Father Chiniquy: "Let me tell you that I have lately read a passage in the Old Testament which has made a profound, and, I hope, a salutary impression on me." The president then took up the Bible that always lay on his desk, and, opening it at the third chapter of Deuteronomy, read the following verses:

**COMFORT FROM  
DEUTERONOMY**

Ye shall not fear them: for the Lord your God he shall fight for you. And I besought the

Lord at that time, saying: O Lord God, thou hast begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. [Vss. 22-27.]

When he had finished the reading, Lincoln said: "I have read these strange and beautiful words several times these last five or six weeks. The more I read them, the more it seems to me that God has

THE VOICE OF GOD

written them for me as well as for Moses." He then went on to speak of the wonderful providence that had lifted him from a log cabin to be head of a great nation and break the fetters of millions of slaves.

**END OF THE  
CONFLICT**

Now I see the end of this terrible conflict with the same joy of Moses, when at the end of his trying forty years in the wilderness; and I pray my God to grant me to see the days of peace and untold prosperity which will follow this cruel war, as Moses asked God to see the other side of Jordan and enter the Promised Land. But do you know that I hear in my soul, as the voice of God, giving me the rebuke which was given to Moses? There is a still, but solemn, voice which tells me that I will see those things only from a long distance, and that I will be among the dead, when the nation, which God granted me to lead through those awful trials, will cross the Jordan, and dwell in that Land of Prom-

ise. . . . It seems to me that the Lord wants, today, as He wanted in the days of Moses, another victim—a victim which He has himself chosen, anointed, and prepared for the sacrifice, by raising it above the rest of the people. I cannot conceal from you that my impression is that I am the victim. . . . But just as the Lord heard no murmur from the lips of Moses, when He told him that he had to die before crossing the Jordan for the sins of his people, so I hope and pray He will hear no murmur from me when I fall for my nation's sake.”<sup>48</sup>

**LIKE MOSES, WITH  
NO MURMUR**

<sup>48</sup>Chiniquy, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, pp. 706-10.





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