

## “A CHALLENGE TO ATHEISTS”

by William Jennings Bryan

The following was taken from the address delivered by Mr. Bryan in Orchestra Hall, Chicago, Illinois, on May 4, 1911.

"Is the Bible the work of man, or is it an inspired book? Is it the product of human wisdom, or did its authors speak as they were commanded by the Lord? Atheists and materialists declare that it is merely the work of man; that it was written under the limitations that apply to human wisdom. Taking this position, they must necessarily contend that, unless man has degenerated in ability and declined in wisdom, he can now produce a book equal to the Bible. Let them produce it. Judged by human standards, man is far better prepared to write a Bible now than he was when our Bible was written. The characters whose words and deeds are recorded in the Bible were members of a single race; they lived among the hills of Palestine in a territory scarcely larger than one of our counties. They did not have printing presses, and they lacked the learning of the schools; they had no great libraries to consult, no telegraph wires to bring them the news from the ends of the earth, and no newspaper to spread before them each morning the doings of the day before. Science had not unlocked Nature's door and revealed the secrets of rocks below and stars above. From what a scantily supplied storehouse of knowledge they had to draw, compared with the unlimited wealth of information at man's command today! And yet these Bible characters grapple with every problem that confronts mankind, from the creation of the world to eternal life beyond the tomb. They have given us a diagram of man's existence from the cradle to the grave, and they have set up sign posts at every dangerous point along the path. We turn back to the Bible for the Ten Commandments, which form the foundation for our statute law, and for the Sermon on the Mount, which lays down the rules for our spiritual growth. The Bible gives us the story of the birth, the words, the works, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension of Him whose coming was foretold in prophecy, whose arrival was announced by the angel voices, singing 'Peace and good-will' -- the story of Him who is the growing figure of all time, whom the world is accepting as Saviour and as the perfect example. Let the atheists and the materialists produce a better Bible than ours, if they can. Let them collect the best of their school to be found among the graduates of the universities -- as many as they please, and from every land. Let the members of this selected group travel where they will, consult such libraries as they please, and employ every modern means of swift communication. Let them glean in the fields of geology, botany, astronomy, biology, and zoology, and then roam at will wherever science has opened a way; let them take advantage of all the progress in art and in literature, in oratory and in history -- let them use to the full every instrumentality that is employed in modern civilization; and when they have exhausted every source, let them embody the results of their best intelligence in a book and offer it to the world as a substitute for this Bible of ours. Have they the confidence that the prophets of Baal had in their god? Will they try? If not, what excuse will they give? Has man fallen from his high estate, so that we cannot rightfully expect as much of him now as nineteen centuries ago? Or does the Bible come to us from a source that is higher than man -- which?"