

It is the distinctive mark of the Bible, that which accounts for its being given by inspiration of God, that it is profitable for the religious purposes mentioned above, and is authoritative for these purposes. Other books may be as true—no inspiration can be truer than Euclid or Legendre—but these other books are not Bibles, because they are not profitable for the purposes mentioned by Paul. Now what has been dug up is not Bible, but history. We learn from it something we did not know before about people mentioned in the Bible; or something which the Bible has already told us is told us again. All this is important, and is very interesting. Just as we feel a peculiar respect for the cover of our Bible and its blank leaves, so we do for its history. There were a hundred pagan kings of Moab, but we care very little for any of them except Mesha, and for him only because he is mentioned in the Bible as one who rebelled against the King of Judah. When, then, a stone was found twenty years ago in Dibbon containing Mesha's own account of his rebellion and expeditions, it was intensely interesting, and I was glad myself to give weeks to its study—but it was not Bible. It did not make the Bible one whit more profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. It only illustrated the Bible in its historical and non vital part, in that which is its lifeless vesture, and not that which is its living soul.

We must not forget the definition of our Lord, "The word which I speak unto you, it is spirit and it is life." It is that which is spiritual and vital which is valuable; the lesson, not the parable. My parable of the Bible would compare it with the rind, the shell, and the kernel of a nut. I take a walnut in my hand and tear of the rind; that has been valuable; without it the nut could not have grown; but it is without life, unproductive, cannot grow, cannot maintain or reproduce life. Then there is the shell; it has been useful, essential, has protected the life within, and has grown with it; but it has no inherent life, is as dead as the wood in the desk before me, is equally unable to maintain or reproduce life. But within these envelopes is the kernel which is all life. It maintains its life when dropped from the tree; it will support life, or it will grow into a new and multitudinous generation of life. The Bible has grown with its concentric parts, some of them protective and some vital; all important, but not all equally so; its spirit and its life are at its centre. It needed its rind of history—out of that it grew, and could not have grown otherwise—but in that there is no life; that is not the Bible we hold dear. It needed its harder shell of argument or doctrine, necessary to its growth; but this is not its life. The kernel of its life is in that which is food for the soul and stimulus for the conscience; it is in the bread of life and the water of life which Jesus gives. That is vital and that is nourishing. Of course the parable is not perfect—no parable is. Rind and kernel, history and instruction, are closer connected in the Bible, here and there, than they are in the nut; but the parallel holds nevertheless, and we must, in our thought and study of the Bible, keep ever in clear distinction the tremendous relative value of its vital part, and the comparative worthlessness of what is lifeless, and, it may be, as in the case of the elaborate Jewish ritual, transient, imperfect, and only relatively true.

What, then, is the gain which we, as lovers of the Bible, get from these remarkable discoveries in the ruins of old and buried cities? Simply this—a fuller and clearer understanding of the history in which the Bible is set. The jewel is precious and the setting is interesting and important. We value the setting as well as the jewel, but not as much. We keep in mind their relative values. We know that the setting is for the jewel, not the jewel for the setting. We will dig out of Nineveh or Babylon or Pishom nothing about the doctrine or instruction, but we will dig up much about the history, much that was in the book, but not in the essential Bible.

When the palace of King Sennacherib of Nineveh was opened, his own contemporary annals were found, written in his own life, at his own order,