

TOWARD A BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Seeing History as God Sees It

By Ron Merryman

"Remember the days of old (HISTORY!), consider the years of many generations (HISTORY!). Ask your father, and he will show you; Your elders, and they will tell you: When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel." Deuteronomy 32:7-8 NKJV.

What an incredible statement! Long before there ever was a Jewish people, long before Abraham was even born, even prior to the settlement of the nations through the sons of Noah, God determined the boundaries of national entities on what would later be those of the nation of Israel!

Think of this in relation to the historical process. Did the descendents of Shem, Ham, and Japheth have any idea that behind their volitional choices for land grants and settlements, there was a definite will of Almighty God that included, even focused on, the geographical place of future Israel in their midst! Would any of us have a clue were it not for the Word of God!

As the wilderness generation is about to enter the Promised Land, Moses is reminding them that their God, the only true God, is the God of the historical process. He is not separated from what is happening in time. It is as if Moses were reading to them that which is so well stated by the late Francis A. Schaeffer, "He is there ... and He is not silent."

Israel: The First People to have a Philosophy of History

The ancient Israelites were the first people to have an accurate philosophy of history. This, thanks to the God who called them out of Mesopotamia to be a people unique unto Himself, a fact He would not let them forget. Read about His historic involvement with His people Israel in Psalm 105: 6-45:

vv 6-9 *Oh you seed of Abraham... you children of Jacob his Chosen... He has remembered His **covenant** for ever, which **covenant** He made with Abraham...*

vv 12-14 *When they were but a few men in number; yea very few... when they went from one nation to another... He suffered no man to do them wrong...*

vv 16-17 *...He called for a famine upon the land: He brake the whole staff of life. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant...*

v 24 *He increased his people greatly..., v 25 He turned their (the Egyptians) heart to hate His people..., v 26 He sent Moses His servant..., v 28 He sent darkness..., v 32 He gave them hail for rain..., v 34 He spoke and locusts came..., v 37 He brought them forth with silver and gold..., v 41 He opened the rock and waters gushed forth..., v 44 He gave them the lands of the heathen.*

Similar expressions of God's involvement historically with His covenanted people Israel can be found in Psalm 106 and Nehemiah 9: 7ff (which I urge you to see). Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7 clearly reflects appreciation of Divine involvement in Israel's history. Paul

rehearses the same to those gathered in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13: 16-41. In Romans 12:4, he reminds all readers that it was/is to Israelites that the covenants pertain.

Suffice it to say: the writers of scripture are lead by God to remind readers THAT GOD IS THE GOD OF THE HISTORICAL PROCESS! He is not divorced from it.

Israel & their Covenant Keeping God

No Jewish child was permitted to forget that Israel was a nation, the only nation on the face of God's earth, under covenants (contracts) that originated with their living God (Jehovah), Deut. 6:6-11. Note the clarity of Deut. 7:7-9, spoken by Moses to a generation of Israelites about to enter the promised land:

⁷ "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸ "but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandment..."

The Hebrew scriptures are replete with reminders to Israelites of their contractual (covenant) relations with Jehovah, who initiated the Abrahamic, the Land, the Davidic, and the New Covenants, Gen. 12:1-3,15; 17:1-22; 28:13-15; Ex. 6:2-8; Nu. 25:12-13; Deut. 5:2-3; 29:1-15; Psa. 89:3-4; 105:6-11; Isa. 55:3; 59:20-21; Jer. 31:31-34; etc. (see Attachment A). The prophets, raised up by God to declare His Word in the face of an apostate Jewish priesthood, can be seen as prosecuting attorneys defending the truth of Jehovah and His everlasting covenants with Israel.

Yes, the Israelites were the first people to have a philosophy of history and the historical process. They knew where history started and where it will end. Herodotus and Thucydides, patron saints in the history departments of our modern universities, postdated Moses and the Israelites by at least 1000 years: they WERE NOT the first to delineate a philosophy of history! God saw to it that His people Israel knew their historical roots, roots which could be epitomized as "Jehovah's Covenant People."

Christians Need a Biblical, Hence Accurate, Philosophy of History

Christians are not to be ignorant of this perspective. If you do not know the issues and details of this Divine involvement, you are like a leaf that doesn't know that it is part of a tree. Or, you are like a tree in space without any roots.

The purpose of this article is to help believers get a grip on the edifying aspects of a biblical philosophy of history.

1. From the biblical perspective, it is God, the God of Christianity that began the historical process.

In the beginning (time), God created the heavens (space), and the earth (mass). Genesis 1:1.

Time, chronology, history as we know it, began with God's creation of the time-space-mass universe as recorded in Genesis 1:1. Christians know this, but its significance often escapes them. This illusive thing that we call "time" is a derivative of our God! We know when time began. Moreover, we know where time is going. God tells so in His Word.

2. God not only began the historical process, the Scriptures insist that He continues to be involved in it.

As per our thoughts in the introduction based upon Psalm 105, Nehemiah 9; Acts 7; 13:16ff.

3. History and the historical process is liner, not cyclical. History from Divine viewpoint has what the Greeks called *telos*, a goal, a direction, a purposeful end. The ultimate goal of history is the glorification of God in Christ, the Messiah. It is to this end that history is moving.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11.

Surely you are not so naïve as to expect such information to proceed from the history departments of our secularized universities! They may even teach that history is cyclical (going in circle... or going nowhere!).

Arnold Toynbee, famous British historian of the last century, in his *A Study of History* (10 volumes), traced over twenty civilizations that rose, prospered and failed in a cyclical fashion over the course of time. Toynbee was an optimistic cyclist: he believed civilization was moving upward toward a golden age when the major monotheistic religions of the world would merge and lead humanity to peace and prosperity worldwide. The ecumenists love him!

Oswald Spengler in his *Decline of the West* traced similar cycles in the rise and fall of world powers, but he was a pessimistic cyclist. The trend according to Spengler is down, toward self-destruction, not up.

But our God tells us that history to moving toward a glorious and climactic intervention by the Lord Jesus Christ at His Second Advent. Cyclical events such as the rise and fall of world powers are only part a movement toward an end, a movement that is linear!

4. Apart from the Bible, there is no way of knowing God's purposes in history; thus the multifarious human speculations as to the purpose, movement, and end of this process.

Reject the God who created time and the historical process and what can you expect in that regard? Guesses: that's it! Secular historians struggle with where history is going and what determines its movement (if in fact one even believes history is moving somewhere other than circles!). Some will say, "Great, men such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Martin Luther move history"; or "Geographical phenomena such as rivers and waterways determine the course of history" (history follows waterways); or as per economic determinists (communists), "Economics and/or the class warfare determines the movement of history."

Others, confounded by our past debunk history. Otto von Bismarck, the first Chancellor of Germany defined history as “Lies agreed upon.” Voltaire, the French atheist wrote, “History is a pack of tricks we play upon the dead.” Henry Ford said, “History is bunk.”

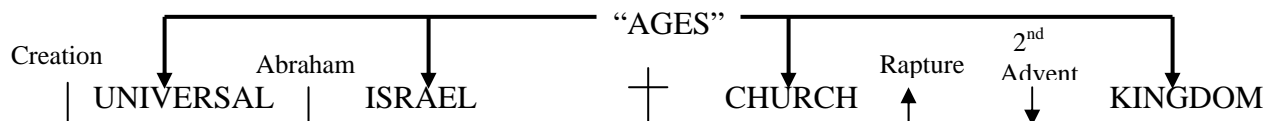
Separate history from the God of the Bible and you will drown in a milieu of human nonsense and speculation!

5. By understanding God and His involvement in history, we can better appreciate both!

It is not accidental that God chose to reveal Himself progressively in the historical process: thus the Old Testament written over a period of 1100 years and the New, many books of which are prompted by historical circumstance.

6. Any view of history that ignores God the Son is totally inadequate.

- Heb. 1:2 God through the Son “made the ages” (tous aionas)
- Heb. 11:2 “Through faith we understand that the ages (tous aionas) were framed or prepared by the word of God.” See also John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16



7. Divine-viewpoint-history frees us from the limitations of our own experience; it gives us perspective; it helps us not repeat past errors of others; it stabilizes us in the present.

Conclusion: the Jews from Abraham on were the first of all peoples to have a very clear philosophy of history. Every prophet, every teacher, the Lord Jesus, his disciples, the Apostles- all functioned from a very clear framework of human history. SO SHOULD EVERY BELIEVER!

Isaiah 46:9,10 Remember the former things of old (HISTORY!) : for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

Attachment A

FOUR MAJOR UNENDING COVENANTS GOD MADE WITH ISRAEL

