

## History

We inhabit a world gone crazy. Too many people, it seems, are either confused or not thinking clearly. And no wonder! Our modern Western world is saturated with lies and contradictions – all in the service of either a pervasive, anti-theistic ideology or a made-up religion. This Sunday School lesson seeks to explain how our modern state of madness developed. It is in three parts: First I discuss the pernicious role that history has in today's progressive thought and contrast it with a biblical view of history. Second, I apply that discussion to one specific area, origins, to show how history is being deliberately distorted. And then, third, I show that history *must* be a major concern for us. We need this perspective to be able better to appreciate the Bible's worldview, which should be ours.

I. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel left the world an entrancing legacy. That German philosopher of a couple of centuries ago taught that history is directional. It is inexorably moving, he claimed, from a primitive period when people were in bondage to superstitions in an ever upward spiral that progresses to a future great utopia of fully realized freedom. History, he alleged, was being moved by a "world spirit" [Hegel was a Baruch Spinoza type pantheist] that guided humanity in a great arc characterized by slow evolutionary processes interrupted by blazing revolutions and other such crises. His "dialectic" (thesis, antithesis, and then synthesis) was the means by which this system of history inevitably and deterministically progressed. "Freedom", according to Hegel (at least, as interpreters understand him), was recognizing the logic of the time we're in and participating in its progress. Hegel was thrilled with the French Revolution, ignoring or regretting the fierce violence it involved. And Marx was thrilled with Hegel, using his idea of history for his own radical views. So do liberals today. In fact, the current term for liberals is "progressives" because they've adopted Hegel's progressive view of history and Marx's application of it. They gleefully want to participate in it.

Hegel's view of history is taught to students in every secular college and university, and they've all taken it as their own worldview. To understand what's happening in our world today, and the broad infatuation with Marxism, we must understand Hegel's thought. By the way: Hegel had attended a Lutheran seminary. He knew the Gospels, and he surely knew Protestant eschatology. It seems that he adopted the biblical view that history has meaning and transformed it into his pantheistic system. So let's ask: What is Scripture's view of history? What is *our* view of history? This won't be easy, because Scripture nowhere explicitly develops such a theme, nor has the Church. But a view of history should be an essential component of a Christian worldview.

The Bible opens with the existence of evil ("darkness was upon the face of the deep") and closes with the eradication of evil ("there was no night"). That means all of Scripture is linear, under the direct control of God as He carries out His great purposes. History is deterministic in that God has determined where and how it progresses. In the will of God for His creation, He intends to fulfill certain objectives, and He will do it in human history.

God created time. He knows the end from the beginning. God is above all time, not limited by it yet aware of it. Time exists to serve God. Time will someday either come to an end or be turned into "ever-lastingness" or "eternity" (whatever that is). All that's between those two points is history, and history unfolds under the direct will of God. And He has exquisite and precise control of every event in history. Nothing happens apart from His watchfulness and supervision, if not His willed intent. The Book of Daniel glories in God's knowledge and control of all history. So does the Book of Revelation. The predictive prophecies of Scripture celebrate God's sovereign control of history.

So, we can say that history is linear – but not "upward." And there's no evolutionary "progress," only an unfolding of God's plan for the ages. Yes, God has willed that history should unfold in discrete eras (in theology, we call them "dispensations") in which His people have different responsibilities. But that's for His own reasons, reasons not explicitly revealed in Scripture. There is progress in *revelation*, but not in history.

So let's understand something absolutely fundamental: Nothing simply happens. Nothing happens by chance. Nothing happens because Nature determined it. Everything that happens, happens because it accomplishes, in some unrevealed way, God's purposes. All history narrates the outworking of God's sovereign purposes in a fully coherent way. And yet, somehow, God has given His humans a measure of moral free will so that they can act within history and be held accountable to God for how they use their freedom. There's no contradiction between human freedom and God's sovereignty, and no paradox is involved. We're finite creatures, and so we have neither the ability nor the right to know how the infinite God controls His creation while allowing us a measure of freedom. But because God is purposeful, all events in history are meaningful. We may not be able to interpret events, but they happen in order to fulfill God's agenda. Thus, for example, the Holocaust wasn't pointless genocide but was necessary to bring the State of Israel into existence so that Christ can return to it. Many events in history are interpreted for us in Scripture, such as the cross, but not all the nitty-

gritty events humans experience. In all those, may we exercise faith that God is, in some way and for some reason, behind them all. See Romans 8:28.

II. In today's evangelical world, we assume that origins is a matter that either Science or the Bible will explain. I argue here that the matter of origins is in the realm of history. It has nothing to do with Science. It is true history and should be understood as such. Let me expand on that claim. There exists in academia the dictum that the study of history begins with the invention of writing. So history is really the study of the written past, a study of documents. So anything prior to Egypt is called "pre-history," and it's the domain of archaeology and anthropology. Anything prior to that is relegated to geology and biological evolution, the domain of science. That's all nonsense. Everything that's "pre-history," that is, in the so-called murky, distant past, is really just present-day fantasy. The Enlightenment idea of pre-historic human development and upward progress is entirely myth. Origins is really a matter of history, revealed to us in the Scriptures. The Genesis creation narrative is history. It has profound theological significance, as do all of the Bible's narratives. And it's written with great style and craft. But it's history! It is sinful, anti-theistic bias if not overt hatred of God that demands that we ignore the Scriptures' historical record and give credence instead to scientists' present-day fantasies.

French Enlightenment figures didn't "misinterpret" the rock layers as many well-intentioned creationists state. They didn't mistakenly see millions of years in the horizontally stratified rock layers instead of Flood sediments. No. Those anti-theists cleverly invented millions of years deliberately to refute the biblical record of a global flood. A horde of others in the West, intellectuals all, then filled in that imagined era with rational-sounding speculations and made-up stories, using language purloined from science. Science illegitimately seized origins away from the realm of history. And hardly anyone noticed. So two errors result: (i) Evangelical theologians, mistakenly accepting that origins is a matter for Science to explain, rush headlong into apostasy by embracing billions of years and even evolution. And (ii), well-meaning Christian scientists, hard at work showing how the Bible's narrative is scientifically valid, miss the big picture in Scripture: Origins is history. Not science.

III. Hegel's legacy is toxic. Modern people are foolishly thrilled with the idea of continual progress and with whatever comes that's new and exciting, and with jettisoning anything that is old. Moderns love the falsehood that we've abandoned primitive, superstitious eras and live now in an era that's enlightened by Science and reason, one that's deliberately and necessarily totally secular. And now, not only to make Science's theft of origins a *fait accompli* but to heap virtue on it, our modern world's brilliant academicians, all of them progressives and Marxists, have decreed that all history is evil and must be obliterated. History isn't merely replete with injustice, racism, slavery and oppression; they allege, it is, itself, a greedy capitalist invention to keep people ignorant and in chains. So it's now impermissible even to *mention* history in polite society. You may not, in today's world, say that Creation is historical. Origins is what Science says it is, or you're evil and should be punished.

But God gave us history to teach us truth. He *commands* us to know biblical history. For one reason, that's because what God has done in the past, He'll do again in the future to an even greater extent. God's promises are really the past re-written and the future pre-written. So for example, the animal sacrificed in the Garden to cover Adam's and his wife's nakedness anticipated the later animal sacrifices for Israel's sins, and then beyond that, the cross. Another example: God holds us today to the same kind of faith that Abraham exercised 4,000 years ago. What kind of faith was that? We need to read the historical Abraham narratives to know that. The Exodus? History. The Conquest? History. The Monarchy? History. The Resurrection of Christ? History. And for another reason, the historical narratives teach theology.

Satan doesn't want us to know biblical history because of the theological or spiritual lessons there. Consider the cross, a historical event. It took place in time and space and was witnessed by many, and recorded in documents for us to read and think about. The cross not only makes atonement for sins and fellowship with God available, as most evangelical church-goers know. But it also draws people to God as nothing else can. The cross shows us the depth of God's love for His human creatures; and it models obedience, Jesus' obedience, which is the key to holiness and spiritual life. It turns us into lovers, lovers of God and of other people. And it gives us purpose in life, that of sharing the lessons of the cross with others. Secular history has no lessons for us, other than that the human race is saturated with sin. (That we already know, or should know). It's biblical history that is essential for us to know. The wisdom and the revelation given by the writers of Scripture is true and timeless, and so is valid and binding for us today. Much of the God's Word is *purposely* historical narrative.

Dear Reader: We need to understand history *biblically*. And we need to know and understand our history-based Bible. We've been given the historical narratives in Scripture to learn from them. They teach us God's ways and God's will. They teach us how to live, and what kind of person we're to become. And God holds us accountable to them. So we ignore them at our peril. Let's read and reflect on Scripture's historical narratives afresh, depending on the Spirit to illumine them for us, so that we may make those truths come alive again as we live for God in this present wicked world.