

9. The Bible and History (1Q 2012—Glimpses of Our God)

Biblical material: Ps. 104:1–9; Rev. 1:1–3; 2 Pet. 1:21; Daniel 2; Rev. 12:7–17; Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 5:17–19; Rev. 1:8.

Quotes

- Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message. *Malcolm Muggeridge*
- I believe in God; I just don't trust anyone who works for him. *Author Unknown*
- Human history is the sad result of everyone looking out for himself. *Julio Cortaza*
- History is just the accumulated stories of how God is working in the lives of all the individual people on earth. *John Hercus*
- The key to the history of the world is the kingdom of God. *D. Martin Lloyd-Jones*
- The whole of Bible history exists to tell us that history turns upon the hinge of sinfulness, not upon the hinge of politics. *J.A. Motyer*
- All history is incomprehensible without Christ. *Ernest Renan*

Questions

In what way does history have a purpose—or not? How does the great controversy theme fit into an understanding of human history? What of divine foreknowledge and predestination? How does Biblical prophecy and history intersect? What do these great issues have to do with my own personal history?

Bible summary

Ps. 104:1-9 defines God as Creator and Sustainer of everything—which includes our history as well, questions of predestination aside! From a prophetic point of view, God does know the end from the beginning and chooses to reveal some aspects ahead of time (Rev. 1:1-3, see also 2 Pet. 1:21). Daniel 2 spells out the arc of history as shared with Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. The war in heaven (Rev. 12:7-17) provides the backdrop to our history, and explains the situation in terms of the great controversy. Rom. 16:20 says that God will crush Satan under our feet, showing there will be a final resolution to the cosmic conflict. Through God's new creation (2 Cor. 5:17-19) he reconciles the world to himself. The Lord is the Alpha and Omega—who was, and is, and is to come (Rev. 1:8). In all of this we see God working his purpose out, while still allowing us freedom of choice.

Comment

The primary understanding of the Bible is that our time here—our history—has meaning and purpose. More than this, the Bible is a record of how God intervenes and directs in history—working out his plans and purposes. This includes not only the historical narratives of how we humans have interacted with God, but also the prophetic perspective in which God details what his intentions are and how we can be part of his universe-wide resolution to the great controversy.

God knows the end from the beginning. Yet to us, what does this mean? When we consider prophecy, we may ask “what is it for?” Surely it is not simply to satisfy our curiosity as to what lies ahead. Rather it is to confirm that despite the apparent success of

evil and the problems of sin and the seeming randomness of life, God still exercises control over his universe and will bring it back into harmony once more. In the context of this quarter's studies, such prophetic perspectives also endorse the validity and trustworthiness of Scripture.

The difference between prophecies in the Bible and predictions of today is that prophecies center on the plans and purposes of God, not on the impacts of wayward comets or Martian invasions! They are not so much about the future, but about God's involvement in human events. In this way we once again see the great controversy unfolding, the revelation of the issues behind the cosmic conflict.

There's no question that prophecy is part of the evidence. But in another sense, the greater emphasis should be on the nature and character of this prophecy-fulfilling God. Even if prophecy is true, no one would want a relationship with a God who is as the Devil describes him. Consequently we have to look not only at the events, but at reasons and consequences. God is always working for good, yet in this world of sin tragic and problematic things happen. That's another thing we need to learn from history—that sin is very corrosive to God's kingdom and methods, that the innocent suffer with the guilty, and that God is affected too.

The issue is truly a question of trust. Not only whether God can be trusted to fulfill prophecy, but whether he can be trusted to run the universe wisely and well, and whether we will be comfortable and happy in his presence. Most importantly, do we trust God enough to give ourselves to him, so that he may repair the damage done by sin, to heal us from the disease of evil, to remake us into his divine image once more? Only then can we say we truly trust this trustworthy God.

Future prophecy—particularly regarding the end and the second coming—is also part of the Biblical prophetic message. If past prophecy has been fulfilled, then future prophecy can be considered reliable. However what of the unfulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament—for example the promises to Israel that were contingent on their positive response? The fact that they went their own way meant that God's promises were not applicable—does this mean that prophecies failed?

What is the Bible then?

- The record of God revealing himself to human beings all through history, and especially in the greatest revelation of all: God's Son, Jesus Christ.
- The account of the great controversy between God and the Devil, good triumphing over evil, and how we all are involved in the battle over the nature and character of God.
- The demonstration of how God came to save us and to re-make us in his image. The evidence of God's salvation.

So it can't be just a good book, or sublime literature, or human imaginings. Take or leave it—the Bible says of itself: this is God speaking to you. Question is; can we trust this God?

Many have issues regarding how God can be “in charge” of history and yet still allow his created beings free will. Issues of predestination and foreknowledge however are really questions about the trustworthiness of God. Can we trust him to know beforehand what our choices will be? So what of the God of the Bible? Doesn't really matter whether the Bible can be trusted if we can't trust the God it speaks of.

From Eden to Exodus, from Mount Sinai to the Mount of Olives, from Galilee to Gethsemane—the chorus of the Bible is: God can be trusted! He really does do what he promises. He really can fulfill his claims. He really is as he says. He can be trusted to know what we will choose, because he will not treat us differently as a result. He will still do all he can, even though he may know in the end that we will be lost.

The assurance of the trustworthiness of God is at the heart of our salvation, and gives us confidence that God will finally end the great controversy through his demonstration of himself through history. He will be proved fair and right, loving and true. History is the evidence!

Ellen White Comments

The Bible is the most instructive history that men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages. It lights up the far-distant past, where human research seeks vainly to penetrate. In God's word we behold the power that laid the foundation of the earth and that stretched out the heavens. Here only can we find a history of our race, unsullied by human prejudice or human pride. Here are recorded the struggles, the defeats, and the victories of the greatest men this world has ever known. Here the great problems of duty and destiny are unfolded. The curtain that separates the visible from the invisible world is lifted, and we behold the conflict of the opposing forces of good and evil, from the first entrance of sin, to the final triumph of righteousness and truth; and all is but a revelation of the character of God. {CE 65}

The study of the Bible will give strength to the intellect. Says the psalmist, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." [PS. 119:130.] The question has often been asked me, "Should the Bible become the important book in our schools?" It is a precious book, a wonderful book. It is a treasury containing jewels of precious value. It is a history that opens to us the past centuries. Without the Bible we should have been left to conjectures and fables in regard to the occurrences of past ages. Of all the books that have flooded the world, be they ever so valuable, the Bible is the Book of books, and is most deserving of the closest study and attention. It gives not only the history of the creation of this world, but a description of the world to come. It contains instruction concerning the wonders of the universe, and it reveals to our understanding the Author of the heavens and the earth. It unfolds a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy. Those who are close students of the word of God, and who obey its instructions, and love its plain truths, will improve in mind and manners. It is an endowment of God that should awaken in every heart the most sincere gratitude; for it is the revelation of God to man. {CE 105-6}

If the mind is set to the task of studying the Bible for information, the reasoning faculties will be improved. Under study of the Scriptures the mind expands, and becomes more evenly balanced than if occupied in obtaining general information from the books that are used which have no connection with the Bible. No knowledge is so firm, so consistent and far-reaching, as that obtained from a study of the word of God. It is the foundation of all true knowledge. The Bible is like a fountain. The more you look into it, the deeper it appears. The grand truths of sacred history possess amazing strength and beauty, and are as far-reaching as eternity. No science is equal to the science that reveals the character of God. {FE 393}

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