

# The Biblical Philosophy of History

David Moon

I have been teaching various history courses in junior high and high school in Christian schools for 28 years. I can say that generally the attitude of a student who first joins one of my classes is that history is an irrelevant topic and that “studying” it for five days a week for nine months will be quite boring. I hear much the same attitude when I meet parents in the beginning of the school year at “back to school nights.” I hear how boring history classes were back when they were in school!

I remember my own experiences in history classes when I was in high school, and I can certainly sympathize with that expectation. Most students see history as something that happened way back when and that is totally irrelevant to their life in the here and now. History class itself is just the boring memorization of tedious and useless dates and facts.

It seems that our educational system views the study of history in much the same way. We hear so much emphasis today on math and science and on the importance of our continuing the march of technology. Society focuses on having the comfortable life, but what about the need to think about how to live life!

I see the study of history as a great tool for helping our students see the world from God’s point of view. Our students are bombarded daily with the philosophy of the non-Christian culture around them. But the Bible teaches us that although we as Christians are in the world, we are not to be of the world. I believe we are supposed to think God’s thoughts after Him.

I have talked with teachers in the Christian schools where I have ministered, and some of these educators struggle with the whole idea of biblical integration and teaching from a biblical worldview. They rightly resist the idea of straining to tack a Bible verse onto a lesson just so that the lesson is “biblically integrated.” Subjects such as history, I am told, are easier to teach from a biblical worldview than, say, math. Teaching from a biblical worldview is not an artificial thing, but more of creating an atmosphere in which the subject is taught. It is the very foundation of all activities and beliefs in the school.

Regarding history in particular, our students need to learn history not just as isolated facts but also as a systematic and foundational way of looking at life. In any of the courses in the history department, the goal needs to be that our students leave the course knowing how it relates to the real world—knowing that what God says about the subject is relevant to the real world and corresponds to what is true in the real world. Our students need to know the truth about the historical subject they are studying so that they can apply their knowledge to how they should live in the world. If the study of history in the classroom is not practical to what our students need to know and use in life, then our teaching is useless and a waste of time.

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An important question our students need to think about is, How do we know anything? In history we see people basing their views of life on personal experience. If we define the word *true* as being in conformity with reality, how do we know that what we experience is actually true? Many times we also encounter people who are basing their views of life on wishful thinking, that is, on believing things that have absolutely no basis in fact. If we really think about it, it becomes clear that almost everything we believe, we believe because somebody told us so. We believe on the basis of authority, and this fact reinforces the need to study history from God's point of view. Whether the subject is U.S. history or geography or current social issues, our task is to base our inquiry on the principles we find in the Bible. The commands and principles of the Bible inform our students as they analyze and judge what peoples, nations, and civilizations have done in the past and indeed are doing now. Students should not analyze and judge for purely academic reasons but so that they can learn from the mistakes and successes of others.

The way that Christians look at history and approach life stems from their worldview. When students study history from the foundation and framework of the Bible, these students can rightly judge the decisions and actions they are analyzing. These studies then help students apply the lessons learned in the study to their own lives. The following are some of the worldview questions that every aspect of historical study should address:

- How do Christians decide on matters of right and wrong?
- What is the basic moral nature of human beings?
- What makes human beings unique?
- How did the world and all that is in it come into being?
- What is reality in terms of knowledge and truth?
- How does and should the world function?
- What does it mean to be a human being?
- What is one's reason for existence?
- How should one live?
- Is there any hope for the future?
- Why is it possible to know anything at all?
- What is the meaning of human history?

Students need to apply two especially important ideas to the study of human history. First, human beings are created in the image of God. This idea brings with it enormous ramifications for the cultural mandate and human rights. Second, human depravity is a fact. Man's sinful state is obvious in the moral, spiritual, social, and intellectual realms. No accurate assessment of human history can take place without acknowledging and applying these ideas. I must also say that these are not just brute facts that are neutral in interpretation. The Bible has much to say about what these facts of life mean and how they affect history and life.

I use four Bible passages to show my students the importance of studying history from a biblical point of view. These passages are not philosophical in tone, but they stress the practical results of viewing history from God's perspective and then acting on that perspective:

- Psalm 78:1–8 speaks of the need to teach each generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord so that the children will put their trust in God and keep His commandments—they will be loyal and faithful to God.
- In 1 Corinthians 10:6–13, we learn that history was written to give us examples so that we can learn from the experiences of others and not have to suffer the painful consequences of wrong choices.
- Ephesians 4:17–25 tells us that Christians should use their enlightened understanding and the truth learned in Christ Jesus in order to affect the way they live. Christians are supposed to think differently than the world.
- Philippians 1:9–11 expresses the goals that Paul had for his spiritual children. These characteristics also reveal my longing for my students. I teach history as a means of discipling God's children. History, taught from the viewpoint and principles of the Bible, is an excellent tool in the Holy Spirit's hands.



David Moon has taught junior high and high school Bible and history for 28 years. He has a wife and four sons. He and his family are serving at the Hinkson Christian Academy in Moscow, Russia.