

History and Redemptive History

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Few Bible believing Christians would dispute the fact that the study of history is meaningless apart from a realization that God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, is guiding and over-ruling history to his own appointed ends. This does not mean, of course, that all that happens is according to the will of God. God has clearly given man freedom of will and the very fact that there will be a final judgment means that man is responsible for the choices that he makes. However, God's rule over, and in, history does mean that he has a sovereign plan that he is working-out which has a purpose and goal which he is able to fulfill. The scriptures from Genesis to Revelation witness to this plan (e.g. Acts 1:7; 2:23; 17:24-31; Rom. 8:28-30, Eph. 1:3-10; etc.) and without an understanding of it history itself is meaningless.

The New Testament literally abounds with passages of Scripture which describe God's redemptive or salvific plan in a nutshell. One example is from Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in

his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:20-28).

These verses describe redemptive history. Their focus is on God's plan of salvation which he achieves in, and through, Christ. In his commentary on chapter 5 of the Book of Revelation G.E. Ladd summarizes the Christian perspective of history:

Here is a simple but profound biblical truth which cannot be overemphasized: apart from the person and redeeming work of Jesus Christ, history is an enigma. For centuries since Augustine and his City of God, a Christian view of history as having a divinely ordained goal which was inseparable from the redemptive word of Christ has colored western thought. Since the enlightenment, many philosophers have rejected the Christian view of life, and for them history has become a problem ... Christ, and Christ alone, has the key to the meaning of human history. It is not therefore surprising that modern thinkers are pessimistic; apart from the victorious return of Christ, history is going nowhere [A Commentary on the Revelation of John, p. 82, Eerdmans].

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