

Old Testament History

Commentary for October 1, 2008 — Changes in History and Methods

The "[October 2008 Newsletter](#)" is now online and it introduces this month's article titled "The Key to Old Testament History." This article provides crucial information you need to comprehend the scope and significance of the Old Testament record relative to conditions today.

My ever-handy computerized *American Heritage Dictionary* defines history as:

"1. A narrative of events; a story.

- 2.a. A chronological record of events, as of the life or development of a people or an institution, often including an explanation of or commentary on those events.**
b. A formal written account of related natural phenomena: a history of volcanoes.
c. A record of a patient's medical background.

3. The branch of knowledge that records and analyzes past events: "History has a long-range perspective" (Elizabeth Gurley Flynn).

- 4.a. The events forming the subject matter of a historical account. b. Something that belongs to the past: Their troubles are history now. c. An interesting past: a house with a history.**

5. A drama based on historical events: the histories of Shakespeare."

The biblical narrative in the Old Testament fulfills each and all of these definitions,¹ and the best part is: the biblical narrative is true.

Supernatural forces have an influence on human history. It is most important to accept this premise. God's influence in history is clearly shown in the Old Testament. (The reason for God's working influence is shown in the New Testament.) Yet this is the precise reason why many historians discredit the accounts found in the Old Testament.² They have refined the simple definitions of "history" and placed false standards upon Scripture, standards often contrary to dictionary definitions.

The history in the Old Testament is valid but secular historians object to the miraculous elements of the Old Testament, relegating the true scriptural history to myth. They do this because they cannot imagine that anyone actually experienced (or witnessed) the wondrous

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1. All 5 definitions are true except perhaps for 2c above. However, if one views mankind as a sick patient, then the narrative of the Old Testament describes the sickness of the human condition due to sin and depravity, needing redemption and a redeemer. Of course, Christ as Redeemer provides that redemption in every way. In regard to definition 5, much of Scripture has been dramatized.
 2. Just as some today consider the Gospels to be composed of oral "myths" (a nuanced scholarly term) and not valid and true accounts, so too many historians consider the Old Testament history to be mythic (or at best factual accounts combined with miracle stories). One of the earliest proponents of the Bible as myth, Julius Wellhausen, had this opinion about the Pentateuch:

"Wellhausen reconstructs the main features of this period without recourse to much of the narrative tradition of the Pentateuch: there is little if any uniqueness to the history of the Israelite ancestors, no desert theocracy, no monotheistic faith, no law set once and for all, no unified experience of all the tribes in Egypt, no covenant theology."

In Douglas A. Knight, ed., and Society of Biblical Literature, vol. 25, *Semeia*. *Semeia* 25, "An experimental journal for Biblical criticism.", *Semeia*, 52 (Chico, CA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1982).

events described in the Bible such as the creation, the flood, the tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues, the exodus from Egypt and the wilderness story, and the other extraordinary but true events of the Bible.

Finally, let me give you the best argument about the validity of “the Bible as history.” It is reflected in this brief exchange:

“When Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, asked the court chaplain for an argument that the Bible is an inspired book, he answered, ‘Your Majesty, the Jews.’”

• **Charles Hoffmeister, Jr., “History Vindicates,”**³

Historic Trends

In this month’s presentation Dr. Martin shows key events that led to a new era, changes that marked the end of civilizations and commenced the beginning of the civilization that we live in now, the Babylonian system.

Our present civilization is quite different from those that came before the major change, and it is the civilization God has chosen for us to live in at this present time just prior to the second coming of Christ.

When the apostle Paul wrote that Christ is **“upholding all things by the word of his power”** (Hebrews 1:3), the **“all things”** includes the societal, cultural, and political affairs of the nations that we have today (Daniel 4:25, 35). **“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”** (Romans 13:1). That includes human political powers and nations.

The trend of history in our time is toward greater and greater freedom — individually and collectively. The German philosopher Hegel wrote that all history is simply **“the development of the idea of Freedom.”**⁴ This is true both for the history of the Old Testament and for history after the Bible was canonized. **“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:32), and **“Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth.”** (John 17:17). That trend toward freedom began with the change Dr. Martin describes in “The Key to Old Testament History.”

Along with a progression toward freedom, our present civilization is also marked by increasing centralization in all human endeavors — science, technology, commerce, religion, and government. All are seeing more and more power being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands as time moves forward toward the second coming of Christ. Eventually all power in the world will be concentrated under the control of a single Satan-inspired genius, the human antichrist. This trend is compatible with the trend toward freedom. Surprisingly the people of the world will freely choose to give power to a centralized authority. Mankind will have no excuses when judgment comes.

The twin progressions toward freedom and centralization will continue to proceed slowly but at an increasing rate as time grows short (Revelation 12:12). This also is God’s will for the time period just before Christ’s second coming and He deems it necessary for these things to take place. We need to know all we can about the origins of our civilization, and Dr. Martin’s excellent presentation provides that vital information.

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3. Dallas Theological Seminary, *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 94, 94:98 (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1937; 2002).

4. George W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1857), translated by J. Sibree. in John Stam, “A Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of History,’” Dallas Theological Seminary, *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 108, 108:461 (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1951; 2002).