

## **Teaching History from a Biblical Foundation**

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An objective of historical study is to uncover the truth about the past to establishing why it is important to our understanding of the present and future. Since history is concerned with presenting truth, and the object of this paper is to explore the teaching of the discipline from a biblical foundation, we must establish what God's Word says about truth. Jesus speaking of Himself says: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). The disciple John writes that "the Word of God was made flesh" (John 1:14). The Bible, the Word of God, is personified in the person of Jesus Christ – who is the truth. Thus, the Bible declares itself to be a definitive truth. The conscientious historian, when contemplating the past, must consider the Bible's claim and the history it contains. Consequently, the study of history – world, national, church, etcetera – is essential in all Christian schools (Jones, 1903).

One of the many definitions of history is: "the study of the past as it is described in written documents left by human beings" (Hirst, 2017). Without a doubt, the Bible is a written document left by persons that lived long ago. As such, the study of the Bible is relevant to historical study. In fact, it is the most ancient and comprehensive historical account that humanity possesses (White, 1903). Moreover, it is a record unmarred by pride and prejudice (White, 1903).

The true philosophy of history is revealed in the Bible (Jones, 1903). Realizing that righteousness exalts a nation and that government is established by righteousness and preserved by mercy, is to recognize the principles of God – who has the power to establish rulers and remove them – this is to understand the philosophy of history (Jones, 1903). Only in the Scriptures is this clearly articulated (Jones, 1903). Its pages show that the prowess of nations and persons is not found in resources, natural abilities, or fortuitous events, but in their cooperation in fulfilling the purpose of God (White, 1903). An alternative philosophy of history, developed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and embraced by most humanist scholars, attempts to discover direction and meaning in history. In his philosophy, Hegel views history as a comprehensible process moving towards the realization of complete human freedom. During his discourse, he states that history is intimately linked to the development of the individual human spirit, or consciousness, and that the role of philosophy is to comprehend the place of this human consciousness in the unfolding of history. In Hegel's analysis, he divides world history into narrative stages of human freedom – employing a trenchant Eurocentric bias. In his treatise, *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel discusses: the democracy of the polis (city-state of Athens), the rights of citizenship within the Roman Republic, the principles of liberty of conscious and individual freedom ushered in through the Protestant Reformation, and the civil freedoms of the modern European state. Although Hegel finds reason in history, he argues that it is a latent reason, which can only be understood when history's work is complete (Little, 2017).

On the contrary, the Bible (before the completion of history's work) supplies a complete rationale of historical events – through the expressed will of God and prophecy. Throughout the historical record, the shaping of certain events all appear solely dependent on the strength, whims, or aspirations of humanity. Nevertheless, the Scriptures make it clear that all the complex and seemingly incomprehensible movements of history all work toward the manifestation of the preordained will of God (Jones, 1903; White, 1903). Historically, every government has a God given purpose – to protect and buildup the nation. Time is allotted to these governments to see if they will fulfill the will of God. Bible prophecy traces the rise and fall of the Earth's great empires, such as: Babylon,

Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. As with these, and other notable nation-states, each had a probationary period, all failed, their power and glory departed, and they were replaced by others (White, 1903). From studying the history of the rise and fall of empires, students will see how worthless the ostentatious display of worldly power and glory is – in view of the truth that only that which is united with God’s purpose and character will endure the test of time (White, 1903).

The Bible reiterates that the apparent complexity of human history is all under God’s control, symbolically illustrated in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel. The complicated wheels described in the vision are under the guidance of the cherubim (God’s agents). However, the cherubim are upheld and controlled by the hand of the Divine (Ezekiel 1,10). This analogy teaches us that no matter how chaotic, mysterious, or opaque world events may be – God is still in control working out His purpose. Only the Scriptures give a correct view of the philosophy of history. The Word of God, provides a historic chain of events linking the distant past to the future. The Bible studied with the prophecies contained within and other supportive historical references, can accurately tell us where we are in the procession of time and what we can expect to come. All that prophecy foretold as coming prior to the present time is fulfilled, and this is substantiated in the pages of history. Therefore, we can be confident that all the remaining prophecies will come to pass (White, 1903).

The study of history from a biblical foundation is vital to the strengthening and development of character. Frequently, history is taught as a mere record of political intrigues, the toppling of governments, the bloodstained record of military victories and defeats, and heart wrenching accounts of murder, greed and deception. Taught in this manner, the results can be detrimental – pressing upon the student’s mind the apparent futility of hope, love and virtue. When history is taught from a biblical perspective, students see that true, long-lasting, national prosperity is linked to the acceptance of divine principles within the Word of God. Moreover, they learn that persons inspired by the truth of God’s Word can triumph over tyranny and despotism – bringing reformation, joy and liberty to a despondent world. Studying history in this way, provides a comprehensive breadth and depth to the study of the human experience. It also emphasizes that as every individual is part of the human family, what happens to any member impacts us all (White, 1903).

When studying history from a biblical point-of-view, the Scriptures must be presented as the chief textbook – filled with principles, facts and symbolic representations. Of all the books contained within the canon, those of Daniel and Revelation are key to obtaining a complete understanding of world and church history. As frequently observed in these books, a single phrase can deftly encapsulate the entire history of an empire, person, event, or era. From that succinct biblical summary, and with the aid of other relevant historical works, one can deduce specific details pertaining to that specific thing (Jones, 1903). This approach to teaching history gives a sense of relevance, awe and excitement to Christian education.

Biography is a genre of historical study. From an educational standpoint, “no part of the Bible is of greater value than are its biographies” (White, 1903). Therefore, it is essential that history teachers incorporate the use of biographical studies into the course work. When studied, biographies teach the important truth that what a person does is the result of who they are. As a general principle, the experiences of one’s life is the product of their own thoughts and actions. Let students comprehend that every action taken by a person will ultimately impact themselves. In other words, those plagued by disappointments and grief are often simply reaping what they have sown. Nevertheless, these tormented souls are not without hope (White, 1903). Sin culminating in retribution can bring about repentance – fostering a personal reformation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit leading to a life of righteousness by faith (White, 1903). God does not invalidate His law of cause and effect, nor does He work contrary to it. He does not undo the retribution caused by sin. However, He uses the impact of the offense to inspire transformation of character – ultimately bringing a blessing out of a curse (White, 1903).

Another truth brought to light through the effective use of biography is the principle that as a person thinks, so they are (Proverbs 23:7). When the twelve spies delivered their report to the assembly of Israel, ten of that number concluded that they could not take possession of the land of Canaan – because they were weaker than the native inhabitants. On the contrary, Joshua and Caleb declared that in the strength of God they could overcome their enemies and possess the land promised to them. The thinking of everyone, demonstrated in their collective biographies, determined their future and demonstrated their true nature. On one hand, the ten spies proved to be cowardly, rebellious, and faithless. Consequently, they all died in the wilderness without obtaining the Promised Land.

On the other hand, the life records of Joshua and Caleb consistently exemplified courage, loyalty, and faithfulness. Joshua commanded the conquest of Canaan, while Caleb took the mountainous stronghold of Hebron for himself and his descendants (White, 1903).

Furthermore, biographical study reveals the truth that a single departure from the expressed will of God is perilous for the offender and those under their influence. When a person chooses to cast an influence for evil, it will have a disastrous effect on themselves, those in their immediate circle, and future generations. (White, 1903). Bible biography abounds with examples such as: the pharaoh of the exodus, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, King Manasseh, and Queen Jezebel. All the mentioned truths and principles, being as they are absolutes, can be deduced from non-biblical biographies.

The student – in studying these life records – must be reminded that departure from the will of God can only bring shame and loss, and that the result of unbelief is failure. Nevertheless, God’s mercy can reach the depths of misfortune and redeem the repenting soul (White, 1903).

The supreme learning outcome, from the study of history, must be the teaching of biblical principles leading to character development (White, 1903). Instruction in history has long depended on memorization. This approach unnecessarily strains this capability within students, while neglecting the other mental powers associated with critical thinking. On Bloom’s Taxonomy, memorization classified under the step of “remember” is at the bottom of the learning pyramid. Whereas those areas that are more closely associated with critical thinking such as: “understand,” “apply,” “analyze,” “evaluate,” and “create” are accordingly ranked higher on the pyramid. Memorization as a learning technique – standing alone – does not allow the student to truly digest and assimilate the information. It circumvents evaluation, analysis, and independence of thought, which leads the student to a state of dependency on the judgment and opinion of others. If left in this state, the pupil will soon be devoid of the ability to discriminate between truth and error and will possibly become a prey to deception. A person with this mindset is easily disposed to accept custom and tradition, with their seemingly imperceptible dangers. The ability to reason is a tremendous gift imparted to the human family, and God desires this trait to be exercised and fully developed (White, 1903). Observing the inherent problems of rote learning, some educators adopted the notion that students need only look within themselves for knowledge. This extreme brought another dilemma – self-sufficiency, which cuts the student off from the true source of knowledge – God and His Word (White, 1903).

When it comes to instruction, the successful educator will acknowledge the personal element (White, 1903). Teachers should invest time, energy, and effort into every student. Jesus, the Master Teacher, discerned possibilities in every person He encountered. He was not deterred by an uncouth exterior, or the underprivileged circumstances (past or present) of the learner. Likewise, the Christian teacher must recognize the untapped potential lying dormant within every student. It is the mission of the instructor to acquaint themselves with the talents given to each student, by God, and inform their pupils of their latent abilities. If properly cultivated through instruction, these talents can be harnessed and polished in such way that the character of the student will stand the test of time and prove to be a blessing to countless others (White, 1903).

In teaching history, instruction must be tailored along lines of effectiveness and simplicity. Effort should be made to incorporate multimedia (maps, drawings, photos, videos, diagrams, etcetera). Likewise, class discussions and group projects should be encouraged. Moreover, in providing verbal instruction, the teacher should be careful to make sure every explanation is plain and clear. Asking questions to students, during the period of instruction, will aid the teacher in assessing if the material is being communicated to the pupils effectively (White, 1903).

It is paramount that history be taught with enthusiasm. Due to the way this discipline is often presented, many students believe the subject to be dry and boring. Consequently, they express little interest in historical studies. Since history teachers are dealing with real facts, they should convey them to the student with force and enthusiasm showing the significance of these things on current and future developments. When students understand the correlation between past and present, it will invoke a natural curiosity and interest in history. For this to come to fruition the teacher must develop student learning outcomes with a distinct plan in mind to accomplish them. Moreover, the instructor should not be satisfied until students understand the biblical principles involved, grasp the underlying truths, and are able to clearly articulate what was learned (White, 1903).

In conclusion, history is a very important discipline, because it contains lessons vital to building Christian character. The pursuit of the truth is a recognizable element within historical study. A complete understanding of truth and where it leads is the purpose behind the philosophy of history.

Biblically this is summarized in the following statement: “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:2). In Hegel’s discourse on the philosophy of history, he argues that the events of history are trending toward human freedom. His analysis of the purpose and direction of history is arguably correct, but it is not the freedom the humanistic philosopher anticipated. It is freedom in Jesus Christ – the Word of God.

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