

# History from a Christian Perspective?

It was August of 1776. General George Washington and his small army were set to defend New York City against British General Howe and his 32,000 men. Washington's army had already suffered heavy losses. They must retreat or be destroyed. The only way of escape was across the East River. That night there was a storm that prevented General Howe from sending his ships up the river to cut off the escape. But how could General Washington get his men safely across the stormy waters? Among the reinforcements that had arrived the day before was a regiment of Massachusetts fishermen who were expert seamen! The retreat took place overnight, aided by a dense early morning fog that hid the last of the boats. No one saw it except one pro-British family. They tried to report it, but the British outpost was manned by a German soldier who couldn't understand English! Were all these amazing factors mere coincidence? No! They were acts of **providence!** God's works of providence have been defined as "that continued exercise of the Divine energy, whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end" (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*).

If our eyes are open, we can see the providence of God at work as we read the historical accounts in the Scriptures. For example, in Esther 6:1-3, King Ahasuerus could not sleep, so he had the "book of the records of the chronicles" read to him. He was hoping that the reading of government records would put him to sleep. Instead, he heard the story of how Mordecai the Jew had saved his life! The next day he took steps immediately to reward Mordecai, and this became the turning point in a destructive plot by Haman to destroy the Jews. Another example is found in Acts 16 where we read of Lydia, a seller of purple dye from Thyatira, "whom providence had brought there [Philippi] in the course of her business on purpose that she might be saved" (C.H. Spurgeon). The Lord led Paul down to the riverside where Lydia and other women were gathered for prayer. When Paul preached Christ to them, "the Lord opened" Lydia's heart (v.14) to receive the gospel.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1, Solomon shows us how God's providence is at work in our individual lives: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Solomon goes on to give us in verses 2-8 a random selection of events that represent the whole of our lives beginning with "a time to be born, and a time to die." In all there are 14 pairs of opposites. These "times" or events in our lives are ordained by God Himself and are not under our control. These times are **His** times, for verse 11 states that God has "made every thing beautiful in **His** time." It is evident from Lydia's salvation that even the time of our mourning over sin and turning to Christ is one of **His** times in our lives!

Just as our sovereign God chose our time to be born and our time to die, He has ordained all the "times" in our lives **that we may "be exercised" in them** (Eccl. 3:10). "There is no such thing as 'chance,' 'luck,' or 'accident' in the Christian journey" (J.C. Ryle). Our times of planting, sowing, laughter, sorrow, mourning, and financial prosperity or loss are under His control. If we look to Him during these times, we will eventually truly see that He has made everything **beautiful in His time**. This is the same truth taught by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things **work together for good** to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Because we know that God is providentially controlling the events of our lives and that His hand of providence is guided by His heart of love, we are able to do as instructed in Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God."

It is our desire that the Lord may enable teacher, parent, and student alike to behold the providence of God as they study our state history and US history textbooks. **It is as we see God's providence at work in history that we begin to be conscious of His care for us through His providential ordering of events in our own lives.** Even seeming disasters are works of providence! For example, in Enterprise, Alabama, in 1918 a boll weevil plague destroyed the city's cotton crop. The city was forced to try new crops such as peanuts, and the new crops brought abundant prosperity! The city was so appreciative that they made a monument in honor of the boll weevil! But it was the providence of God that brought the boll weevil to Enterprise for their good! They were "exercised" by it to try new crops that prospered. May we also learn to be exercised by the trials of providence so that we may say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71). Hebrews 1:3 tells us that it is the Lord Jesus Who sustains and controls all things (**providence**) and that He does this "by the word of His power." Let us remember the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:14: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after Him." To "find nothing after Him" means that nothing matters to us except the Lord Himself. It means that we are brought to the end of ourselves, we repent of our sin, and we turn away from our self-will and the world. To "find nothing after Him" means that we bow before Christ as our Lord and Saviour (Romans 10:9, 13) and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Dear Reader, if you have not yet humbled yourself before Jesus Christ, the God of Providence, I entreat you to call upon Him today, for He said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

--Rev. Steve Dean

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Additional note about a "Christian perspective": Our materials provide an accurate historical account with an emphasis on events and historical figures that are examples of patriotism, character, and Biblical truth. You will not have to be on guard for overtones of evolution, humanism, socialism, or atheism!

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