

SEEING HISTORY WITH NEW EYES

A Guide to Presenting Providential History

Phillip G. Kayser

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Contents:

The Importance of Providential History..... 1

The Presuppositions of Providential History..... 4

1. Everyone has presuppositions when they write history..... 4
2. This means that history is not neutral. 5
3. God sovereignly controls every detail of history. 6
4. Every historical event has purpose and meaning. 7
5. All of history is driven by eschatology. 7
6. History is relevant to our struggles, hopes and aspirations..... 8
7. History is covenantal and illustrates God’s blessings and
 cursings. 9
8. The faith that a nation adopts determines the course of its
 history..... 10
9. Scripture helps to define God’s purposes in history. 12
10. Scripture gives us principles by which we can critique events
 in history. 12

Some Ideas for Developing Providential History..... 14

***A Further Checklist of Things That Can Make Your
 History “Providential”..... 16***

Where do I go from here?..... 19

The Importance of Providential History

Writing providential history is hard because it takes much more than a mere recitation of dates and events. Providential history is an attempt to interpret history within a Biblical Worldview and show the meaning and purpose of historical events. This is what made older Christian histories so exciting to read. You saw God's hand directing the flow of history in exciting ways. Unfortunately, in our era, "[h]istorians seem determined to tell the story of the world without recourse to 'the God hypothesis.'"¹ But to do so is to misinterpret history. As Cornelius van Til said, since God in Christ created and sustains all things (Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3), and since all things work together for His glory (Rom. 11:36), it would be "impossible to interpret any fact without a basic falsification unless it be regarded in its relation to God the Creator and to Christ the Redeemer."²

But modern evangelical historians have largely abandoned this older Christian approach to writing history. In part it may be an attempt to be academically respectable in the eyes of the world.³ In part it may be skepticism that we can understand God's purpose apart from divine inspiration.⁴ In part it may be because most evangelical historians (at least those who attend the

¹ Tim Stafford, "Whatever Happened to Christian History," in *Christianity Today*, April 2, 2001, vol. 45, No. 5, p. 42.

² Van Til, *Christian Theistic Evidence*, p. iii.

³ One historian said, "Certainly, I couldn't hope to present events or developments as the workings of God in history, causally linked to the will of God, and hope to get a hearing." Another historian said, "The nub of the issue is, how do you talk about God in history in a public university? Does that kind of language have any credibility? If language is likely to repel, or to bemuse, there's no point raising it."

⁴ Peter Wallace sums up this sentiment when he says, "But history which claims to know what God was doing is mere insolence and hubris." Another historian said, "The prophets are constantly saying from Abraham through to Jesus, 'This is what God is doing in your midst. Why are you so blind? Why can't you see?' Even within that which is revealed history, sacred history, salvation history, even there you need men and women of God, inspired by the Spirit, to point out to people what is happening. It's not assumed that anyone can go and study history and just read it off. From that, one might well say, 'if history is so difficult within Israel, what hope have you outside?'"

Conference on Faith and History) do not believe that there really is (or should be) a distinctively Christian approach to historiography.⁵ In part it may be an overreaction to the way some historians have imposed a meaning on history (such as the revisionist histories put out by Marxists, Feminists, homosexuals, etc) in order to promote their agenda or cause.⁶

For whatever reason, most modern evangelical historians have sadly abandoned Providential History and have opted for a so-called “neutral approach” to writing history. But it may be asked, “If Christian historians write history like everyone else, what is their value?”⁷ We must not be like pagans who, “although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God” (Rom. 1:21). The Christian’s passion must be that of 1 Corinthians 10:30 – “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Steve Wilkins laments the woeful inadequacies of secular history books. He says,

Vital facts are omitted. Unbelievers are lionized and given a prominence they never enjoyed. Clearly Christian influences are ignored or openly discounted. In many cases, it is not that the facts are unknown, rather, the historian simply views them either as insignificant or, as antagonistic to his own particular

⁵ After interviewing many historians at one such conference, Tim Stafford concluded, “Despite the conference’s robust numerical growth, the persistent question of what exactly evangelical historians do that is different from non-Christian or non-evangelical historians remains unanswered.” (In “Whatever Happened to Christian History,” in *Christianity Today*, April 2, 2001, vol. 45, No. 5, p. 42.) He went on to say, “The word integration is supposed to describe the process that professors at Christian schools follow, bringing their faith and their learning together into a coherent whole... In history there is little evidence that this has amounted to much. Ronald Wells told me of several well-known historians who have challenged the possibility of writing Christian history by saying, essentially, ‘Show me the books... I see a lot of assertions, but I don’t see much material. If you mean Marsden, if you mean Hatch, if you mean Noll, well sure, I know those guys; they’re wonderful scholars, but there isn’t anything uniquely or particularly Christian about them.’”

⁶ This was particularly noxious with the Marxist and National Socialist attempts to rewrite history. Some, like Sinngebung, believed it was the function of the historian to impose meaning on history. Christians should make every effort to avoid such abuses.

⁷ Tim Stafford, “Whatever Happened to Christian History,” in *Christianity Today*, April 2, 2001, vol. 45, No. 5, p. 42.

viewpoint. The facts don't fit with his view of the nation's past (or his agenda for the nation's future).

As a result, modern history books are filled with terrible distortions and inexcusable omissions. The facts, in many cases, do not fit the carefully orchestrated fiction that has become the history of this nation. Thus, they must either be ignored or twisted. Our history has been rewritten.

The children of this nation are being made into revolutionaries by the history books they are reading. We cannot continue to allow theological Canaanites to teach us our past. For the last two generations in this country we have been told that Christianity is irrelevant and that Christians are dangerous. We have been told that our faith is good for comforting us emotionally and soothing us psychologically but it is of no use in tackling real problems in the "real world." And we have believed it.

We have believed these lies because we have not been told the truth about the wondrous works our God did for our fathers. We have, as a consequence, become practical deists -- believing that God is practically irrelevant to solving any problem outside of our souls.⁸

May this booklet not only serve as a guide for giving presentations at the Providential History Festival, but may it also promote a renewed interest in reading Providential History. We believe that reviving Providential History is critical to the Church's future.

⁸ Handout by Steve Wilkins, nd.

The Presuppositions of Providential History

1. Everyone has presuppositions⁹ when they write history.

People criticize presenters of Providential History for bringing Biblical presuppositions into the study of history. But the only alternative is to bring in humanistic presuppositions. It is impossible to write history without presuppositions. For that matter, it is impossible to think about any subject without presuppositions. Another way of saying this is that history cannot stand alone. It is part of a worldview. And a worldview is a web of assumptions by which we interpret reality. The source of those axioms/assumptions reveals the ultimate authority for that system of thought.

The starting point for Christianity must not be the assertions of *man* but must be the assertions of *God*. The Bible does not say, "Your Word is true" (as if we can judge the truthfulness of God

⁹ The New Testament word for "presuppositions" is *στοιχεῖα* (*stoicheia*). This word was used in classical Greek and by the Church fathers to mean the elementary or fundamental principles. In Geometry it was used for axioms, and in philosophy for elements of proof or the *πρωτοι συλλογισμοῖ* of general reasoning (Liddel and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.). Obviously both of these definitions are synonyms with "presuppositions." The New Testament teaches that the *στοιχεῖα* are the "foundation" upon which our faith and practice rests (Heb. 5:12-6:3). We find our *στοιχεῖα* in the Word of God (Heb. 5:12) and most specifically in the person of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:8-10; Heb. 6:1) revealed in them. The *στοιχεῖα* of the world are the foundation of the non-Christian "philosophy" (Col. 2:8) and are diametrically opposed to the *στοιχεῖα* of Christ the God-Man (Col 2:8-10). Our thoughts and actions are a logical outworking of these *στοιχεῖα* in everyday life (Col. 2:20ff). We must recognize that the superstructure of our world-and-life view is antithetical to the superstructure of the heathen's world-and-life view, not because the superstructures do not have any things in common, but because of the way in which these superstructures are completely committed to their foundation or presuppositions. Paul gives us an example of this concept when he vigorously opposed the Galatians succumbing to pressure to be circumcised and observe "days and months and times and years" (Gal. 4:10). Though the physical act of circumcision was not wrong (cf. 1 Cor. 7:19; Acts 16:3), the idea that lay behind it was destructive and led to syncretism, a denial of their presuppositions and an unintentional reversion to weak and pathetic presuppositions (Gal. 4:9).

by some man-made criteria), but “Your Word is *truth*” (John 17:17; Psalm 119:160), which means that all truth claims must be judged by the Word of God. It is *the* standard for truth.¹⁰ Jesus also called the Bible “the key of knowledge” (Luke. 11:52). Without this key of knowledge we fail to see the true significance of events. As R. J. Rushdoony said, “Men cannot give a meaning to history that they themselves lack, nor can they honor a past which indicts them for their present failures.”¹¹

2. This means that history is not neutral.

To think that believers and unbelievers will approach history in a neutral fashion ignores two theological truths. First, it ignores the doctrine of total depravity which teaches that humans suppress the truth of God as seen in creation (Rom. 1:18-25,28). Scripture is quite clear that man’s mind is not neutral, for “the carnal mind is hostile to God” (Rom. 8:7) and is blinded (2 Cor. 4:4). It considers the things of God to be foolishness and will not receive them (1 Cor. 2:14). The natural man is influenced by a “heart [that] is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). The unbeliever fights the truth in many ways: he may deny it (Gen. 3:4; John 5:38; Acts 19:9), ignore it (2 Pet. 3:5), psychologically repress it (Rom. 1:18,28; 2:3), acknowledge the truth with the lips but deny it by conduct (Matt. 23:2ff), put the truth into a misleading context (Gen. 3:5,12,13; Matt. 4:6) or use the truth to oppose God (Rom. 1:32). Even

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem comments on this saying,

The difference is significant, for this statement encourages us to think of the bible not simply as being “true” in the sense that it conforms to some higher standard of truth, but rather to think of the Bible as being itself the final standard of truth. The Bible is God’s Word, and God’s Word is the ultimate definition of what is true and what is not true: God’s Word is itself truth. Thus we are to think of the Bible as the ultimate standard of truth, the reference point by which every other claim to truthfulness is to be measured. Those assertions that conform with Scripture are ‘true’ while those that do not conform with Scripture are not true. What then is truth? Truth is what God says.”

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 83.

¹¹ R. J. Rushdoony, *Biblical Philosophy of History*, (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House, 1974), p.135

those who seek to be as objective as possible cannot avoid the influence of their depraved hearts.

Second, The Bible says that believers may not be neutral (Matt 12:30). Instead, they must give Christ the “preeminence in all things” (Col. 1:18). If “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ” (Col. 2:3), then every academic pursuit must be related to Christ. We are either reasoning independently of God or we are reasoning dependently. Henry Van Til stated, "Any organization that claims to be neutral, as do the public schools and some labor organizations, is by that token denying Christ's claims of absolute lordship over all things."¹² Neutrality should be seen for what it is – exclusion of Jesus and His Word.

3. God sovereignly controls every detail of history.

Scripture is quite clear that God controls every detail of history (Eph. 1:12; Dan. 4:35; Rom. 11:36), including the free actions of men (Prov. 21:1; Ex. 9:12; Gen. 50:20) and the apparently random or chance events of history (Prov. 16:33; 1 Kings 22:34). This presupposition makes us look for the hand of God in all of history. We see the amazing way in which God used technological inventions (such as the plow and the printing press), disease (such as the Black Plague), economic movements (such as the Reformation’s Free Market ideas) to advance His cause. Though we may not immediately recognize God’s hand in every detail, we should be confident that God’s control goes to the tiniest details of history.¹³ Though it is possible to

¹² H. Van Til. *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., 1959), p. 209.

¹³ A fun example can be seen in the following story narrated by Paul Lee Tan: “King Henry VIII of England sent a delegation to the Vatican to patch up the political differences between himself and the Pope. The delegation was led by the Earl of Wiltshire [Anne Boleyn’s father], who took along his dog [whose name was Urian]. As was customary at that time, the Earl prostrated himself before the Pope and was about to kiss the Pope's toe. The pope, willing to receive the homage thrust his foot toward the Earl, and his dog, watching, misunderstood the action and went to the defense of his master. Instead of a kiss, the Pope got a bite on the toe! This enraged the Swiss guard and they killed the dog. And this so angered the Earl that he refused to proceed with the

misinterpret God's providence, that fact should not make us deliberately ignore God's hand in history. We are grossly misinterpreting history if we do not credit God with the flow of historical events. We are misinterpreting history if we do not acknowledge that all the conspiracies of men and of Satan cannot thwart His purposes (Psalm 2). Instead, we must have confidence that "The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples to no effect" (Psalm 33). History is not governed by fate, Satan or evil men, but by the Lord God Almighty who predestines "whatsoever comes to pass" and "does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Daniel 4:34,35). History is His Story.

4. Every historical event has purpose and meaning.

Absolutely everything in history has a divine "purpose" (Eph. 1:11; Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:28), including the rebellious actions of nations (Rev. 17:15-18; Ex. 9:16). History is not simply the study of *man's* thoughts, dreams, actions and reactions, but it is also the study of *God's* sovereign purposes in governing such thoughts, dreams, actions and reactions. A Christian should not see history as meaningless or write history as if it is simply a random, unconnected series of events. Our writing should seek to understand God's purposes to the degree that we are able. Other Scriptural commands, promises, and theological truths can help us to do so.

5. All of history is driven by eschatology.

Unless we understand the goal of history, we do not understand history fully. Everything is moving toward a final goal. This rules out a circular view of history and opts for a linear view. But it also affects our view of meaning, order, historical relationships and many other features in the

mission for which he had been sent - and he returned home without having accomplished anything. After his return to England, King Henry VIII took steps to separate England from the jurisdiction of Rome." [Tan # 121, from *Christian Victory*]

philosophy of history. 1 Corinthians 15 says that the goal of history is the subduing of all things under Christ's feet. Ephesians says that God's goal is that "He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him" (Eph. 1:10). Most Christian historians are utterly pessimistic in their view of history because their eschatology is pessimistic. They fail to see the incredibly awesome progress of history towards God's final goal. Eschatology is critically important. Everything from the beginning of the world to the present has been crafted by God to move towards His final goal. Wilkins says, "Every day, we see a little more of how God is filling the earth with the knowledge of the Lord "as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). All history is the record of the success and victory of the sovereign purpose of God."

6. History is relevant to our struggles, hopes and aspirations.

History is very relevant to our lives. This is certainly true of Biblical history: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). But it is also true of all well written history. This is why Scripture called people to learn from non-canonical histories (2 Chron. 20:34).¹⁴ Parents are supposed to pass on to their descendants a Providential history of His dealings in their lives (Psalm 78:1-4) and make sure that future generations do "not forget the works of God" (Psalm 78:7). Scripture calls us to learn from judgments in the immediate past (Deut. 13:11; 17:13; etc). History provides us with examples that can inspire zeal and boldness or produce

¹⁴ For several more examples, see the admonitions to readers to do extra study in non-canonical histories such as the Book of The Wars of Jehovah (Numb. 21:14), the Book of Jashar (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18), another Book of Samuel on the Kingdom (1 Sam. 10:25), the Book of the Chronicles of David (1 Chron. 27:24), the Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), the book of Solomon's Natural History (1 Kings 4:32,33), the Book of Jehu the Son of Hanani (2 Chron. 20:34) and an extrabiblical (but reliable) history of the Kings (1 Kings 14:19,25; Chron. 20:34; 33:18). See also the ancient records of 1 Chronicles 4:22 and even the referral to chronicles from Persia (Esther 10:2).

fear and wonder. Scripture assumes that properly written history will always be relevant. As Deuteronomy 32:7 says,

Remember the days of old,
 Consider the years of many generations.
 Ask your father, and he will show you;
 Your elders, and they will tell you.

7. History is covenantal and illustrates God's blessings and cursings.

God promises that He will honor those who honor Him and will dishonor those who dishonor Him (1 Sam. 2:30). This principle applies in all times and to all peoples so that "righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). All mankind is in personal covenant (albeit a broken covenant) with Adam, and all nations are in corporate covenant through Noah.

But if all of history is covenantal, it means that the five essential components of a covenant should be detectable in history. Ralph Alan Smith describes these five covenantal elements this way:

There are five basic questions that the philosophy of history must answer: 1) Who is in ultimate control over history? 2) Who are His representatives in history? 3) What are the laws by which He rules the world? 4) What sanctions does He administer in history to those who keep or disobey His laws? 5) To what end is He leading history? These five questions follow the five-point covenant outline developed by Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper* (Fort Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). They can be stated in different words and from slightly different perspectives, but the basic issues are the same.¹⁵

It is impossible for nations to escape the sanctions of the covenant. Even pagan nations that honor God's laws will to that degree be honored (Jer. 18:7-8; see Jonah 3:5-9), while nations that disregard God's laws will suffer (Jer. 18:9-10; see Jonah 1:1-2). Many disasters and blessings in history make a great deal of sense when studied from the perspective of the covenant.

¹⁵ Rev. Ralph Alan Smith, "the Conflict of History," in *The Covenantal Kingdom*, an unpublished essay.

Even though Japan was still a pagan nation after World War II, when it adopted Biblical economic principles from the West, it began to prosper. When it later copied non-Biblical western economic principles, it began to suffer the same economic cycles as the West. God's covenant principles cannot be ignored.

8. The faith that a nation adopts determines the course of its history.

Steve Wilkins writes,

The most influential factor in understanding a nation's history is its faith. What is the prevailing belief about God, man, truth, and duty? All men are theologians. They may be heretical theologians, but they are theologians nonetheless. Everyone has a view of God and man, of truth and duty. Nations, therefore, have predominant theologies which determine their economics, politics, commerce, ethics, traditions, laws, and all else.¹⁶

A simple study of the difference between polytheistic countries and monotheistic countries will show profound ramifications in personal and social relationships. For example, Polytheism destroys any vision for science because there is no one God who gives laws of physics, laws of morality or any other laws, such as laws of logic. Instead, you have many gods who compete with each other, but are themselves subject to the limitations of matter, chance and their own limited powers. Stanley White says, "Some have pondered why the ancients never created a formal science. The answer lies in the fact that polytheism is not compatible with science. The ancients, such as Aristotle viewed the world as a series of unrelated events. They did not see an overall pattern in nature or the universe."¹⁷ They could not see a pattern, because for them there was no one God from whom all things came into existence.

Furthermore, in polytheism the gods are vying with each other for your affection and attention. That immediately means that there are no absolutes for morality in such a polytheistic culture. A person would have to ask, "Which god's morality do I

¹⁶ Handout by Steve Wilkins, nd.

¹⁷ In Stanley White, *The Meaning of Science*, vol. 2.

follow?” Such a culture tends toward pluralism where this is right for you and something opposite is right for me. Pluralism is gaining momentum in America because America is fast becoming a polytheistic nation (where all gods are equally honored).

Polytheism also affects your view of history. Since polytheism does not believe that one God predestinates the future or controls history, polytheists are skeptical that history can have any meaning.

There are many other implications of one's faith. Because Christians see unity and diversity within the Trinity as being equally important, there is a corresponding tendency to see balance of unity and diversity in culture. Unitarian countries like Saudi Arabia have tended to err strongly in the direction of imposing unity, and polytheistic cultures have tended to err in the direction of imposing diversity. In contrast, the most free countries in the world have been Protestant Christian. Christian nations have historically been the least racist, the least class conscious and the most prosperous. Both polytheism and monotheism tend toward tyrannically controlling governments. As one columnist worded it,

[Unitarian religion]... leads to a desire to control both public behavior and private thoughts while polytheism, when resorting to violence, seeks control over the public sphere only.¹⁸

Another author says,

Whereas in polytheism the rivalry between the gods makes the ascendancy of one god impossible, monotheism leads to an inescapable logic of universal power. While polytheism resists the idea of unifying truth thereby producing social fragmentation, monotheism will tend to totalitarianism unless it is modified as it is in the Judeo/Christian tradition.¹⁹

For some fascinating discussions of the impact of the Christian Creeds upon the West, read

¹⁸ Tom Harpur, “Monotheism’s Bloody History,” in *Toronto Star*, January 29, 2005.

¹⁹ Comments on Islamic Terrorism by Peter Selick, on April 6, 2004.

- **R. J. Rushdoony**, *The Foundation of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church*
- **Douglas Kelly**, *The Emergence of Liberty In the Modern World: The Influence of Calvin on the Five Governments from the 16th through 18th Centuries*
- **Phillip Kayser**, *The Doctrine of the Trinity and It's Practical Implications for Life*

9. Scripture helps to define God's purposes in history.

Scripture affirms that everything in history is intended for God's glory (Rom. 11:36), the advancement of Christ's kingdom (Eph. 1:10) and the good of His church (Rom. 8:28; 9:17; Eph. 3:9-11). These grand themes help us to see broader purposes in history. For example, God prepared the way for the rapid spread of the New Testament throughout the whole world when the whole world had to learn Greek under Alexander the Great and later generals. God paved the way for the rapid spread of missions when he caused tyrannical Rome to stop bandits, put an end to sea pirates, make sea travel safe, and make quality highways and roads all over the empire. Providential historians have analyzed these and many other themes to weave the story of how all the events leading up to Christ's birth were indeed "the fullness of the time" (Gal. 4:4).

10. Scripture gives us principles by which we can critique events in history.

One of the purposes of Providential History is to judge historical events by the standard of the Bible. God's Word is the only infallible interpreter of reality, and the principles of Scripture are "the key of knowledge" (Luke. 11:52). If we are to discover truth, it must be measured against the standard of truth, the Bible (John 17:17). Thus, we shouldn't analyze the Aztecs dispassionately, but should critique their bloodthirsty culture with a Biblical standard. Far from being a "highly advanced civilization," the Scripture would see it as a demonic culture. Certainly, as men and women created in the image of God, they had achieved some technological feats, but there was good reason why all the natives sided with Cortez against their

oppressors. We shouldn't consider ancient Egyptian medical practices as simply "primitive." Scripture ascribes moral and religious overtones to the medical issues that plagued that land (Ex. 15:26; Deut. 7:15; 28:60).

When studying the history of economics, the history of business, or the history of human thought it is necessary to interact with the flow of these events through Biblical eyes. Why have Calvinistic countries been the most free market? Why has every Roman Catholic country gravitated toward centralism in civics and socialism in economic practice? The ideas of these different theologies have consequences in social theory. When writing history, Christians must learn to interact with all events within the worldview of the Bible. This way, we can learn godly lessons from even pagan history.

Some Ideas for Developing Providential History

When all of the presuppositions we have listed are taken into account, it becomes clear that there are many different ways of writing Providential History. For example, if one wanted to write about Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek tyrant who lived from 215-164 BC, one could do any of the following and still make it a providential history.

- How God used a tyrant to revive Israel.
- Antiochus, God's instrument of judgment.
- Antiochus, the bitter fruits of Greek rebellion against God.
- Antiochus: the relationship between his false religion and his political theory and/or economics, art, sexual practices, family, technology, science, etc.
- How God restrained a petty tyrant with humanistic checks and balances.
- Antiochus and the spread of Judaism throughout the world.
- Greek disintegration and the growth of Rome – its significance.
- The impact of Antiochus on the New Testament Judaism.
- The impact of persecution on Judaism.

One could write a providential history of BC China, even though it was not directly connected with Biblical history. The principles of God's Word apply to all of life. Some examples:

- Evidences of Noah, the Tower of Babel and the dispersion in China.
- Taoism and economics: a Biblical critique.
- Why China never produced the liberties of the West.
- Chinese religion and the laws of harvest.
- 4000 years of covenant judgment in China.
- God's providential preparation of China for the Gospel.
- The Consequences of Buddhism in Chinese culture.
- Confucianism: form of godliness but denying the power thereof.
- Idolatry and bondage.
- The Chinese view of history versus the Biblical view.
- Fitting Chinese history into Biblical history: problems and solutions.
- Limited sovereignty and the problem of nationalism.

If you re-examine the presuppositions listed above, you will see numerous ideas for writing Providential History. It can cover the history of ideas, technology, religions, business, political ideology and many other ideas, but always from a Biblical perspective and with a confidence in God's control and direction.

A study of the history of wars could analyze not only the causes and outcomes of wars (and what we can learn from that), but could also critique wars within the framework of a just war philosophy. The history could also show how God used wars to advance His overall purposes in history. It could show the impact of religion on war strategies, handling of prisoners, etc.

Notice a common thread to these ideas: history properly treated is about analysis of causes, or effects, or ramifications, or purposes according to Biblical presuppositions; not simply the recounting of events or, worse yet, analysis according to non-biblical presuppositions.

Also, any single work on Providential history does not have to cover all aspects of historical analysis. Pick one or two rather than trying to cover it all.

A Further Checklist of Things That Can Make Your History “Providential”

- ✓ Have you shown how the ideologies of the time impacted this piece of history?²⁰ Keep in mind that “ideas have consequences.”²¹ Examples:
 - The impact of Calvinistic theology on the formation of the American system. Total Depravity led to distrust of human nature, which led to a distrust of both democracy and dictatorship. God’s sovereignty led to the formulation of limited sovereignty that was delegated, enumerated and specified. Etc.
 - How Christianity resolves the tension of the one and the many through the doctrine of the Trinity and imbalances result from other theologies. This impacts answers to questions of centralization versus decentralization, individual versus group, private goods versus public interests, etc.
 - Why polytheism can never produce a university, can never sustain rigorous scientific questioning and can never justify a universal ethic.
- ✓ Have you self-consciously sought to implement the presuppositions listed in this booklet?
- ✓ Have you shown how this piece of history has purpose and direction and fits into the overall flow of history?²²

²⁰ Greg Singer said, "It is impossible to understand completely the history of a nation apart from the philosophies and ideologies which lie at the heart of its intellectual life." C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, revised ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1981 [1964]), p. 1.

²¹ An expression coined by Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948).

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- ✓ Does your presentation demonstrate the personal hand of God, or is it an impersonal narration of natural causes and effects?²³
 - ✓ Does your presentation connect in some way with God's history of redemption and provision for sin?
 - ✓ Does your analysis of pagan history show the bitter fruits of independence, double-mindedness, suppression of the truth, idolatry, etc?
 - ✓ Does your analysis of pagan history show how they could not survive for very long without operating on borrowed capital? Do you show how even the borrowed capital is distorted and leads to bitter fruit?
 - Sovereignty is an inescapable thought, but when men substitute the sovereignty of man, Nature or the State for that of God, it leads to tyranny.
 - Infallibility is an inescapable thought, but when men deny the infallibility of Scripture, some man or institution begins to be treated as infallible. Mazzini (mid-19th century Italian revolutionary) believed in the infallibility of the people: "We believe in the infallibility of the people...[but] we put no trust in men... The mass can never err." Others believed in the "divine right of kings." Others believed in the

²² Steven Alan Samson said, "For the Christian and Jews, by contrast, history cannot be understood apart from God's self-disclosure as its author. History is a record of God's dealings with man and the rest of creation. Thus, having an author, history also has a direction and purpose." Later he said, "What distinguishes the linear from the cyclical view is that history manifests a *teleology*. Everything moves according to a divine plan toward a final goal or purpose (*telos*)." Dr. Steven Alan Samson, "Models of Historical Interpretation," at <http://www.americanreformation.org/Philosophy/Polity/SamsonHistoricalInterpretations.htm>

²³ "As the Creator, God has established the flow of time and reveals Himself irreversibly and infallibly in historical time. Consequently, time is not an impersonal, natural process. It is the result of God's creative act. The idea of a self-sustaining and self-regulating Nature is pagan, not Christian."

infallibility of an elite. Some today believe in the infallibility of science.

- Salvation is an inescapable concept. But if God's salvation is rejected (or not known), men will opt for salvation by science, by state intervention or by some other means. Recognizing this in history opens up our ability to interpret it in ways that are meaningful to the present.
 - Law is inescapable, but when man is the maker of law, liberties are eroded.
 - Many of the foundations for Biblical culture are borrowed (and then distorted) in pagan cultures: family, government, justice, covenant, community, individual initiative, etc.
 - Etc. Understanding inescapable concepts helps us to analyze strange movements in history.
- ✓ Have you used Biblical criteria to judge a historical event? Is it explicit so that the reader can learn how to critique life Biblically? (It may be helpful to explicitly state your criteria and then proceed with your analysis based on that criteria, that way the reader can apply those criteria to future situations they encounter.)
 - ✓ Have you given lessons that can be learned from this historical event?
 - ✓ Have you clearly shown your viewers a glimpse of the sovereignty of God in history (whether pagan or Christian history) or shown the bitter fruits that flow from denying the sovereignty of God?²⁴ People should come away with a sense of awe at God's working.

²⁴ Steven Alan Samson said, "If people deny the sovereignty of God, they are apt to find their answer in the state, the individual self, historical necessity, or

Where do I go from here?

Keep in mind that these are general guidelines to aid you, not legalistic mandates for writing history. It would be rare to find every point in this checklist fulfilled in one presentation of history. Some subjects of history lend themselves to highlighting certain principles more than others. Some presentations will need to be so brief that it will be impossible to meet most of the points in this checklist. However, if you meet one or more of them, it is likely that you are well on your way to writing Providential history in a way that will be meaningful to others.

We want you to have fun at the Providential History Festival and not get stressed out. Experiment. Watch how others give history presentations. Be prepared to get better from year to year. Don't be afraid of failure. As NBA coach Rick Pitino once said, "Failure is good. It's fertilizer. Everything I've learned about coaching I've learned from making mistakes." We can't improve if we don't step out and try. We at the Providential History Festival want to give you lots of room to experiment. But if you have any questions about your project, feel free to ask lots of questions. Our future goal is for the website to contain resources to help you further grow in this task. Check it out periodically at <http://providentialhistoryfestival.com/>

The best advice that I can give is to read the masters of Providential history like Steve Wilkins, R. J. Rushdoony, Iain Murray, Stephen McDowell, Mark A Beliles, Douglas F. Kelly, Peter Marshall, David Manuel, Gary DeMar, Gary Amos, Diana Waring, Paul Jehle, Doug Phillips, John Eidsmoe, Marshall

impersonal natural forces. The point is that they will vest it somewhere. The question of sovereignty is a foundational issue that embraces all the others. It is prior to the others because it is a question about the nature of reality itself. Once the locus of sovereignty has been established, we may address the other questions, which deal with the relationship of means and ends, truth and consequences, causes and effects. As a reality question, it raises ethical as well as practical issues: Who or what creates that reality or controls the circumstances, establishes the rules or standards, initiates the action of sets the agenda, devises the appropriate procedures, determines the outcome, and judges success or failure? Although sovereignty is a question about ultimate things, it is usefully applied to mundane things..." (Steven Alan Samson, "modes of Historical Interpretation," in *Contra Mundum*, no. 11, Spring, 1994.)

Foster, Joe Morecraft, George Grant, and William Potter. Read older Christian histories. Listen to CD's from conferences on Providential History. But don't get intimidated. Providential History makes history come alive.

In conclusion, let me give Steve Wilkin's exhortation:

When we hear what our God has done in the past, we will once more realize that He is not merely the Lord of the Church or of the individual, but the GOD OF THE WHOLE EARTH AND EVERY AREA OF LIFE.

This is our glorious task in this generation. We must not shirk it. For the glory and honor of God and the future of our culture, let us give ourselves to knowing and telling the great things He has done. To do otherwise is to surrender future generations to the slavery that always follows unholy forgetfulness.²⁵

²⁵ Handout by Steve Wilkins, nd.



This booklet aims to lay the basic groundwork for those who endeavor to present and teach Providential History...

Christians need to have their thinking transformed on all levels and in all areas. This is no less true in our understanding of history than it is in our understanding of theology. When we approach history we should aim to see it as God sees it and thus look for his purposes, his plans, and his glory. Providential History may be a tough story to write, but any other approach is at best a half-truth and at worst a lie.