

## *God will determine History, not Men.*

At least a couple of historians have made a studied effort to point out to their readers that a goal which men had attempted was often quite different than the final outcome. For instance, compare what men intended and attempted in this country in 1766 and what happened in the year 1776! Compare what they intended and attempted in 1851 and what happened in the year 1861!

The answer which these historians correctly gave is that God is in control of events. Men are simply the actors. "In studying history as a whole [we] should... relegate economic and political history to a subordinate place and give religious history the primacy" (Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, page 94). "Each page of history may begin and end with: Great is God, and marvelous are His doings among the children of men....[But] it is when the hour of the conflict is over that history comes to a right understanding of the strife and is ready to exclaim: 'Lo, God is here, and we knew Him not'" (George Bancroft).

Assuredly, the Bible is insistent on this fact. "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). God upholds all things by the Word of his power (Hebrews 1:3). "By God all things consist" (Colossians 1:17). In God we live and move, and have our being (Acts 17:27). "If there would be calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?" (Amos 3:6.)

To be sure, in hindsight, academic historians will write about only those events which had a bearing on significant events in history, that is, which had affected many people, such as, wars or changes in governmental

policies. Family historians will report only on those events that mattered to a given family. In either case, historians will select only certain events, and not others. In fact, they will present matters in such a way as if their chosen events simply had followed one another to the exclusion of all other possible events. Nevertheless, at the time when so many events were going on, the participants could not be certain of not merely the outcome, but of which of these events would finally contribute toward this unknowable outcome. Only God knew what he would do to bring about the end result. Men did not know how God was going to shape the events and which events he would use to bring about the outcome which he had in mind.

*Man's view of the future has been restricted by a divinely-imposed labyrinth.* In a maze, or labyrinth, a person could only see so far ahead of him, and this condition would remain throughout all of the twists and turns of his journey. A man may intend to travel in a straight line, but the maze would determine the direction which the man must take and the location at which he will arrive. Though man would do the walking, he would not be in control, the maze will be. So it will be with historical events. A man may intend to go from point A to point B, yet God will introduce any number of events to alter that plan in order to achieve his own purpose.

For example, the great battle at Gettysburg was never intended to be fought there by either side. A confederate general by the name of Henry Heth simply had sent a small unit into town to get some shoes. Then it became entangled with Union cavalry.

Furthermore, God may bring about the elements of delay, reversal, and surprise. He could introduce an inducement to persuade an actor to change his mind. Unanticipated opposition could arise from a person that could bring about a change in the plans of another. Thus the outcome rarely will be that which men had envisioned and engineered it to be. Indeed, the result commonly will be unforeseen by all, and will occur despite the resistance of the actors. In fact, even the best intentions of men toward a goal often will be weak and temporary, and will be altered by imperfections, ambiguities, selfishness, jealousy, and evil motives. That anything at all ever could get done would be due to God who is in control of all. "In him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17).

Hence when he would carry out his plans among men, God will choose his direct way, though to men it may seem as a labyrinth. God will go from his point A to his point B. Not knowing the mind of God and which mechanics, so to speak, he will put into motion along the way in order to implement his plans, men may be baffled by the twists and turns, by the reversals and the accelerations. If men would only trust in God's promises as he has urged them to do, they could settle back with ease and assurance, and depend on the Lord to carry through his excellent plans on schedule.

God will not only lead men through a labyrinth, humanly speaking, in order to make his events and outcomes to happen, but God, furthermore, will choose the foolish things of this world (in the estimate of men) to accomplish it. He has done this deliberately for the purpose of putting to shame the non-Christians and the

worldly wise (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:27-29), and to get men to trust solely in his promises. When God purposely weds his promises to those things which men by nature dismiss as not viable: the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised things of this world, men know that they will have to rely solely on God's pledges if anything at all would ever get done. Thus the Lord points out that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

If, however, men would have been shown either through a biblical prophecy or through the signs of the times that a future result will happen, they still may ask "How?" That is to say, since currently there may be no intent, no action on anyone's part, nor even a related event which any far-sighted man might connect with the prophesied result; since men currently could not see the result which God is in the middle of accomplishing, it would be due to the fact that currently man cannot see the outcome on the horizon (to use a different metaphor), nor the steps which would lead to it. Nor does anything need to be seen on the horizon before men could be certain of the future result which was foretold by biblical prophecy or by the signs of the times. God will simply urge: "Do not ask 'How?! Trust my promise! I will accomplish it!"

In fact, if a man would ever ask "How? How will you do it?" God will reply: "I will only promise you that I will do it. In my Bible I have stated clearly not how, but why I will do a thing." God will do it in order to call men to repentance during their life on earth, and to bring

them to possess his prepared salvation. God will also punish men after they would refuse to repent and to possess his salvation by an act of faith.

To be sure, the reason why men ask, "How, God?" is because they are hoping to find assurance in the impenetrable mechanics of God's working. God replies, in effect, "Never mind my mechanics! You would never understand them. Besides, if you would be looking for assurance there, you will not find it. That is not where I have placed it. You will find your assurance only in my gospel promises. Look there for it! That is where I have placed it. That is where I have promised that you will find it."

Be satisfied with that! Pray: "Good Shepherd, 'lead me in a smooth path!'" (Psalm 27:11)!

*Biblical lessons to be learned.* The Bible promises that God is in control of the events of nature and of men.

"All things were created through him and for him.... In him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16, 17). God continues "upholding all things by the Word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3); in regards to individuals (Proverbs 16:9), and in regards to whole nations (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 4:24-25). As your Father "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45), at times, in his high wisdom, the Almighty will allow men to carry out evil acts (Acts 12:1-2), at other times he will prevent them (Acts 12:3-10). Having these promises, God urges you: "Call upon me in the day of trouble! I will deliver you" (Psalm 50:15).

*Conclusion:* To have the knowledge of anything in the future, man would have to know it from the sure promises or threats of God and by his dependable

biblical signs of the times. To be sure, there exists the less certain human axiom that history will repeat itself; that is to say, "You could count on sinners to do the sinful thing under the same circumstances." However, as to when history would repeat itself thusly, and to what extent it would do so, such knowledge will remain vague.

You must not complain about God's guidance in your life as the Israelites in the wilderness complained (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:10-12), but should suppress your sinful thoughts by meditating on law and gospel passages, and be patient with, even grateful for, what doors, so to speak, the Lord may open for you in life, and which he would keep closed despite your efforts to open them. You are to do your duty according to the Ten Commandments into whatever position God has placed you. Since God has promised that "all things work together for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28), even the events that would seem bad to your sinful thinking will be transformed by the Lord's wonderful working into something exceptionally good - spiritually good - if not physically good as well. He has promised it.

Trust his pledge!

*President Lincoln's testimonies from experience.* On the problem which Lincoln puts forth: "If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it," Lincoln himself answers: "The pilots on our western rivers steer from point to point, as they call it - setting the course of the boat no farther than they can see. And that is all I

propose to do in the great problems that are set before us.”

“I shall stay right here and do my duty. Here I shall be.... I shall never desert my post.”

“The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.”

“The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party; and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are the best adaptation to effect his purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true; that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere great power on the minds of the new contestants, he could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun, he could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds” (Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln [Pleasantville, New York: The Reader’s Digest

Association, 1970], pages 342A, 454A, 454B, 455A, and 273Bf.).

*Prayer/Hymn*

What our Father does is well:

Blessed truth His children tell!  
Though He send, for plenty, want,  
Though the harvest-store be scant,  
Yet we rest upon His love,  
Seeking better things above.

What our Father does is well.

Shall the willful heart rebel  
If a blessing He withhold  
In the field or in the fold?  
Is He not Himself to be  
All our store eternally?

What our Father does is well.

Though He sadden hill and dell,  
Upward yet our praises rise  
For the strength His Word supplies.  
He has called us sons of God;  
Can we murmur at His rod?

What our Father does is well:

May the thought within us dwell!  
Though nor milk nor honey flow  
In our barren Canaan now,  
God can save us in our need,  
God can bless us, God can feed.

Therefore unto Him we raise  
Hymns of glory, songs of praise.  
To the Father and the Son  
And the Spirit, Three in One,  
Honor, might, and glory be  
Now and through eternity!

Benjamin Schmolck (1672-1737).  
Translated by Henry W. Baker (1821-1877).