

Saturday, May 25, 2013—Great Lakes Grace Bible Conference—The Line, The Wheel, and the Hill: A Scriptural Model for Understanding History

## **Introduction**

- Galatians 1:4—is there anyone here how doubts that world we live in is evil? We see corruption and injustice on all sides. We observe a creative order that groaning under the strain of sin. We see defection from the truth on the part of those who used to stand with us in the truth of God’s Word rightly divided.
- In the recent past Richard (2009, *Welcome to Winter*) has tried to help us understand what is going on around us by talking about the cycles of history and where America is at within our national cycle.
- Even a novice student of history is familiar with George Santayana’s famous quote, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Santayana’s statement encapsulates one of history’s great debates regarding the philosophical nature of time itself. Is time and therefore history cyclical like Hinduism and indigenous religions teach, or linear possessing both a beginning and ending toward which humanity is advancing? A thoughtful reading of Santayana highlights the following paradox; history is both cyclical and linear. Implicit within Santayana’s comment is the notion that if humanity forgets about their past mistakes, their forgetfulness will condemn the species to a cyclic fate of revisiting past mistakes. Conversely, cyclical reoccurrence can be avoid and linear progress continued by acknowledging past mistakes thereby allowing mankind to avoid the same missteps in the present as well as future.
- Are time and history cyclical or linear? Or are both true? If so how? What do the Scriptures teach about these issues? Herein lies the goal of this study, I want to present a complete Biblical paradigm for understanding history and try to explain how it helps us understand what is going in this present evil world. It is only when you combine these concepts that a complete model Scriptural model comes into focus.

## **The Line**

- Genesis 1:1—time and by extension history have a point of origin in the creative activities of almighty God. There was a big bang. There was nothing, God spoke and Bang there was something. God brought time and matter into existence out of nothing.
- Revelation 21:1—the earth as we know it will come to an end. Connecting these two points establishes a line with both a beginning and a predetermined ending.
- When we speak about how God has worked in the past (time past), how God is working in the present (but now), and how God will work in the future (ages to come), we are utilizing a strictly linear view of history.

- Ephesians 2:11-12—Time Past
  - Ephesians 2:13—But Now
  - Ephesians 2:7—Ages to Come
- Ephesians 1:10—time originated in Genesis 1 and is advancing forward in linear fashion toward a prophesied end, the establishment of the new heavens and new earth. When the Dispensation of the Fullness of Time arrives the purpose for which God created time will have been fulfilled.
  - One could argue that mid-Acts dispensationalists are the most linear thinkers around.

### **The Wheel**

- Virtually all gentile societies have viewed time as cyclical in nature. Regardless of their geographic location or despite their lack of contact with each other, pagan cultures all possessed a circular view of life linked to the seasonality observable in nature. Pagan holidays and festivals coincided with seasonal occurrences such as the winter and summer solstices as well as the spring and autumnal equinoxes'. After the so-called conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 312 A.D., the Roman Catholic Church slowly began the process of trying to Christianize pagan holidays. As a result, the Church positioned Christmas, Easter, and All Saints Day or All Hollows Eve to coincide with pagan festivals that celebrated the seasonal changes of nature.
- Where did the gentiles obtain this seasonal celestial view of the universe?
- The notion that early men were primitive (e.g., cave men) is an evolutionary supposition that Bible believers should reject. Adam, the first man, was not a half man/half animal creature as evolutionary pseudoscience teaches. Rather, Adam was created in the image of God as a fully functioning adult male possessing superior physical, mental, spiritual, and emotion faculties as you or I. Moreover, Adam was placed into a mature, fully functioning, and perfectly created environment.
- Genesis 1:14-19—before God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, He created the planetary bodies of the universe. Note a few significant details.
  - First, the alignment and position of the planetary bodies serve the purpose of providing light upon the earth.
  - Second, the relationship between the earth and the celestial bodies of the firmament would not only account for the differences between day and night but would also serve as a mechanism for rendering seasons as well as for counting days, weeks, and years.
  - Third, the dividing of day and night, seasonal differences, and the counting of days and years were designed in verse 14 to serve as signs to the inhabitants of the earth. According to Strong's Concordance, the Hebrew word translated "signs" in the King James Bible means "a signal, a distinguishing mark, banner, remembrance, miraculous sign, omen, or warning."
  - Therefore, Adam was placed in an environment in which the planetary bodies served as signs of God's existence and handiwork.

- Genesis further reports of humanity's fall into sin, which not only wreaked havoc on God's pristine creation but also clouded and distorted man's willingness to see God's handwork in the natural world.
- Romans 1:19-23—the Apostle Paul reports how mankind's fall into sin distorted his willingness to see the witness God placed within creation. The following points about post-fall man are clearly observable from this passage.
  - First, mankind clearly knew who God was through his creation.
  - Second, based on the testimony of creation alone, mankind is without excuse for not desiring to retain God in his knowledge.
  - Third, the ultimate result of not glorifying God as God, lack of thankfulness, and vain imaginations is the changing of the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man. In short, mankind took the witness of God through creation and perverted it in an attempt to escape accountability. The end result was that humanity changed the truth of God into a lie for which “God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.”
- Therefore, from the very beginning mankind was aware of the seasonal nature of God's creation. After the fall, the sons of Adam, in an attempt to remove God from their knowledge, took the signs and seasonal markers God established when he created the planetary bodies and hijacked them as part of their religious systems. Herein lays the explanation for why virtually all pagan societies in the ancient world viewed time as cyclical. They were simply following the course of this world, a perversion of the knowledge of God authored by Satan and his lie program.
- Acts 14:16-17--when God allowed the gentile nations to follow after their own foolishness, he did not reorganize or restructure the physical mechanisms of his creation. Rather, God still uses the seasonality of his creation as a testimony to the nations of his existence.
- Genesis 8:22--notice that God left the signs of seasonality in place to serve as a witness to the gentiles of his existence despite their perversion of it. Sin has not disrupted the seasonal patterns of creation but has instead distorted mankind's understanding of them.
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8--while linearism remains the predominant model for understanding history, we must also recognize that God is also the author of cyclical seasonality. Consequently, to arrive at a complete paradigm of history, we must embrace the reality that as time moves forward linearly towards its prophesied end, cycles are also occurring.
- In secular terms we can observe this cyclicity in the following ways:
  - The business cycle in economics: peak, contraction, trough, expansion.
  - The rise and fall of nations throughout world history. A well-rooted and established culture seeks to take advantage of its surrounding less sophisticated neighbors. Perhaps peaceably at first, often followed by military conquest, one society emerges and expands their power base by subjecting their enemies until they reach a summit of sustainable power. While some cultures were able to maintain their zenith longer than others, corruption and entropy ultimately creep in leading to slow decline and decay, which in the end result in the loss of power. Eventually through the combination of both internal problems and external threats, the civilization falls only to be replaced by a new society that follows the same progression.

- The Chinese Dynastic Cycle
- Judges 2:10-19—the same cyclical phenomenon is observable within the only nation that God formed on earth, the nation of Israel. The middle section of the book of Judges presents seven cycles of apostasy, oppression, cry for deliverance, salvation, and rest. Israel vacillates between obedience and apostasy as the people continually fail to learn for their mistakes.
- Eventually, both Israel and Judah were conquered by gentile powers thereby ushering in the times of the gentiles politically and completing Israel's fall into political irrelevance due to her habitual unbelief. Despite having succumbed to the same cyclical collapse as the gentile nations surrounding Israel, time marched on. The linear was driven forward by the covenants and promises that God made to his nation that have not yet come to pass. Therefore, while the nations are rising and falling in predicable fashion, history is being pulled along a linear plane towards God's prophesied end.
- II Timothy 4:2—we need to continue to preach the word regardless of the seasons we find ourselves in.

### **The Hill**

- Now that we have seen that both cyclical and linear concepts are both Scriptural all that remains is to combine them into a single explanatory model. For accuracy's sake, the trajectory of our line is best illustrated by a downward sloping line. Drawing the line in this fashion sets the Christian view of history apart from other linear progressive models discussed in previous postings. Unlike the evolutionary or Marxian views of history, humanity is not improving but finding new ways and methods to rebel against God.
- Daniel 2:35-44—within Nebuchadnezzar's dream we see the entire duration of the times of gentiles politically foretold in stunning detail. The only thing not foretold in Daniel 2 was that God was going to interrupt the progression of gentile power and usher in an unprophesied period of grace and peace, namely the dispensation of grace. The mineral degeneration seen in each part of the statue reflects the Law of Human Collapse. Mankind has no hope without God. It is only the revelation of Jesus Christ at his second advent to establish his kingdom that stops humanity's descent into oblivion.
- II Timothy 3:13—these are getting worse and worse not better.
- II Thessalonians 2:7—the mystery of iniquity is already working. It is only the presence of the body of Christ on earth that is retraining mankind's slide into oblivion.

### **Putting It All Together**

- In short, a complete Biblical view of history must contain the following three characteristics.
  - First, it must reflect the God-ordained method of Bible study by adhering to linearism as its predominant explanatory model.
  - Second, it must recognize that God is also the author of the cyclical and make room for seasonality as God's linear plan unfolds.

- Third, the linear progression and imbedded cyclicity must be understood to progress along a line that is downward sloping in its trajectory, thereby taking into account the Law of Human Collapse.
- This is best illustrated by envisioning a tire rolling down a hill. When the tire reaches the bottom it will crash in catastrophe. This is where the course of this world is headed and only the return of Christ can remedy the situation. As believers we need to understand that we cannot alter or fix what has already been set in motion. All we are called to do is preach the word regardless of where the wheel is in its rotation or how far down the hill we are.

### **What About Us?**

- Prophetically we know where this is going and how it will end because God has revealed his plans on the pages of Scripture. These things are predetermined and revealed in the Bible.
- We know how the dispensation of Grace will end but we do not know exactly when it will end. We do know that it must be before the 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel because of a prophetic statement made by the Apostle Paul.
- I Thessalonians 4:15—notice the phrase Paul uses when first teaches about the catching away of the saints, “by the word of the Lord.” This phraseology is consistent with that of the Old Testament prophets when they were foretelling future events. When Paul foretells the end of the dispensation of grace he employs the technique of the Old Testament prophet to reassure his audience that this event will happen because God has predetermined that it would occur.
- The expression “by the word of the Lord” occurs 10 times in Scripture and only 1 time in the Pauline Epistles. In comparison the phrase “the word of the Lord” occurs 255 times in the Bible. The vast majority of which are in a prophetic context.
- I Kings 13:1-5
- I Chronicles 11:3—David is anointed king over Israel according to “the word of the Lord.”
  - I Samuel 16:1-13
- II Chronicles 36:21-22—the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled in the 70 year Babylonian captivity.
  - Jeremiah 19:3, 25:9-12, 27:6-8, 29:10
- Isaiah 39:5-6—Isaiah by the word of predicts the Babylonian captivity.
- Ezekiel 25:1-4—the word of the Lord prophesied against the Ammonites.
- Ezekiel 28:20-23—the word of the Lord prophesied against Zidon.
- Ezekiel 29:1-2, 30:1-2—the word of the Lord prophesied against Egypt.

- When the word of the Lord is spoken with respect to individuals, cities, or nations what is predicted will surely come to pass. “By the word of the Lord” is a prophetic construction used throughout the Old Testament by God to predict future events.
- I Thessalonians 4:15-17—as an apostle, Paul is using the language of prophecy to foretell the end of this dispensation. That God will one day return to meet the saints in the air cannot be found in the Old Testament prophets because it was part of the revelation of the mystery (I Cor. 15:53) committed to the Apostle Paul.
- I Timothy 2:6—as the due time testifier of God’s secret plan to form the body of Christ, Paul foretells how this dispensation will end.
- The rapture of the church must occur before the tribulation because the next prophetic event to be fulfilled is the one foretold by the Apostle Paul as part of the revelation of the mystery. The saints will be caught away to meet the Lord in the air.
- There are two ways we can escape this present evil world: 1) by death, 2) by rapture. Between now and rapture the predetermined end of this dispensation we cannot rightly attribute any event to the direct physical intervention of God because he has not told us in his word they would occur.
- We can, however, rest assured that “by the word of the Lord” he will catch away his waiting to church to meet him in air.