

FOUNDATIONS
FOR CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

THE LAW OF GOD (8): THE TIMES



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (8): The Times
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Contents

Welcome to <i>Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (8)</i>	4
1 People	5
2 Culture	7
3 Issues	9
4 Worldviews	12
5 Events	15
6 Calling	17
7 Legacy	19
Questions for Reflection of Discussion	21

Welcome to *Foundations for Christian Worldview:
The Law of God (8): The Times*

Every worldview is developed and pursued in a specific place and times. The aspects and components of those times – the people, culture, issues, events, other worldviews, and so forth – both affect and are affected by any individual’s worldview.

This was as true in Moses’ day as it is in ours. The strength of any worldview is in how well it enables those who hold it to make sense of the times, so as to flourish within those times, and thus prove their worldview to be reliable and true. But holding fast to a worldview amid the vicissitudes and challenges of any period of history is a challenge. Moses understood this, and he kept an eye on all the various aspects and components of his times as he laid the foundations of our Christian worldview in the five books that came from his hand.

We must work hard to understand the times in which we live, so that we can know what we must do to live our Biblical worldview consistently and fruitfully before the world.

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We’re happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you’ll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 People

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Genesis 6.5

Worldview vision

We have been considering the *vision* leg of our vision/disciplines/outcomes worldview triangle, as that vision emerges from the five books of Moses, the Law of God. Most prominent in the worldview we encounter in this part of Scripture is the reality of God, and of creation as the work of His hands. Other unseen realities also feature large: especially sin and the human soul, and the power of God's Word and faith. We encounter the works of God throughout the books of Moses, and here also we find the beginnings of the unfolding story of God's people. God's covenant with a people of His own choosing establishes the framework within which all other aspects of the narrative of Genesis-Deuteronomy unfold.

Every worldview must include in its vision of that which is ultimately good and true, some understanding of the times. Only by understanding our times – the people, cultures, events, issues, and so forth, that characterize our segment of history – can we know how best to pursue our vision of the good and true way of living. As a later generation of the descendants of Jacob would demonstrate, understanding the times is a precondition for knowing how we must live (1 Chron. 12.32). We must have a vision of the world we live in if we are to be able to make progress in our own vision of how that world ought to be.

In this final study of the worldview *vision* that emerges from the Law of God, we will consider the times within which the covenant people of God began to be a nation. We will see that those times have much in common with our own times. What we discover as true about the times of Noah, the patriarchs, and Moses will remain true for all times. The characters and cultures will change, as well as the issues and events, but the basic categories defining the times of Genesis through Deuteronomy hold much in common with the world as we know it today.

First in prominence among the categories of the times in which we live are the people with whom we have to do. Let's see what we can learn about people from the five books of Moses.

Fallen and sinful

Setting aside the brief period of sinlessness of our original parents, the trait common to the people who appear throughout the books of Moses is that they are sinful. They do bad things. Plan wickedness. Do harm to others, simply to gain some advantage for themselves. Their sinfulness finds them deliberately throwing off God's original design for people and pursuing lifestyles that are inimical to knowing Him and His blessings. Their sinfulness creates an atmosphere of suspicion, wariness, fear, and violence among the peoples we encounter in the books of Moses.

Even the best of the people – those who know the favor of God – are prone to wickedness and self-centeredness. Noah drank himself into a stupor. Jacob's sons sold their brother into slavery. Moses killed a man early in his life, and later in life overstepped God's command. Abraham and Isaac lied. In fact, so prone to sin of different kinds were the people of God's choosing, that He gave them His Law to guide them in the ways of holiness, define the sinful practices they were to avoid, and issue punishments and correctives designed to keep sin in check. The people God destroyed in the flood and in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had reached a point of sinfulness where, if something drastic were not done, they would destroy themselves and everyone around them. Those who rebelled against Moses in the wilderness, and determined to take leadership from Him, were likewise consumed by God, thus sending a powerful message to the rest of Israel.

Although people are sinful, they are still human beings, made in the image of God, and, as we might expect, are thus capable of much good. The sinful people in the books of Moses created culture, built cities, frequently honored and provided for their neighbors, often tried to do what was right in serving others, and gave land and, sometimes, sound advice to God's people on how best to carry out His will (cf. Ex. 18).

Everywhere we turn in the five books of Moses, we encounter sinful people, people who disappoint, disturb, and dismay us, but who surprise and encourage us at the same time. And this leaves us, at the end of Deuteronomy, wondering whether there is any hope for recovering that original condition of blessedness which our first parents forfeited and which God in His covenant promised to restore.

Religious and political

The people we encounter in the five books of Moses are, like people in every age, religious to the core. From the tower builders of Babel, who hoped to reach heaven by their own efforts, to the worshipers of Ashtoreth, Baal, Milcom, and other pagan deities, the people of Moses' day were devoted to unseen realities which they invested with their strongest affections and highest hopes. Their lives revolved around their devotions in many respects, and zeal for their gods could induce them to strange and extravagant ceremonies, costly sacrifices, and campaigns of violence against those whose religion threatened their own.

Closely connected with religious practice in the times of the patriarchs and Moses were the political forms and alliances that bound peoples together as nations. Most nations were ruled by dynastic monarchies, it seems, with loyalties going all the way back to the Tower of Babel and the affinities – language and blood, primarily – which bound people to one another. Within their own political entities, the peoples we meet in the Law of God established communities, developed laws, created forms of culture, and brought forth progeny to whom they taught the language, law, and lore of their forebears. They benefited from the common grace of God in a multitude of ways, yet almost always without acknowledging Him or seeking Him according to His will.

Nations traded with one another, entered into alliances for war or mutual defense, eyed each other's prosperity, trashed each other's shrines and sacred places, plundered each other's wealth, and created an overall environment of uncertainty, tension, and fear.

Into such times as these, God introduced His holy nations of priests, armed with His Law and protected within His covenant, to begin the work of restoring the world and all creation to His goodness.

For reflection

1. How did the reality of sin affect the religious and political lives of the peoples of Moses' day?
2. How was it possible that sinful people could accomplish so much that was useful and good?
3. Why is it essential to understand the times in which we live?

Next steps – Conversation: What are some "best practices" for understanding the times in which we live? Talk about this with some Christian friends.

2 Culture

Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah. And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. Genesis 4.19-22

The inevitability of culture

The sudden appearance of culture in the antediluvian world is without fanfare or surprise. These days, archaeologists and anthropologists marvel at every newly-discovered example of cave art, or some ancient celestial calendar, or other “wonder” of culture on the part of what they consider to be primitive peoples, not all that far removed from their simian ancestors.

The Bible is more realistic about culture. Human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, their souls inscribed with the penchant for exercising dominion over the creation, are natural-born creators, like the Creator Who made and rules over them.

So there is no sense of strangeness or wonder attached to the first mention of culture in Genesis 4. We expect people to make cities; domesticate cattle; fashion homes out of skins or other material; learn to make music, write poetry, and play instruments; and take up even more complex forms of making, such as mining and smelting metals. Culture is what human beings do. No people has ever been discovered who lacked culture, because people, made in the image of God, are makers, and they will make whatever artifacts, create whatever institutions, and sustain whatever conventions will allow them to define themselves, and to sustain and enrich their lives.

Culture is natural to human beings. But because human beings are fallen, the culture they create can often be put to fallen uses, contrary to the good and glorious purposes of God.

The uses of culture

Culture – artifacts like harps and tents, institutions like cities and governments, and conventions like language and lore – are essential to human wellbeing. Culture *defines* human life. How we dress or speak, what we wear, the special days we acknowledge, where we work and to what ends – these all define us as a particular *sort* of people – Americans, say, or Congolese.

Whatever culture we create also serves to *sustain* us. Herding cattle provides milk, meat, and materials for building or clothing. Playing instruments appeals to our aesthetic sense, and provides diversion and delight. Building cities allows for the kind of interdependence that unites a people and enables them to work together for the common weal.

And culture *enriches* our lives. Sure, we can live without poetry, but who would want to? And one suit of clothes would be enough, but we have closets full.

But culture in the hands of fallen people can serve fallen purposes and further the fallenness of the world. Whatever instrument or tool Lamech used to kill two men, that was an artifact of culture put to fallen uses. His poem, commemorating his violence, was meant to vaunt his prowess and cow his wives, hardly the sort of literature we would commend to our children. The tower which the peoples of the earth sought to construct in the plain of Shinar mocked God and denied both His grace and His mission. The government of Pharaoh turned in violent oppression against a people who had been its very salvation not that many years before.

At the same time, culture can serve saving and glorifying purposes, like the ark Noah built, the tabernacle and its furnishings, and the form of local spiritual leadership and civil government God established for Israel in His Law.

When culture is used to *define* people as a holy priesthood unto the Lord, to *sustain* them in line with God's pleasure and purposes, and to *enhance* their lives, so that they delight in God, His creation, and one another, then culture is being used in line with humankind's original mandate to rule the earth and exercise dominion over it.

Redeeming culture

Even fallen culture can be redeemed. That is, culture which is being put to the uses of a fallen world can be changed, redirected, and improved, so that people benefit and God is glorified. And sometimes, one form of culture can be used to arrest or transform fallen culture, to reset people within the reach of God's grace, and on a course more in line with His blessing.

Just so, when the people of the world after the flood decided against God's mandate to fill the earth, settled in a single place so as *not* to be scattered – the plain of Shinar – and undertook to gain heaven by their own hubris and hand, God intervened with a cultural convention – language – to get them moving in the right direction again. He could have simply destroyed them all, perhaps choosing one from among them to start again. But in His grace and mercy, He used culture to reshape the direction of human development.

Lamech wrote a poem to vaunt himself; Moses wrote a song (Ex. 15) to glorify God. Pagan peoples kept accurate records – *toledoth* – of their great men and their achievements; God's people used the same form – “these are the generations of” – to record God's faithfulness and the progress of His covenant. Pagan rulers promulgated laws to subject their peoples; God gave His Law to liberate.

Culture, in other words, is not inherently evil. The books of Moses show us that making culture is inevitable, ubiquitous, beneficial, and God-like; but we must make sure we use culture in ways that conform to God's will and revelation. The people God called out of Egypt to worship Him at Mt. Sinai, plundered their Egyptian neighbors of their cultural wealth. So eager were the Egyptians to be done with them, that they forked over jewelry, tapestries, clothing, implements of all kinds, and many valuable raw materials, just to make sure those wretched Israelites and their first-born-killing God didn't come back. The people of Israel used that culture – all of it fallen in origin – to define themselves as worshipers and servants of God, sustain themselves throughout their journey, and provide a variety of life-enhancing resources *en route* to the land of promise.

And all with the approval and under the direction of God and His Law.

For reflection

1. What role does culture play in our salvation today? What effects should salvation have on our use of culture?
2. How can we know when the culture God allows us to have is being put to uses that are according to His will?
3. Should Christians be more active as culture-makers today? Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: For one day, write down all the different forms of culture you use to define, sustain, and enhance your life. Pray over each of these, asking God to help you use them for His glory. Review your use of culture in prayer at the end of the day. Share this exercise with a Christian friend.

3 Issues

Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him. Genesis 26.12-14

Every age

In every age, people have to deal with a variety of issues confronting them, to which they must respond, and which can affect the course of their lives. This was as true for the patriarchs and the people who followed Moses through the wilderness as it is for people in our day.

When we think of the kind of issues that characterize the times we live in, certain recurrent themes come to mind: justice and fairness, wealth and poverty, property rights, ethnic and racial differences, political stability, moral and cultural differences. Human beings are never very far from having to make decisions and choices relating to one or another of such issues.

These issues are present in the books of Moses, and by observing how God's covenant people dealt with such issues, we can discern principles and practices to guide us in thinking about our times and the worldview vision that should guide us. Here I do not intend an exhaustive treatment of this subject. Instead, by looking at just a few examples of such issues, I hope to add more definition to the worldview footprint that emerges in the Law of God.

Seek peace

Issues arise in every age that pit people against one another, creating tension and uncertainty. Disputes over rights and property, international disagreements, acts of injustice, and racial differences are just a few of the issues that can set people on edge.

The general principle that seems to have guided the people of God whenever such issues arose was to seek peace with their neighbors. We see this, for example, in the case of Isaac and the Philistines. To avoid the consequences of famine, Isaac sought to live peaceably among the Philistines in Gerar, following the Lord's will for him. Though he got off on the wrong foot with them, his little act of deception was quickly redressed, and Isaac lived, worked, and flourished among the Philistines for many years.

But his neighbors became jealous of his prosperity, and sought to drive him away by depriving him of water rights. In response to repeated seizures of his wells, Isaac moved on and dug new ones. The Lord blessed him and renewed His covenant with Isaac, so that he prospered even more. This led the Philistines to come and seek peace with Isaac, who had been such a man of peace among them. After a little chiding of the king and his entourage, Isaac agreed and entered a covenant of peace with them.

We see this same peaceable spirit in Moses' first approach to Pharaoh. He made his request – that the people should be allowed to go into the wilderness and hold a feast with their God – humbly, even adding “Please” in so doing (the Hebrew, נָא, *nah*, means something like *please* or *I pray* or *won't you*). Only after Pharaoh's repeated rejections, and the increasing hardness of his heart, did Moses and God take the gloves off and lower the boom.

Again, as the people of Israel approached the land of promise, they sought peaceful passage through the territory belonging to the Amorites (Num. 21.21ff), promising not to despoil the people of the land as they passed through. They only resorted to war when their offers of peace were rebuffed, and they were attacked.

Various statutes in the Law of God outline guidelines for living in peace with one's neighbors, as well as with surrounding nations and peoples. God is a God of peace, and peace is always prominent among the promises He makes for His people. They, in turn, are called to seek peace and be peace-makers wherever they can.

Exercise compassion

A second general principle we see in the Law of God for defusing tensions and alleviating uncertainty is the practice of compassion. We see this in various ways, but especially in the laws that address caring for the poor and for foreigners.

The gleaning laws included in the Law of Moses provide a compassionate attempt to help the poor. These were good laws on two counts. First, is the obvious provision of food for those who, for one reason or another, were not able to provide for themselves. Farmers were instructed not to reap the corners of their fields, or to go over their vines or olive trees with a fine-toothed comb. They were to leave fruit for the poor to gather. If a farmer forgot a sheaf of wheat or a basket of harvested fruit, he was not to return to claim it, but to leave it as part of the gleanings.

The second point was just as important. Poor people in ancient Israel were not to expect a handout to meet their needs. They had to work for it. By going through the fields and vineyards, gathering what they could, they maintained both an ethic of work – foundational, as we have seen, to what it means to be an image-bearer of God – and the sense of dignity that goes with taking responsibility for one's own wellbeing.

The Law's approach to dealing with foreigners – “strangers,” as it is commonly put – was to allow them space to work and live, contingent upon their obeying the laws of the land. God commanded His people not merely to have compassion on strangers and aliens, but to love them, remembering that they had once been unloved strangers in a foreign land – unloved, that is, except by God Himself (Ex. 22.21; 23.9; Lev. 19.34).

The overarching principle

The issues that confronted God's people, whether of justice or property or social disparities or international threats, were to be governed by one overarching principle: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19.17, 18).

Loving one's neighbors as one would like to be loved is a simple formula for addressing all manner of issues that might arise in communities and between citizens. Neighbor love is a reflection and a channel of God's love, which lies at the foundation and in the heart of all human existence.

Various statutes in the Law of God encode this principle in specific ways, some so venerable as to be cited by writers in the New Testament as continuing to be valid in their day (cf. 1 Cor. 9.3-14; Jms. 5.1-4; etc.). The great issues that divide people can only ultimately be redressed when love – not money or status or race or political alliance or any other such thing – is the common currency that binds a society together.

From the beginning, God intended His people to master the work of loving their neighbors as themselves, and to be a light to the world, showing and leading the way in dealing with all the various kinds of issues that threaten our fallen world. He knew that this would not always be possible, and so counseled His people to prepare for war when peace-seeking, compassion, and love could not prevail. But the dominant theme and remedy for the issues that arise between people, according to the Law of God, is to learn the art of neighbor-love, and to practice it faithfully and well.

For reflection

1. What do you consider to be the great issues facing us in our times? How do people typically try to deal with these?

2. What does it mean for you to be a loving, compassionate, peace-maker in your Personal Mission Field?
3. The Church should be the training-ground for neighbor love (cf. Jn. 13.1-15). Suggest some ways local churches could improve in this.

Next steps – Transformation: How consistent are you in loving your neighbor as yourself? For the next few days, ask God to give you specific opportunities to love your neighbor. Jot these down as they come, and pray them back to the Lord at the end of the day. Ask the Lord to help you become more aware of such opportunities, and to fulfill them as Jesus would.

4 Worldviews

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: I am the LORD your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD."" Leviticus 18.1-5

Conflict of worldviews

Right away in the books of Moses, we realize that the people God has chosen for Himself – a holy people before Him, in all the blessings of His covenant – do not pursue their calling and mission in a vacuum. They live in the midst of many different peoples, whose ways and doings and laws differ in many ways from those God intended for His people.

It would not do for God's people to be ignorant of this. They enjoyed a special status with Him, as His chosen and covenanted people; and they were called to a special mission issuing from that status – to show the wisdom, goodness, beauty, and glory of God to the world. They would only be able to fulfill their purpose, and to point the rest of the world to God's original intentions, by hewing to God's plan, framework, and Law.

They lived and worked and exercised dominion in the world, but they must be careful not to be of it.

This meant they must have some working knowledge of worldviews different from their own. Otherwise, it would be very easy to drift from the secure framework of the vision, disciplines, and outcomes God was shaping them for, into a worldview framework that was antithetical to God's purposes and contrary to His glory.

Israel throughout the Old Testament experienced a conflict of worldviews, a continuous clash between what God and His people believed and sought, and what the surrounding pagan nations hoped to realize. And that conflict began in the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses.

Emergence of conflict

We can see this conflict emerging early on. Cain was banished from his parents to a land where he and his descendants pursued a way of life that in many ways mocked and defied what God intended. Their other descendants ultimately became so abominable to God, that He destroyed them all in a great flood.

Not long after that, people decided they knew better than God where they should live, what they should do, and how they should realize the goal of being like God. In the plain of Shinar, they resolved not to fill the earth, but to hang together under an authoritarian elite, and concentrate on working their way to the heavens. God put an end to that rebellion as well.

But the conflict returned again and again. We see it in the immorality of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. We discover it dangerously at work in the generations of Egyptians, who forgot about how God had used His people to save them, and decided instead to subjugate, enslave, and control the population of Israel for their own purposes.

We see it also in the religion, morality, and political lives of the nations that stood between the people of God and the land of promise. The Law of God sets the stage for a struggle to supplant those people and their worldviews, and to allow the worldview encoded in the Law of God to take root on earth as it is in heaven.

Two worldview extremes

Our text highlights the extremes of the unbelieving worldviews in the midst of which God's people were being established to realize their calling and fulfill their mission.

Egypt was a large, authoritarian empire, a theocracy with Pharaoh as either god-on-earth or the closest thing to deity people could imagine. The religious bureaucracy served his will. The laws of the land existed at his pleasure and according to his interpretation. And the people were subject to whatever projects, wars, or whims the Pharaoh considered to be in his – and thus the nation's – best interest.

The countries of the Canaanites, on the other hand, were tribal oligarchies. They could trace the origins of their countries back to the days following the tower of Babel, and each nation guarded its homeland, culture, and ways assiduously. Violence, plunder, and civil war were not uncommon among them. A popular polytheism characterized the peoples of Canaan, and shrines, sacred centers, and idols proliferated throughout their lands. Pagan religion sanctioned such abominations as harlotry, child sacrifice, and ethnic cleansing.

Not everything about these cultures was unusable. God commanded His people to plunder the Egyptians, and He gave the farms and cities of the Canaanites to His people. But their “doings” and ways – how these people thought, lived, and related to one another in their daily lives – were not agreeable to God. In His Law, God spelled out the requirements of love, both toward Him and toward their neighbors, that He expected His people to follow. By keeping Him central in their hearts and minds, and by learning, obeying, and teaching His statutes and judgments, they would create a society and culture characterized by righteousness, justice, beauty, goodness, and love. The worldview revealed in God's Law – beginning with the vision of God and His works – would allow the people to realize their full potential as His image-bearers and holy nation. They must cling to Him and His Law, be aware of any incursions from or compromises with the surrounding nations, and teach the worldview of God to the generations. Only thus would they realize the precious and very great promises of His covenant.

The Law of God outlines a worldview that can allow the chosen, redeemed, called, and sent people of God to be a light in the darkness and a power for beauty, goodness, and truth in the world. We are unwise to ignore or minimize this Law. Let us, rather, as God commanded His people of old, hide it in our hearts, and devote ourselves, in all our ways, to following Him Who, by keeping this Law perfectly, has opened the way of life to all who believe in Him (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

For reflection

1. What are some characteristics of contemporary worldviews that God finds objectionable?
2. What are the best ways for Christians to keep from coming under the influence of these worldviews?
3. Why should we look to the Law of God as a foundation for developing a Christian worldview?

Next steps – Transformation: How can Christians help one another keep from compromising with unbelieving worldviews? Discuss this question with some Christian friends.

5 Events

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

While the earth remains,

Seedtime and harvest,

Cold and heat,

Winter and summer,

And day and night

Shall not cease." Genesis 8.20-22

The importance of history

It matters how the followers of Jesus Christ understand history.

I recall as a university student, having to take a series of courses on Western history and the history of English literature. Each course told the stories of certain people and events which were to important for their times, and seemed to have some continuing interest for us in our day.

But not for me. I was bored to tears. I attended every class, read the texts (mostly), took copious notes, wrote better-than-acceptable papers, and prepared diligently for and passed all my exams. But I cannot remember one thing of lasting value from any of those courses. My attitude toward them going in was, "I have to do this, so I may as well knuckle down and give it my best shot." I was not interested in history. I had no appreciation for the importance of certain events, or why I should care about them. And I came away from those courses saying, like the proverbial Presbyterian minister who falls down the staircase, "Well, I'm glad that's over with."

I was, you might say, like a good many people today, including a good many Christians: "Who cares what happened in the past? I'm living for the present, man, and trying to pack it with as many interesting experiences as I can. I don't have time to care about who bludgeoned whom in 1066, or what difference it made that a high school dropout went to Ireland as a missionary in 430 AD."

Which is too bad, really. Because everything that matters in our faith – all that we believe, envision, aspire to, and cherish – all of this and more is rooted in historical events of the past. Those events came to pass under the sovereign oversight and by the sovereign power of our Three-in-One God, and they unfolded just as they did to demonstrate and confirm His love for His people.

It would be as if you were to say, "I don't care who my parents were or what they did for a living. And what does it matter that I don't remember when or whether I graduated from high school or went to college? The date of my wedding anniversary? Who cares about dates and stuff in the past?"

Yeah. Try those on for size sometime.

The fact is, history matters to God, and particular events in history, beginning in the books of Moses, particularly demonstrate the *purpose* of history, and reveal something of the *will of God* for history, and for those who, by His grace, are granted temporary occupancy in that arena.

History as staging ground

History is the staging-ground for the cosmic drama of redemption. While the entire scheme of redemption –

all its promises, benchmarks, stages, components, and fulfillment – was worked out in the divine Trinity from eternity past, the events that comprise God’s work of redemption took place in history as we know it. The events of history show us the unfolding plan, power, promise, and purpose of God; and in important events in the books of Moses, we learn how to *understand* history so as to gain the perspective and benefit God intends.

A murdering brother and rebellious son, cast out from his parents and exiled to a distant land, is not just a story of fratricide. It shows us God’s eternal intention to separate His people from those who oppose Him and them, while, at the same time, continuing to care for the rebels by His common grace.

The flood in Noah’s day demonstrates the ferocity and might of God’s judgment, His hatred of sin, and His personal care and protection for His chosen people, as well as for all His creation. God does not give up on what He has made, or on those He intends to realize His saving grace. But He will not long tolerate rebellion against His will.

The events that brought Abraham to Canaan and God’s covenant are not just an interesting story about an entrepreneurial elderly gentleman, who proved he could make it on his own in a foreign land. They show us the power of God’s calling and His faithfulness in doing good for the people of His choosing.

The story of Joseph demonstrates what God intends His people to be and do in a world that cares not a whit for Him. The Exodus from Egypt shows just how mighty God is, and the lengths He will go to redeem His people for Himself. The giving of God’s Law on Mt. Sinai is a watershed moment for all human beings, for here is where God drew the line in the sand dividing sin and righteousness for all the peoples of the world.

All the events of history, sketched out in the books of Moses, point forward to a work of cosmic restoration that God will do through the Seed of the woman.

These are not merely things that happened in the who-cares past. These are works of God, stages of development in His eternal plan, reminders of His greatness, goodness, power, holiness, and portents of His astonishing and saving love. By understanding and meditating on such past events, Paul tells us, we may know continual comfort and indomitable hope (Rom. 15.4).

History as revelation

And this is because, at bottom, the events of history are acts of divine revelation. But for too many of us, these events are like going to a 3-D movie and trying to appreciate it without wearing the special glasses. Oh sure, you can get the general story line, remember some of the highlights and turning-points, and even recall the names of a few of the players. But without those special glasses, you can’t appreciate the depth, beauty, color, and ultimate meaning of the events you watched unfold before you on the screen. And you’re not likely to watch that film again, or encourage anyone else to.

So strap on the special glasses of Scripture and saving grace, and let God show you how to understand the events of times past, as well as the times in which you live. When you do, you’ll see that, the events unfolding around us in our day – no matter how separated they may seem from such spiritual matters as seeking the Kingdom of God and going to heaven – are all of a piece in the divine puzzle of history, which God calls us to understand, and in our way and place and time, to contribute to according to His purpose and will.

History matters, because it matters to God. That’s the first lesson of history, and all the events that comprise it, from the five books of Moses.

Questions for reflection

1. How would you describe your attitude toward history? Do you see the events of the Bible as having

happened in the same flow of history in which we live today? Explain.

2. Why do history and its events seem to matter so much to God?

3. What are the keys for understanding the events of history from a Christian point of view?

Next steps – Preparation: Does it matter whether the history recorded in the Bible is true? Why? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

6 Calling

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 1.27, 28

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. Genesis 2.15

The idea of calling

For any worldview to attract a following, it must provide persuasive answers to three questions: "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "What should I be doing?"

Since the 1950s, the secular worldview has offered a variety of options in response to those questions, but they all coalesce loosely around the following answers: "Who am I?" I am a higher form of animal, a strictly material product of chance, time, and matter. "Why am I here?" I am here to survive and to pass my genes on to the next generation. "What should I be doing?" Whatever it takes to survive and, if possible, be happy, before I die and return to the dust, which is the cosmic essence.

But even these answers are encased in a larger perspective on life and the cosmos which insists that *no reason* can be found for why we are here. Life and the cosmos have no ultimate meaning, except that which we impose on it, and that meaning is at all times susceptible to change. We cannot really know why we are here, or what we should be doing; and we cannot be certain that we or such questions as these will have any abiding relevance in the generations to come. We can only hope, struggle, and grope.

Simply put: According to the secular worldview, we cannot answer these questions convincingly, only hopefully. We *hope* that there is a reason for our being here, and something meaningful for us to do. We *hope*, but we cannot *know*. No voice comes to us from beyond space and time to indicate any true and eternal significance or purpose for our existence. As Camus saw so clearly, the secular worldview insists that we are all struggling against absurdity, pursuing absurd lives against ultimate oblivion, in an absurd and unyielding cosmos, where nothing makes any final sense.

Of course, people don't live that way. They live as if their lives *do* matter, and as though they *do* have meaning and purpose. But most people are content to let the pacesetters of our secular agenda continue to trumpet their Sisyphean myth, and feel very brave about it, as long as they don't unreasonably impede my personal quest for whatever I define as happiness.

They live, that is, more like people who understand and embrace the idea of *divine calling*, as that is revealed early on in the books of Moses.

The focus of calling

The idea of calling stems from the fact of creation. Deny creation, and you have no grounds for calling. Without creation, all that might be calling becomes merely struggle and groping for something to believe in.

But God created human beings and appointed them the task of filling the earth and having dominion over it. People were made to increase and rule in such a way as that the beauty, goodness, truth, righteousness, peace, and joy that the Three-in-One God knows within Himself might prevail throughout the creation, with ever-increasing glory.

People are called by God to do good, to work with their souls and bodies to bring forth good fruit for the benefit of their neighbors and the glory of God. Most people actually live this way in our secular world, and

this is testimony to the *fact* of their being made in the divine image, the *fact* of their knowing (although they may deny) God, and the *fact* of God's common and sustaining grace to all His creatures and the entire cosmos.

An infinite variety of specific *callings* is available to humankind. Each of these callings makes a contribution to the wellbeing of the creation and the glory of God. Callings can be discerned in a variety of ways – by upbringing, environment, opportunities, training, interests, and so forth. But only within the context of knowing God and submitting to His calling for humankind can *any* calling provide the kind of fruitfulness, fulfillment, satisfaction, benefit, and glory that God intends for *every* calling.

In these secular times, the notion of calling has been substituted with whatever occupation or approach to life seems most likely to satisfy the god of self and its concierge, the god of happiness. Calling comes not from any unchanging divine Word, or sense of divine grace and leading, but only from what brings most satisfaction and pleasure to the self.

The end of calling

The Biblical view of calling answers the three previous questions as follows: “Who am I?” I am the image-bearer of God. “Why am I here?” I am here to know, enjoy, serve, and honor my Creator. “What should I be doing?” I am working in every aspect of my life to realize my purpose for being, doing everything within my power, at every opportunity, for the glory of God and the wellbeing of my neighbor.

Such a view of calling makes all of life into a continual worship of God; for in all we do, we remember who we are as God's image-bearers; we look to Him to help us define the parameters of our assignment in the garden of the world; and we work to bring out His goodness in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, and to guard everything within our purview against the corrosive and destructive influences of the lie.

All of life is calling, and every calling is significant, but only when we listen for the divine voice – God speaking to us from His Word – to direct our efforts toward realizing His goodness, and for His glory.

Questions for reflection

1. What does the idea of calling mean to you? How would you define your calling from the Lord?
2. Is it really possible for all of life to be a continuous act of worship (Rom. 12.1, 2)? Explain.
3. Do you think Christians should work harder at understanding the idea of calling? Do you think we're more influenced by the teaching of Scripture in this matter, or by the temper of our times? Explain.

Next steps – Transformation: Meditate on the day ahead – all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Has God called you to these? To what end? How can you prepare to make the most of all these opportunities for knowing, enjoying, and serving God? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.

7 Legacy

Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." Genesis 15.5

Place in time

A important feature of the worldview that begins to emerge in the books of Moses has to do with time and our place in it.

For most people today, time is merely something to spend. "Spending time" is perhaps the most common way of thinking about the succession of moments God grants us each day. Typically, we spend on things we want. Time, therefore, is to be invested for one's own self-interest, one's own view of happiness. A person's time is his own unique possession, to do with as he thinks best according to vision of the life and world which he pursues.

But this is not what we see in Scripture. Even as early as the books of God's Law, the people of God are encouraged to cultivate an awareness of time, and to use their time, within a framework governed by what we might describe as three "looks" – past, present, and future.

Within the framework of the Biblical worldview, we look continuously to the past, to remember what God has done and promised, and to learn the lessons of our forebears' experience with God. We owe a debt to the past, both to keep and obey what God has spoken, and to honor those who have gone before us in His covenant. To ignore or disdain the past, as is increasingly the mood today, has no place in the Christian worldview.

But we live in the present, and in the present our desire is to realize what God has promised in the past by understanding and obeying His Word, and living toward His promises in all we do.

Living fully under God in the present allows us to keep an eye on the future, and what we by our works will leave for those who succeed us in the covenant line of our God. How we understand the *past* times of God and His people will help to shape what we do with the time of our lives in the *present*, so that we leave the generations to come in the *future* a legacy they can build on for the generations that will succeed them.

Within the vision we pursue of the worldview to which God calls us, we must nurture a vision of the legacy we will leave, the fruit of our efforts in time, for the blessing of the generations to come.

Dominion achieved

Since the legacy we leave will be shaped within our particular calling from the Lord, we need to think of our legacy in those terms, and resolve to leave an example and whatever tangible goods we can to help others serve the Lord in their generation. The Hebrew artisans, Bezalel and Oholiab, were called by God to make the tabernacle and its furnishings. They received from Moses God's Word instructing them concerning a dwelling place with His people; they invested the time of their lives in making the tabernacle and all its furnishings; and they left a legacy to facilitate the worship of God's people up to the time of David (cf. Ex. 35, 36).

We must think of our own callings as the quarry from which our legacy will come. It will be a legacy of *dominion*, the product of our *example* and our *labors* in seeking to realize the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Each of us has people in our lives who, though now departed, have left us an *example* that continues to impact

us in these days. We may not even have known these people personally, but only read about them; still, the power of their *example* exerts a shaping influence on how we live today.

Others have, by their *labors*, made tangible contributions to helping us realize our own calling – institutions, freedoms, endowments, bequests, estates, and more humble but equally important items such as books, tools, recipes, journals, letters, or even household furnishings. All these fruits of the *labors* of previous generations, we receive as gifts from the Lord, and put to use in our own calling for the purpose of exercising dominion in His Name, so that He might be glorified in all we do. And, as we do this, we are creating our own legacy of *example* and *labors* that will bless and serve the generation to come.

Dominion transferred

But we must also strive to leave a legacy of *people*, who are minded and able, to carry on the work of having dominion that we have given our lives to in our time.

God specifically gifted Bezalel and Oholiab to teach others how to do the work necessary for constructing and maintaining the tabernacle. Heads of households in Israel were commanded to teach their children the ways of the Lord. Priests, judges, and rulers were established, whose primary responsibility was to ensure that the Word of God directed the ways of the people in all their communities.

No small part of our legacy will be in the lives of people we encourage, equip, and assist in taking up the work of exercising dominion within the context of their own calling. Children, neighbors, students, and many others will be affected by us, directly or indirectly, intentionally or otherwise. We must be always mindful of the impact our lives can make on others, and work to ensure that that impact directs them to seeking the goodness of the Lord in their own lives and callings.

As faithful people in Israel looked forward to the generations that would succeed them – generations who would be blessed by God and would bless the nations of the world – they worked in their own times, following the example and using the legacies of those who had gone before, to ensure that the worldview which begins to emerge in God’s Law would continue from one generation to the next, for the praise and glory of the Lord Who chose, redeemed, and called them.

Questions for reflection

1. Are you conscious of leaving a legacy of example and labors for the next generation? In what ways?
2. How can you see that the legacy, of previous generations of the people of God, continues to serve you in your calling?
3. How can believers encourage one another to nurture a vision of the legacy they will leave?

Next steps – Transformation: In a short paragraph – three or four sentences – write out the legacy you believe God wants you to leave for the future. Commit that legacy to the Lord in prayer, and begin working more consistently toward it day by day.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Why is it important that Christians maintain a good understanding of the times in which they live? What are some helpful ways of doing this?
2. We can't escape or avoid either people, culture, or the issues these create. How can we become better equipped to deal with these consistently, according to our Christian worldview?
3. Christians bring their worldview into their daily lives – all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Each of us has a Personal Mission Field to which the Lord has sent us to seek His Kingdom and make disciples. Why is it important that we have a clear Biblical worldview to guide us in our calling to God's Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12)?
4. What legacy are you working to leave for the generations to come?
5. What's the most important lesson you've gained from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.