

# A Biblical View of History

By Lee Williams

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Read the comments related to Isaiah 46:8–11 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: If God created all things and His plan will never fail, what difference does this make regarding the way we think about history? What will happen if I try to go against God's plan?

### Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Colossians 1:15–17 in the section **It's in the Book**. Paul used many words to tell us about Jesus in this reading. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What is an "image"? What does Paul mean when he states that in Jesus "all things hold together"? Is this picture of history different from the view of those who don't believe in Jesus?

### Assignment Three

Read the comments related to 1 Corinthians 15:13–17 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Can we trust that the history we learn is the truth? What if someone lied in the past about history? How could we prove that what they have said is not true?

## Scripture to Memorize

*And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*

1 Corinthians 15:14

## Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand that the biblical view of history teaches that God created the world with a specific purpose in mind and that history is not just a collection of accidental events that occur over time.

**Lee Williams** is the senior associate dean and associate professor of History at The College at Southwestern. He holds his bachelor's degree from Oklahoma Baptist University, and his MA and PhD in history from the University of Arizona. Lee has twice been presented the Forum Award for excellence in teaching. He has served as president and cofounder of the Northeastern Biblical Studies Center in Manchester, New Hampshire; director of Systems Administration and Security for Bizland, Inc.; and director of Distance Education for Southern New Hampshire University. Lee also taught as a foreign expert at the Henan University of Science and Technology, Luoyang, People's Republic of China.

Lee is married to Deanna, and they have four children and twelve grandchildren. Lee enjoys running and is an avid rock climber. An adult Sunday school teacher, he also plays lead guitar in the church orchestra.

## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

John has been rock climbing for two years. At first he was not a very good climber, but during those two years John worked out in the climbing gym twice a week, lifted weights and ran many miles. Imagine that John takes his friend Bill with him rock climbing. After watching John climb, Bill is impressed but he surprisingly tells John he is lucky to have been born able to climb so well. "I guess some people are just gifted with the ability to climb," said Bill. How do you think John will answer his friend Bill?

### History Has a Specific Purpose

Read Isaiah 46:8–13 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 9. the former things of old.** This phrase could be translated as "history."

**Verse 11. bird of prey.** This reference could be to the ancient kingdom of the Medes, called by God to destroy the wicked Babylonian Empire. However, many early Christians believed this was a reference to Christ.

Many who hold a "scientific" view of history believe world events just happen accidentally, caused by the actions of men or nature. Christians believe God made a world where man could be in charge of nature and enjoy a close friendship with God Himself. Unfortunately, because man chose to do evil, he never was able to accomplish God's original purpose. God then sent His Son, Jesus, as One who could get the job done. Thus, God is accomplishing His purpose through His Son and those who choose to follow Jesus and His teachings. In this passage Isaiah clearly states that God has a plan and that He will accomplish that plan.

### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** can now share answers to the following questions: If God created all things and His plan will never fail, what difference does this make regarding the way we think about history? What will happen if I try to go against God's plan?

### Discussion Question

In our **Real-Life Scenario** we saw that John prepared to be a good climber. He had a plan and purpose for his actions. Bill, on the other hand, thought John was just good by accident. Could John climb tough rock walls without training and preparation? Later in life John might want to be a brain surgeon. Would Bill's talk about luck apply in that case? How does this apply to the purpose of history?

### On Your Own

You know God created the world with a purpose and then gave a book to everyone so they might know that purpose and the plan. Suppose you were explaining this to a friend who is close to trusting in Jesus. In the space below, write a few things you would invite your friend to believe and do.

**Read** Colossians 1:15–17 out loud.

### **Studying the Passage**

**Verse 15. image.** This term refers to a likeness, copy or reflection. Think of a statue.

**Verse 17. all.** From this term we know nothing is left out, even history. If Christ created all things, nothing existed before Him. If all things exist by His power, nothing is done without being guided by Him.

Christians believe Jesus is the focus of all of history. It has been said that all of history is “His story.” Jesus came into the world to make a way for people to repair their friendship with God. Why do you think the makers of our calendar divided history into BC and AD? Jesus is *the* pivot point of all history.

### **Assignment Two Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Two** can now share answers to the following questions: What is an “image”? What does Paul mean when he states that in Jesus “all things hold together”? Is this picture of history different from the view of those who don’t believe in Jesus?

### **Discussion Question**

Would it make a difference if Paul wrote that Christ was *made* before all things? What did Paul write in verse 17?

### **On Your Own**

Try to imagine what our world would be like if Jesus had never lived here and never died for man’s sin. In the space below, write several things that would be different in a world without Christ.

## Christianity Is Rooted in History

Read 1 Corinthians 15:13–20 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 14. vain.** This word means “worthless or of no value.”

**Verse 15. misrepresenting.** These would be similar to those who lie in court.

**Verse 17. if Christ has not been raised.** If there is no historical Jesus, then Christianity is a lie and we are trusting our souls to a teaching that is not true. Fortunately, we know beyond doubt that Jesus did live on this earth, both from the Bible and other dependable, historical documents.

The foundation of Christianity is Jesus of Nazareth. This is why Christians put so much emphasis on the study of history. No reputable historian today denies that Jesus lived in first-century Israel. Without this knowledge of a historical Jesus, we would have no basis for our faith in Him and His teaching.

### Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** can now share answers to the following questions: Can we trust that the history we learn is the truth? What if someone lied in the past about history? How could we prove that what they have said is not true?

### Discussion Question

We know that the Bible is an accurate historical document. What if the Bible were full of good sayings but also full of historical errors? Would that make a difference?

### On Your Own

In addition to the death and resurrection of Jesus, what three historical events recorded in the Bible are important to our faith today? In the space below, write the three events, and, beside each, write how our faith would be less complete if that event had never happened.

## **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

## **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

## **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

## **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

## **Prayer**

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

We have examined three readings from the Bible (Isaiah 46:8–11; Colossians 1:15–17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13) related to teachings about the nature of history. From these passages we can see that Christians believe God has given history a plan and a purpose.

Many in our world today do not believe God is watching over and guiding the events that happen in our world. For them the people with the most power or the loudest argument can, and should, tell us what to do and how to behave. People who ignore God want a world similar to the biblical period of the judges of Israel, when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Believers firmly state that God loved the world, sent His Son into the world to save us from our evil ways, and that Jesus will return again just as He said He would. Because Christ created all things, nothing existed before Him. Because all things exist by His power, nothing is done without being guided by Him. Christians believe Jesus is the focus of all history.

History matters. If there is no historical Jesus, then Christianity is a lie, and we are trusting our souls to a teaching that is not true. Fortunately, we know beyond doubt that Jesus did live on this earth, both from the Bible and other dependable, historical documents. Without this knowledge of a historical Jesus, we would have no basis for our faith in Him and His teaching.

For the Christian the world is not out of control. God is moving in history to bring about His purpose for the creation: to glorify Himself and provide a way for people to live in a right relationship with the Creator of the universe.

### **Follow up Question**

*Since faith is at the heart of Christianity, why does history matter?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.