



Lesson Guide

Lesson 6 - History: Whose Story?

Introduction

The word “remember” is central to the message of episode 6. On this tour we will set up the fourth and final pillar in the Temple of Truth – *History* – and take a close look at the importance of maintaining a firm grip on the past. In the process, we will see that a proper appreciation of *historical context* – in other words, our place in God’s “larger story” – is fundamental to an accurate understanding of almost every aspect of our lives. History provides us with indispensable insights into the meaning of existence, God’s plan and purpose for the ages, man’s responsibility toward the Creator, and his duty toward his fellow creatures.

Themes

Dr. Tackett’s key scripture passage for this discussion is Isaiah 46:9-11: “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done ... Indeed, I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass ...” Two major thoughts arise from these verses. First, God is *sovereign*, or absolutely *in control*. History is in the most literal sense *His* story. Nothing happens at random or by chance. The hairs of our heads are numbered, and the details of our lives are threads in the great tapestry of His overarching providential plan. Second, we as human beings cannot understand our place in the world without cultivating a vision of ourselves as part of this larger story. This is why the Bible contains so many exhortations to “remember” what God has done in the past, whether through the device of “memorial stones,” annual festivals, tassels, phylacteries, or the discipline of hiding His Word in our hearts. If we do *not* remember, we run the risk of becoming myopic, proud, self-sufficient, and eventually incurring our own destruction (see Deuteronomy 8) – not necessarily *physical* destruction, but rather a complete loss of identity, purpose, and meaning, or what Amos refers to as a “famine of hearing the Word of the Lord” (Amos 8:11).

Here too we come face to face with the implications of man’s fallen nature and encounter yet another manifestation of the *Cosmic Battle*. Man resists the idea of a sovereign God. He wants to control his own destiny, live inside his own “little story,” and free himself from all connections with or references to an all-inclusive divine plan. Thus he devises ways to propagate the “pernicious lie” of self-determination (“I am my own god,” or “I believe in myself”) by taking the larger story of history into his own hands and turning it into a powerful *tool* for the manipulation of other people and the accomplishment of his own selfish purposes. *Historical revisionism*, or the agenda-driven re-writing of history, operates on the basis of the premise, “If I can change your historical context, I can determine the way you view the present.”

This strategy is consistent with George Orwell's observation that "He who controls the past controls the future" and Karl Marx's dictum, "A people without a heritage are easily persuaded."

Postmodernism – the contemporary philosophical perspective that rejects both *revelation* and *reason* – takes this process to an extreme conclusion by denying the validity of all comprehensive truth systems, or what it calls *metanarratives* (including Christianity). Stated simply, the postmodern perspective maintains that there *is* no "larger story." Instead, everyone must tell his or her *own* story and invent (if possible) his or her *own* concept of meaning and significance. In other words, history does not exist at all except as it exists in our own minds, where it can be edited and tailored to further our own goals in the present.

Points to Watch For

As we have seen so often during the course of our first five tours, the essence of the *Cosmic Battle* or the conflict between Truth and Lies can be boiled down to a confrontation between the claims of the sovereign God and the claims of the sovereign self. It's the old story of the Garden of Eden, where the serpent re-wrote the past by asking, "Has God really said ...?" and where man became completely caught up in his own "little story." From beginning to end, Dr. Tackett's message in episode 6 is that "It's *not* all about *you*." As Jesus put it, "He who seeks to save his life will lose it." Given our current "self-actualizing" cultural climate, it is likely that some group participants will take exception to this idea. Others may have theological objections to Dr. Tackett's statements about the relationship between God's sovereignty and human free will; for he states very plainly that if we are *only* free agents, then we are completely without hope.

Discussion Questions (Pick 3 or 4 for your discussion time.)

(Make these questions your own. That is, don't just "read" them, but become familiar with them so that they don't appear as simply an item to get through. Go through them yourself before your group meets and ponder them.)

1) Opening question. This may be the only question you need to ask.

A. Ask your guests to list what they saw on the tour. Here are some of the key items: What you believe in the present is based upon the past; power of historical revisionism; this is not new: lies about Jesus' resurrection; veracity of God's Word; comparison of the earliest dates of ancient documents like the Iliad to the New Testament; comparison of the number of manuscripts; God's mandate to remember (memorial stones); we remember what we should forget and forget what we should remember; the Providence and Sovereignty of God; the random arrow that killed Ahab; antinomies and paradoxes; postmodern's denial of the metanarrative; the Larger Story; natural myopia; Elisha's servant; God's Photo album; the Pilgrims; stepping stones.

B. Ask your guests to point out the ones that were particularly interesting or striking to them and why.

C. Ask if this particular area struck anyone else as well.

D. Ask if there were other items that they saw that stood out to them. (You may want to read back through the list if you need to.)

2) What are the consequences of believing the line: “It is all about me”—that my script is the only script that really matters?

(Continual frustration—everyone else will be trying to make their script the ultimate script and they will constantly be stepping on yours. Your concern for others will become totally selfish. In other words, “how can your script enhance mine?”)

3) Contrast the “stepping stones” outlook of the Pilgrims with our modern self-centered, solve-it-now mentality?

(Never lay yourself down for those behind you if it is all about your own little story; won’t believe that a small step in the right direction is worth taking; won’t realize that it took years for our culture to sink to where it is and it will take years, maybe generations, to get it back.)

4) Reduced to simplest terms, what is the basic difference between the biblical understanding of history and the human-centered *revisionist* view?

(The Bible sees past events as having *objective reality* in themselves; the *revisionist* perspective sees all reality as being primarily *subjective* in nature – i.e., it exists in our minds and can be shaped, molded, and manipulated at will.)

5) Why do you suppose so many students are bored by the study of history? How is this boredom related (if at all) to the overarching theme of this tour?

(Some may be bored simply because they’ve had boring teachers. But the fundamental issue is that they fail to see themselves as part of the “larger story.” They need to have their eyes opened to take in the broad sweep of God’s activity in history and how their “small story” fits into the overall plan.)

6) Os Guinness suggests that our sense of *identity* is directly related to our grasp of history. What role did this concept of *identity* play in the experience of the Pilgrims of Plymouth Plantation? How do we as members of contemporary society compare with them in this regard?

(The Pilgrims obviously had a very clear concept of their place in God’s sovereign plan. As a result, they were able to stand firm in the face of hardship and suffering. We today seem to have a far more tenuous grasp on our identity, both as individuals and as a people. As a result, many of our contemporaries seem to be “lost” and engaged in a frantic and misdirected search for purpose and meaning.)

- 7) **What is the point of the story Dr. Tackett relates from 1 Kings 22 regarding King Ahab and the prophet Micaiah? How does this narrative fit in with God's declaration about Himself in Isaiah 46:9-11? How does it relate (if at all) to the problem of *historical revisionism*?**

(The entire story turns upon the phrase, "A certain man drew a bow at random ..." [verse 34]. The point is that, under the sovereign control of God, nothing happens "at random." As the Lord says in Isaiah 46, "I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass." Our destinies are in *His* hands, and we cannot change this no matter how we try to "fiddle" with the past by re-writing history to fit in with our own plans.)

- 8) **What is the connection between this discussion of history and the concept of *universals* and *particulars* that we encountered in Lesson 2?**

(History as *God's Story* provides the *universal* reference point against which we can begin to interpret the significance of our own *particular* stories; but the attempt to extract *universal* meaning from the *particulars* of our own narrow experience is futile – just as the scientific endeavor to construct a comprehensive understanding of the cosmos on the basis of the "stuff in the box" is doomed to failure.)