



President Thomas Jefferson

“God, who gave us life, gave us *liberty*. The Christian religion is a religion, of all others, most friendly to *liberty*, science, and the freest expansion of the human mind. I consider the doctrines of Jesus, as delivered Himself, to contain the outlines of the most sublime system of morality that has ever been taught. Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always as pure as they came from His lips, the whole civilized world would now have been Christians.”

PERIODS OF HISTORY

Katherine Dang

Ancient History

Creation – 50 BC

“Law Without Liberty”

Middle History

50 BC – 313 AD

“Law of Liberty” (Christ)

Medieval History

313 – 1382 AD

“Liberty Without Law”

Modern History

1382 – Present

“Liberty With Law”

History Is God's Story of *Liberty*

To view history correctly is to view it biblically, and to view history biblically is to view it providentially. By God's act of creation, all things are rightly His, to rule in accordance with His good pleasure. God's supreme authority over the universe naturally leads to the idea that He has an overriding hand in all of its affairs. God is not a detached monarch, distant and removed from His subjects. He is a personal God, conscious of and overruling in every detail. He is intimately involved in history, for it is “His Story,” not man's.¹

History, then, is not haphazard or accidental. It occurs as God planned. History is not a string of striking episodes, with no other connection but that of time. The events of history are not by chance. We may go back to the underlying cause of every event and discover in each God's intervening wisdom. We see men planning and working with only their own immediate and material interests in view, and, yet a power behind them is noiselessly and effectually overruling their action, to the furtherance of higher, more permanent purposes.²

But what are those purposes? Before one begins turning the pages of time, he should preview the book. Before one observes the particulars, he must consider the whole. What is the big picture of the story of God? What great thread has He been weaving throughout the time of earth's people and nations? Who is the main character, and what is the plot that drives the drama?

By the light of divine Providence, *history is clearly seen as the story of liberty*. One cannot read the Scriptures without recognizing that God loves liberty. He created the angelic host with the freedom to choose whether or not to love and serve Him. We know that Lucifer chose to rebel. The Lord also created mankind with liberty. Again, God gave man the freedom to choose whether or not to love and serve Him, and, once again, His creation chose to rebel. However, even after man forfeited his liberty, God was gracious enough to give it back in time. He sent His Son to die so that mankind could be free again. Thus, it is obvious that God loves liberty.

To be more specific, history is the story of two liberties, one primary and internal, the other secondary and external. The former is spiritual liberty; the latter, civil liberty. Spiritual liberty is the freedom of the spirit from sin and death. In a word, it is *salvation*. Civil liberty is the freedom to live without the oppression of an external ruler. In a word, it is *self-government*. How can man be saved and how can he establish a society that allows him to govern himself? Those are two ageless questions that man has sought to answer.

What does history look like, then, in light of these two liberties? In the beginning, man was created with both spiritual and civil liberty. He was free from sin and he was allowed to govern himself without oppression. Yet, because of his rebellion against God, man forfeited both liberties. Consequently, to check the inclinations of man's savage heart required external force – depraved humanity ruling

History Is God's Story of *Liberty*



Statesman Alexis de Tocqueville

“Christianity is the companion of *liberty*, the cradle of its infancy and the source of all its claims.”

Democracy in America, 1840

THE STORY OF LIBERTY

Ancient History

The loss of man's spiritual and civil liberty and God's preparation for the coming of Christ

Middle History

Man receives spiritual liberty through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

Medieval History

The preservation of spiritual liberty and the first glimpse at civil liberty through the Magna Carta

Modern History

Spiritual and civil liberty reunite and bear fruit in America

2 Corinthians 3:17

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Galatians 5:1

“It was for freedom that Christ set you free; therefore, do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery.”

^{1,3,7} Katherine Dang, *Ancient History*

² G.G. Hebbe, *Universal History, 1948*

depraved humanity – which was harsh and cruel. Neither intellectual cultivation (Athenians), nor militant self-discipline (Spartans), nor an advanced political structure (Romans) was able to overcome human depravity. Thus, Ancient History contains man's endless struggle with his inhumanity, the rise of one despot after another, and a savage record of law without liberty.³

Thank God that He did not leave mankind in that state forever. Middle History marks the turning point of His Story, the end of the Pagan Era and the beginning of the Christian Era. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, to redeem man from sin and to restore the gift of spiritual liberty. Thus, the climax of history is the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. He is the focal point, the main character. The law of life, which is Christ, set men free from the law of sin and death.⁴

Calvary has always been the birthplace of liberty. The world's hopeless enslavement to sin and oppression was undone by the freedom of the individual. Calvary is the beginning of the end of the wretchedness of spiritual bondage and its consequences. As Christianity entered upon the scene, it brought into the world a revolutionary form of government – *self-government*, the government of God through Christ indwelling the individual.⁵ The power of Christ in individuals turned the world right-side up!

In principle, spiritual and political slavery were overthrown, and mankind gained real hope of reversing the inherent, downward spiral toward self-destruction. As spiritual bondage is the foundation upon which despotisms are built, so is spiritual liberty the foundation upon which free nations are built. The capacity men have for civil liberty (self-government) is to be

measured by the extent to which they live in spiritual liberty (salvation). Liberty is the internal, operative work of the Gospel upon the hearts of men. Its power, which sets men free internally, likewise sets them free externally.⁶

Once men obtained spiritual liberty through Christ in Middle History, he soon set his sights on civil liberty in Medieval and Modern History. When the Bible was made available to Englishmen, they began to recognize and defend their natural God-given rights to liberty. Those rights were first expressed in 1215, in an unprecedented document called the Magna Carta.

No other factor will propel the progress of liberty further than placing the Word of God into the hands of men. Political changes happened immediately after the Reformation, with the English Separatist (Pilgrim) leading the way. This freeman of New England became the New Testament man of liberty for the modern age. With Bible in heart and hand, the colonists developed and executed the principles of Christian self-government. Then, the United States was founded upon the capacity of its people for individual self-government (civil liberty), an expression of their faith in Christ (spiritual liberty).⁷

God loves liberty. It is clear that His story is about liberty, of the miraculous power of Christ to free men both internally and externally. It is also clear that America has a unique role in that story of liberty – the only place, since the Garden of Eden, where men have experienced both spiritual and civil liberty. Let us not view this truth with pride. Rather let us consider the heavy responsibility we have as Americans to protect and promote God's wonderful gift of liberty.