

INTRODUCTION

*"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,
that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."*

Romans 15:4

A proverb says, "History repeats itself," and in spite of the alleged universal acceptance of this statement, many do not recognize its truth.

"Peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it." --G. W. F. Hegel

"Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." --H. G. Wells

Though the Bible is mainly history, it is not like human products. Being "divine history," it does not suffer from the defects of secular history. In one of His last prayers before His death, Jesus said to God, *"Thy word is truth"* (John 17:17). The errors of fallible human memory and prejudicial human manipulation do not materially afflict the Bible. Jesus promised his Apostles, *"...The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you"* (John 14:26). A Spirit-assisted memory is a blessing that many might crave today, but it was promised only to those inspired men. Another companion promise made by Jesus reads, *"Heaven*

and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). The preservation of the words of Christ is enforced by the almighty power of God, so that human error cannot infiltrate them. This promise cannot fail, nor will it be rescinded.

The Bible's effectiveness as a "teaching history," however, depends on man's acceptance of its truthfulness. As an example of this, Stephen, after accurately rehearsing a number of Bible events before an angry mob of opponents, said, *"You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, You do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do you...you who received the law as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not"* (Acts 7:51,53). We see, then, that even when words were "ordained by angels," and accurately reported the evils practiced by their fathers, some did not respect them, or obey them.

If we find Bible history "tedious," and consider forsaking the study of it, remember ...human histories can be rejected as biased, or mistrusted as unreliable, but Bible history, being the revelation of a God "who cannot lie," demands acceptance. It is reliable and educational, even if it is referring to something that seems fantastic to the modern mind, such as miracles. Jesus, in whom we say we believe, and in whom we trust for salvation, confirmed the integrity of the miraculous "histories" of Noah's flood (Matthew 24:37-39), the sustaining of the widow of Zarephath, and the cure of the leprous Syrian, Naaman (Luke 4:25-27). Denying the truthfulness of Bible testimony regarding miracles is the same as rejecting the integrity of Christ who confirmed its truthfulness.

Though we can rely on the accuracy of Bible history, we must also make a study of the events of church history after the close of the New Testament, especially if we want to learn what happened during the periods of the "galloping" Apostasy and the "crawling" Reformation (which we propose to do). For this purpose, we will have to rely on the integrity of human, uninspired writers. We will expect them to be somewhat biased, and capable of error, for no human being is without a measure of these faults. However, many authors of religious histories have won reputations for integrity through the years, and we are willing to put a reasonable amount of trust in what they have recorded.

In this book, we will often quote Philip Schaff, a famous religious historian, who says...

"Finally, the history of the church has practical value for every Christian, as a storehouse of warning and encouragement, of consolation and counsel.

It is the philosophy of facts, Christianity in living examples. If history in general be...as Diodorus calls it, 'the handmaid of providence, the priestess of truth, and the mother of wisdom,' the history of the kingdom of heaven is all these in the highest degree." (History of the Christian Church, Vol. 1, p. 21.)

Mr. Schaff approaches his subject with a high degree of enthusiasm. We agree with him on his stated premise, but knowing the perversity of men in general, we will be more cautious and less enthusiastic in our approach to the subject, less quick to praise apostates, and we may frequently frown on the foolish foibles of men in religion. We will reserve our praise for those historical characters who contributed something valuable to the recovery of abandoned truth, and will shed a tear over every hindrance erected by man against it. Our standard of truth will be the Bible, especially the New Testament, and, following the rule of Romans 3:4, "*Let God be found true and every man a liar*," we will test every man's words by it.