

## God Has Revealed Himself in History

As important as ethical teachings are to Christianity, the Christian faith is not a belief system based on ethical teachings only. Nor is it based *primarily* on ethical teachings. It is critical for us to understand this. Two characteristics of the Christian faith set it apart from other religions. First, it is a belief system that rests on God's activity in history, and second, it has the Person of Jesus Christ as its central focus. Who Jesus was and is, and what He did—these combined elements placed against the backdrop of God's working in history—form the linchpin of Christianity.

Here let's consider why history is so important. When someone says something like, "The Bible is not primarily a book of science, history, philosophy, or moral teachings, but a book of faith," he or she minimizes the Bible's authority. This is perhaps done unintentionally, but the effect is real. Yes, there is an element of truth in such a statement, but the statement still distorts more truth than it presents. It is not even helpful to call the Bible a book of faith. Here's why. The Bible actually is a record of God's revelation of truth about Himself, the world, humanity, sin, life, death, eternity, and many other things. Faith is important because we are wise to respond to God's revelation by believing it and by acting accordingly.

Whenever and wherever the words of God's revelation in the Bible speak to history, philosophy, science, or any other field of knowledge or study, it speaks accurately and reliably; so God's revelation in Scripture is worthy of our faith (see Titus 1:2). This is not to say that we don't take into account the various literary forms used in Scripture. Metaphors are used and should be understood in their context. Poetry conveys meaning in ways prose does not. Often the Bible speaks in generalities and not with scientific precision (see Luke 13:19; see the article titled "Roofs in First Century

Palestine"). We should take all these things into account when interpreting the Bible, knowing they do not negate or diminish the trustworthiness of anything the Scriptures say.

Having said all of this, we should note the uniqueness of Christianity with regard to history. When we say the Bible is a Book of God's revealed truth about Himself, we are not saying that we can go to the Scriptures and read descriptions God gave about Himself; the Lord did not reveal Himself in a series of descriptive essays. He unveiled Himself in history, in the context of interactions with real people at specific times and in specific places. Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, and Isaiah are but a few of the people with whom God interacted.

The Bible is a trustworthy record of such interactions, and in this sense it is a history book. This is one reason the Israelites were repeatedly commanded to remember God's acts of deliverance and provision (see Ex. 13:3; Deut. 16:1-3; Josh. 4:1-9 for three examples).

God's revelation of Himself climaxed with the arrival of His Son, Jesus, on earth. Jesus was the ultimate in divine revelation (see Heb. 1:1-4). As had been the case before, in God's Son, divine revelation occurred in specific places during a window of time in history. After Jesus returned to heaven, God continued to work in peoples' lives through the Holy Spirit. This, too, He did in history. So we cannot divorce Christianity from history or vice versa. And today, God continues to reveal Himself—through His Word, His Spirit, His church, and His committed followers. Today we are privileged to see His story continue to unfold—even though the window of time for the formation of God's written revelation, the Bible, is closed.

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