

THE REMNANT

There are many different theories of history.

Some argue that history is *progressive*: that mankind is gradually building a better world for himself and will one day be able to create a perfect society. During the 19th Century, major advances in science and technology seemed to provide evidence for that theory and as the 20th Century dawned, the progressives were full of optimism. But two brutal world wars showed that science and technology could be used to kill and maim people as well as help them and that dealt a major blow to the optimism of the progressives. Other historians have proposed that history is *cyclical*: that certain patterns of human behavior repeat themselves over and over again. Karl Marx argued that all history consisted of a struggle between economic classes, with the working class oppressed by those who possessed land and capital. He proposed that the only way to establish economic justice would be to abolish private ownership of property and let the government divide wealth evenly among the citizens. Outside of North Korea, Cuba and American universities, however, that theory has ended up on the ash heap of history, as one of our former presidents famously predicted.

Yet another theory is that history is determined by powerful, charismatic leaders who attract large followings and impose their will upon civilization through war and conquest. In other words, history is written by great leaders. Figures like Napoleon, Charlemagne, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar come to mind. And there are other theories as well.

But there's only one explanation of history which is set forth by the Author of History Himself, and you will find it in the Bible. According to the Bible, human history is divided into three stages. The first state is recorded in the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis, which describe God's creation of man, man's rebellion against God, and the corruption of man's nature which resulted from his being separated from God. The corruption was complete; man became totally and willfully sinful. God described the extent of man's sinfulness in *Genesis 6:5*: "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." At the end of the first stage of human history, mankind was perishing in its own sinfulness and spiritual darkness reigned over the earth.

The second stage of history began with the story of Abraham, through whom God's launched His plan to save mankind from self-destruction.

Through Abraham God raised up a people called the Israelites through whom He would bless all the other peoples of the earth. He said to Abraham: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." He gave the Israelites a code of law to live by and a form of worship through which their transgressions of that law would be forgiven. They would be His church and their mission would be to broadcast the knowledge of God and of His salvation to the rest of mankind. He blessed them abundantly and encouraged them to lead Godly lives as a witness to His glory. By doing this, they would serve as a light to the nations. But instead of living Godly lives the Israelites lived ungodly lives. They ignored God's laws and polluted the form of worship He had given them by mixing it up with pagan worship. They sank to levels of depravity that, according to Ezekiel were worse than those pagan nations. God sent prophet after prophet to remind them of the mission He had given them and warn them of the consequences of ignoring it. But they ignored the prophets and continued in their rebellious ways. And as time passed, darkness once again gathered over Israel. But God cannot be mocked and His plan could not be thwarted and he found another way to send His light into the world. He kept a faithful remnant, a small body of Israelites who honored His laws, refused to worship pagan idols and continued to worship Him. Through this remnant, God kept His light shining in the darkness.

He sent prophets to encourage them by revealing his plan to them—His plan to save mankind from self-destruction. He promised that even if Israel collectively failed to honor his commands and fulfill the mission He had given them, He would send a very special Israelite who would succeed where corporate Israel had failed. He would be called the Messiah, and He would deliver God's blessing to Abraham to all the peoples of the earth. He would illuminate the world and be the glory of His people Israel. And as the second stage of history ended, the remnant were holding high hopes for the arrival of the Messiah. God never gives up on mankind but will do everything within his infinite power to save them from themselves.

The third stage of history is recorded in the *New Testament*, which began with the arrival of the Messiah. He was God's own Son and He came to bring salvation from sin to the ends of the earth. He gathered His own faithful remnant—twelve men He called Apostles—and sent them out to carry the good news of salvation to the rest of mankind. They would be the beginning of a new Israel, a new church which would broadcast God's light to the nations.

And the twelve became hundreds and the hundreds became thousands and the thousands became millions and the entire earth was lit up with their message of salvation. But as the centuries passed, the darkness began to return. The Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ came to be buried under a plethora of laws and human traditions. Then the light of the Reformation burst forth and the Gospel once again had free reign.

In the modern age, however, the darkness has returned with a vengeance. God's *New Testament* church, the church of the Gospel, has become as corrupt as His *Old Testament* church. The evil one--the source of all darkness--is relentless and has succeeded in rolling back the armies of the faithful on just about every front. Under the assault of materialism, political correctness, cynicism, paganism and just plain worldly apathy, membership in Christian churches has shrunk significantly--especially in the last twenty years. What is worse, many of the churches that call themselves Christian have abandoned the Word of God and are making up their own theology. They are preaching the zeitgeist--the spirit of the times--glomming on to whatever fashionable social trend they find attractive. They remind me of the man of whom it was said that the best idea he ever had was the last one he heard. There's a saying that where God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel, and nowadays many of the chapels are drawing more worshippers than the churches. In addition to this, some popular social reformers of our time are aiming their guns at Bible-based churches. LGBTQ leaders have called the Bible a "hate-filled book" because it condemns homosexual practices and have said that anyone who believes it to be the Word of God is a bigot. Pastors and churches have been sued and taken to court for declining to perform homosexual marriages. Advocates of abortion rail against pro-life churches. The Bible clearly prophesies that the antichrists of this world--all the powers that strive to draw man's worship away from Jesus Christ and silence the preaching of the Gospel--will, in the short run, succeed.

What has been happening will continue to happen and will probably get worse. Meanwhile, to quote a pastor you are familiar with, the world will continue to go to hell in a handbasket. What, then of those of us who see this happening and wring our hands and cast a despairing eye upon the future? What of our children and our grandchildren who may experience things far worse than we are seeing now? With the culture turning its considerable power against the church, how will their faith survive?

The answer is that God always preserves a remnant.

Through the darkest days of the period of the Old Covenant, God preserved a remnant, and He will do so again.

But it's time for us to realize that we are the remnant.

The age of prophecy is over; there will be no new Messiah to come. When Messiah Jesus returns, the age of grace will be over and there will be only judgment.

As in the *Old Testament* era, God's light in the current age of grace now shines only through His remnant. We are that remnant, that light, and if we don't shine, where will the light come from? Jesus Himself told us that when the Gospel has been proclaimed to all who have ears to hear it, the end will come. So it's time to let Jesus shine in our lives! I'm fully aware that Easter sermons are supposed to be more celebratory and Gospel-oriented than this one has been. And I wish that I could stand here and preach only good news to you on this day of the resurrection of our Lord. But I've come to the conviction that we can no longer put our heads in the sand and pretend that things are spiritually healthy in our country. A battle is going on and there is no DMZ, no "safe space" between us and those who attack and slander the church of Jesus Christ. Increasingly, you will be faced with the choice between speaking up for Him or consenting to their attacks by remaining silent. You will have to choose between proud of Jesus or ashamed of Him. That is the challenge that God lays at the feet of every believer. When it comes, you can say along with Peter: "I don't know Him." Or you can say, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

