

“Historian Michael A.G. Haykin welcomes us into his world of historical peculiarities, fascinating biographies, and intriguing stories. These enriching readings provide a window into divine providence as it unfolds in God’s grand redemptive history. While scholarly in substance, *The Weekly Historian* is wonderfully readable, carefully accessible, and will no doubt ignite your curiosity for more as you discover your place in God’s story.”

Dustin Benge, Associate Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Historical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY; Senior Fellow of The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies.

“*The Weekly Historian: 52 Reflections on Christian History* is the latest book from the prolific pen of Michael A.G. Haykin. The book is a ‘taster of the riches of the past history of Christianity.’ This ‘taster’ will whet your appetite for more such nourishing food from the banquet table of church history, one covered with scrolls, books, pen, and ink. From papyrus to purple and from Macarius to Spurgeon, you will encounter fascinating subjects and intriguing characters in *Weekly*. My favorite chapter is ‘A Frantic Passion for Purple.’ Haykin’s interest in color is not the odd curiosity of an out-of-touch historian, but a lesson in the providence of God in the advancement of the gospel. I plan to read *The Weekly Historian* to my daughters and I anticipate loving every minute of such a happy endeavor. Read this book for the sheer pleasure of the experience but also as a means to better understand the present and to more courageously face the future via these delightful stories of the past.”

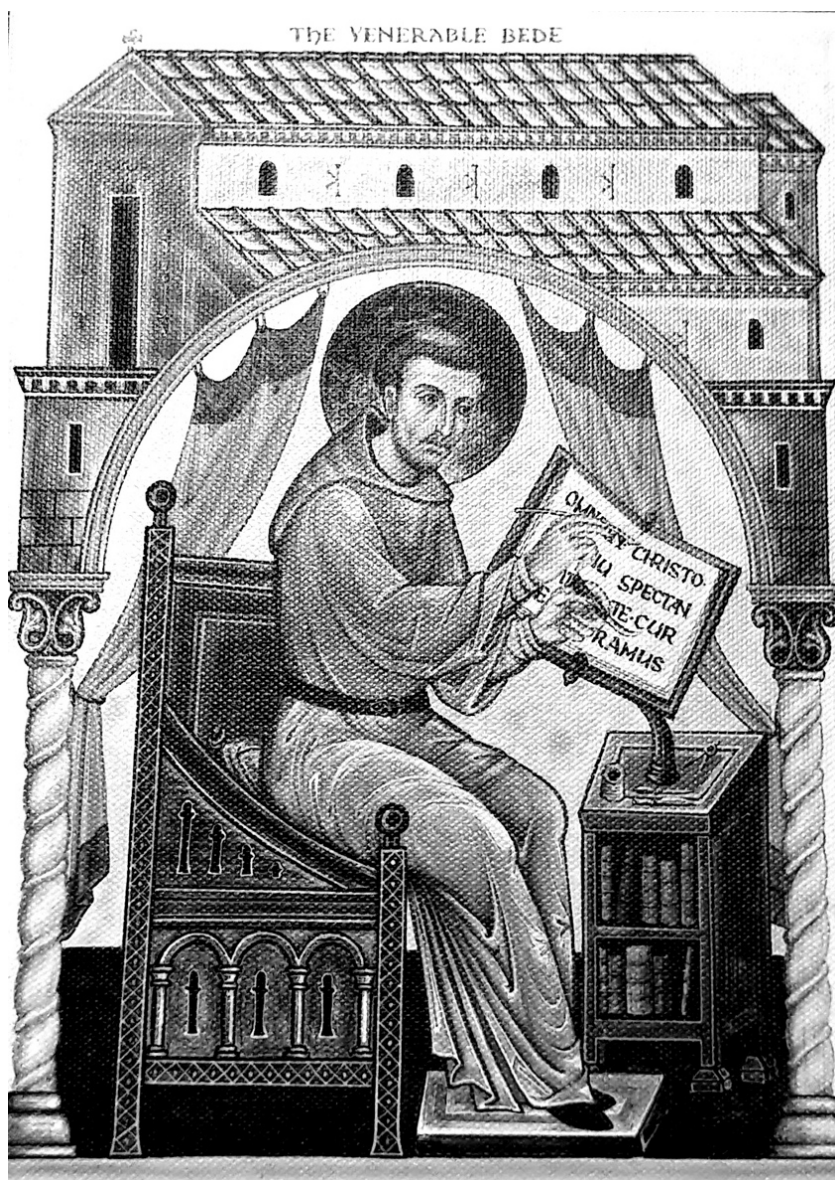
Ray Rhodes, Jr., author of *Yours, till Heaven, the Untold Love Story of Charles and Susie Spurgeon* and *Susie: The Life and Legacy of Susannah Spurgeon* from Moody Publishers. He is also author of an upcoming biography of Charles Spurgeon, scheduled for 2024 from B&H Academic.

“Imagine going on a sight-seeing tour alongside a world-renowned photographer. What sort of pictures would he take? and would you not be eager to see the treasure trove of his camera roll? It is in much the same vein that one might view Dr. Michael A.G. Haykin’s sight-seeing tour through church history in his latest gem, *The Weekly Historian*. This book is a delicious feast of history and theology through the eye and pen of one of our most eminent modern divines. Each entry is full of intrigue, insight, and inspiration. Any library without this book is incomplete.”

Nate Pickowicz, pastor of Harvest Bible Church, Gilmanton Iron Works, New Hampshire; author of the upcoming *R.C. Sproul: Defender of the Reformed Faith* (H&E, 2022).

“In *The Weekly Historian: 52 Reflections on Church History*, Dr. Michael Haykin agrees with the eighteenth-century Baptist leader, Caleb Evans, that ‘Every Christian ought to be a good historian.’ This book will help. While not an exhaustive survey, *The Weekly Historian* is a trusted guide into some of the most important people and events of church history. Haykin’s expertise allows him to do fine history in accessible snapshots that will spur the reader on to further study and a deeper appreciation for the Christian’s shared history—a most noble enterprise.”

Michael E. Pohlman, Associate Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Ministry and Chair, Department of Ministry and Proclamation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; co-host of the weekly podcast *Bede: History for the Church*.



The Venerable Bede



MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN



The Weekly Historian

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Published by: H&E Publishing, Peterborough, Ontario
www.hesedandemet.com

Cover design by Corey M.K. Hughes

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-77484-046-7

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-77484-047-4

To Matthew Hall and Hershael York once again:

For the joy of serving as a church historian at
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
under their leadership

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Introduction

A pithy remark by Caleb Evans, the eighteenth-century Baptist leader, which I read in the course of preparation for my doctoral comprehensive examinations in 1977–1978 has stayed with me over the years: “Every Christian ought to be a good historian.” At the time I had no idea who Evans was, nor the significance of his life and ministry for the English Baptist cause in his day. He made this remark in the course of a sermon that he preached on November 5, 1778, which was entitled *The Remembrance of Former Days*. November 5 was the day that the Roman Catholic Guy Fawkes’ plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605 was discovered and foiled. It was also the day when William of Orange landed in Torbay in 1688 and went on to execute a successful coup d’état against his father-in-law, the Catholic James II, and so ensured that the British throne would remain within the realm of Protestantism. So, for these two reasons, ardent Protestants like Evans in the eighteenth century celebrated the remembrance of these momentous events with an annual sermon and worship. Evans’ 1778 sermon was a call to his “ordinary” Christian hearers to read history and remember it, for in truth they were surrounded by its impact day after day. In Evans’ words: “Every Christian ought to be a good historian, and if his knowledge of history be improved by him as it ought, the better historian he is, the better Christian will he be.”

Well, this weekly reader is designed to help you become “a good historian” in the way that Evans desired. These 52 weekly reflections, each of which takes but a few minutes to read, are a reminder of how important history—in this case, actually, church history—is for the believer. The first reading for the first week of the year is actually a mini-defence of why we should read church history regularly. The remaining 51 reflections then go through the Patristic and Medieval eras (Weeks 2–16), the sixteenth-century Reformation (Weeks 17–32), Puritanism and early Evangelicalism to the close of the eighteenth century (Weeks 33–49), with the remaining three reflections focused on people and events of the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries (Weeks 50–52). These weekly reflections very much mirror eras in which I am especially interested and about which I have written widely: late Antiquity and evangelical Protestantism from the Reformation to the long eighteenth century.

If this book were intended to be an overview of church history, it would be quite inadequate. But it is not meant to be a survey of church history. Rather, consider it a taster of the riches of the past history of Christianity, which hopefully will lead you to further reading and discoveries. There are also some common themes that appear, which again reflect my doctrinal interests: biblicism, the Trinity and pneumatology, the need for revival. Again, these hardly exhaust the riches of Christian thought. They are meant to spur you on to reflect upon the way Christians have thought upon other vital matters, such as Christology, ethics, and political theology. Finally, given the nature of this weekly reader, I have not included in its pages the dates of the various figures I refer to and cite (these can be easily found online). Nor have I retained that key element of my apparatus as an academic historian, the footnote or endnote. I do quote various historical figures and contemporary historians, but because of the nature of this work (and the way that the reflections originally appeared), I have chosen not to include either footnotes or endnotes.

Most of these reflections appeared first in a monthly column that I have been privileged to write for the English Christian newspaper, *Evangelicals Now* (<https://www.e-n.org.uk/>), and are gratefully reprinted here by permission. A few of the others had their origin on a blog that I once maintained, *Historia ecclesiastica* (named after the famous work by the Anglo-Saxon historian Bede, whose picture graces the frontispiece of the book). And finally, one or two originated in *Tabletalk*, the Bible study magazine of Ligonier Ministries, which are also reprinted by kind permission.

The images in the book are in the public domain, having been taken from Wikimedia Commons or the New York Public Library bank of digitized images. A few are from the author's private collection. One image, that of Katherine Willoughby, the Duchess of Suffolk, is used by permission of Alamy.

“Every Christian ought to be a good historian”

Though it was written two hundred years ago, Jane Austen’s fiction is still popular since so much of it still rings true to human experience. In her novel *Northanger Abbey* (1817), for instance, the heroine Catherine Morland makes a statement that is amazingly prescient about the modern boredom with history. In Catherine’s words, history “tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome.” Many in the modern world, sadly even Christians, see the past as little more than this: a tiresome account of a few big names with little wisdom to impart for life today. At best, it may offer a couple of hours of entertainment and diversion via a movie or a novel.

History, important to God

How different is the Bible’s perspective on the past. Here, history is obviously important to God, since it is the realm where God ultimately brings about the salvation of his people by entering into the very fabric of time and taking on our humanity, sin excepted, in the person of Jesus Christ. This divine activity in the realm of history should not be restricted to the Bible. Though it is impossible to trace out his footsteps across the sands of time in detail, it is blasphemous to deny that God is at work. His work may often be hidden, but it is biblical to confess that he is providentially guiding history for the glory of his Name and the good of his people. As such, to quote the seventeenth-century Puritan Richard Baxter, “The writing of Church-history is the duty of all ages, because God’s works are to be known, as well as his Word.” Reading Church history should lead therefore to the praise of God and his adoration.

The individual and history

Men and women are historical beings, immersed in the flow of time. Without the past our lives have little or no meaning. When a community forgets its past, it is like a person suffering from dementia: they really cannot function in the world. So we must study history, and as Christians, this means Church history.

This reading of the history of God's people can also provide us with models for imitation. For instance, in Hebrews 11-12:2, the writer uses the history of God's faithful people in the old covenant to encourage his readers to run the "foot-race" of faith. He wants them to draw encouragement from the lives of past believers to press on in faith and obedience towards the final goal.

And we soon discover that this story of the past is not simply that of an elite few, but encompasses every believer's life and that we can learn as much from the so-called minor figures of Church History as from the "big names." As the American apologist Francis Schaeffer reminds us: with God there are no little people!

History—a path to humility & freedom

Studying church history also builds a deep sense of indebtedness to others who have gone before us, and thus helps to cultivate the great virtue of humility. The study of our past informs us about our predecessors in the faith, those who have helped shape our Christian communities and thus make us what we are. Such study builds humility and modesty into our lives, and so can exercise a sanctifying influence upon us. Jesus put it this way in John 4: "Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour" (ESV).

The study of Church history also liberates us from the tyranny of present-day ideas, what C.S. Lewis calls "the idols of our marketplace." Consider Francis of Assisi's attitude towards poverty. For him the word "poverty" (*paupertas*) was a bride to be embraced since he believed that it gave him true freedom. For modern Westerners, Christian and pagan alike, poverty is generally viewed as an unmitigated economic disaster that places severe limitations on one's freedom. This example reveals the way that Church History can call into question what we take for granted as an absolute and reveal it to be merely relative and culture-bound.

Little wonder then that the eighteenth-century, evangelical Baptist Caleb Evans once said that "every Christian ought to be a good historian."

On papyrus

The Bible is bound up with history in many ways. One of them is the basic way that the Bible has come down to us. The most prominent medium by which the Scriptures were recorded for us was on papyrus, which is largely unique to the Nile Delta in Egypt and began to be used for writing books as far back as the third millennium BC.

Making the papyrus scroll

Papyrus is a reed that grows between 7 and 16 feet in height and has a long three-sided stalk without joints, which is roughly the thickness of the human wrist. It is amazing to think that someone in the third millennium looked at this plant and thought, “I could use that for writing.” Due to its vital use in recording the Scriptures, one can see the providential hand of God at work in its discovery as a medium for writing.

To make it into a writing material, the hard, outer shell was cut away. This revealed the softer pithy centre, which the Greek called *biblos*, the word from which our term “Bible” ultimately derives. This centre was then cut into thin strips. These were placed side by side on a hard, smooth surface, while other strips were placed at right angles in a layer over them. These two layers were then fused by means of a press that broke down the cellular structure of the papyrus fibres and released the juice of the pithy centre that acted as a glue. This formed a sheet that was then dried, trimmed, and the surface smoothed out with pumice. The size of a single sheet ranged from 4 inches to 11 inches in width and from 8 inches to a foot in length. For a biblical reference to a single sheet, see 2 John 12.

The next step in the manufacturing process was to paste individual sheets together to form a longer strip, which was then rolled up as a scroll with wooden dowels at either end. One side had the fibres running horizontally—this would be called the recto. The other side, which had the fibres running vertically, was called the verso. A flour paste was used to join the separate sheets.

A standard roll had about twenty sheets and ran to about eleven and a

half feet. The strip of glued sheets was rolled up with the recto, the intended side for writing, facing inwards for protection. Writing on both sides of the papyrus was quite unusual. It is thus interesting that the scroll mentioned in Revelation 5:1 was “written on the inside [the recto] and on the back [the verso].”

It is reckoned that the two longest books of the New Testament—Luke and Acts—would have filled scrolls of about 30 to 32 feet in length. Not surprisingly, one of the librarians at the famed Library of Alexandria, Callimachus, used to say, “A big book [scroll] is a big nuisance”

Once a papyrus scroll was produced, it was often wrapped in cloth or leather and stored in some kind of container, usually a jar.

Alexandria and books

Since most papyrus grew in the Nile Delta, Egypt eventually came to supply papyrus for the most of the Mediterranean world and it became a major book production centre. In fact, the library of Alexandria was deemed one of the wonders of the Ancient World and made Alexandria a centre for scholarship.

The great third-century Bible exegete Origen, who played a critical role in the defence of the Old Testament as Scripture in the face of the rejection of it by the various heretical groups known as the Gnostics, did much of his early studies in this remarkable city.

The autographs

All of the original copies of the books of the New Testament, which scholars call “autographs,” were written on papyrus. Currently, there are 97 papyri of various portions of the New Testament extant. The oldest is called p⁵²—which dates from AD 125—and contains a portion of the Gospel of John, namely, John 18:31–33, 37–38. Virtually no other book from the Ancient World is so well attested as our New Testament.

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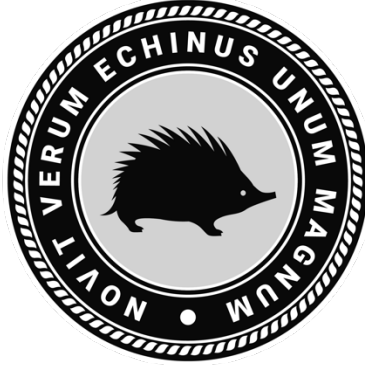
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Among the fragmentary sayings of the ancient Greek author Archilochus, born on the Greek island of Paros in the eighth/seventh century BC, is this cryptic statement, πολλὰ οἶδ' ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ' ἐχῖνος ἓν μέγα (“the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one great thing”). The Dutch theologian Erasmus later translated the Greek into Latin thus: *Multa novit vulpes, verum echinus unum magnum*. The saying was given a degree of currency in the modern day by its use in a famous essay by Isaiah Berlin entitled *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), in which he divided historians and thinkers into foxes, those authors whose thought has no central focus, and hedgehogs, those thinkers and historians who subsume their thought under one great idea. The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, of which the author, Michael Haykin, is the director, took a portion of this saying—*novit verum echinus unum magnum*—for its motto a few years ago.