



The Light and the Glory: Did God Have a Plan for America?

Peter Marshall , David Manuel

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Peter Marshall and David Manuel explore the Christian foundations of American history, considering God's special role in America's creation and its implications for today.

The Light and the Glory: Did God Have a Plan for America? Details

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From Reader Review The Light and the Glory: Did God Have a Plan for America? for online ebook

J. says

An enjoyable read and a compelling story. It's too bad the authors proceed with such little concern for historical accuracy, reprinting any anecdote (however unsubstantiated) that supports their interpretation and failing to deal with evidence that conflicts with it.

Yes, many of America's founders were devout Christians. Yes, the United States government was constructed in a civilizational context deeply influenced by Christianity. But Marshall and Manuel carry their argument to baseless, inaccurate, and (quite frankly) dangerous lengths.

It's worth reading this book just because of its cultural and political impact on a generation (and a half) of Christian homeschoolers. It's well-written and gripping. But it would be irresponsible to take it uncritically as historical fact.

Benjamin Alexander says

I think this series is the best series you can read to your children about God's history with America.. That I know of.. They are good writers and they craft a great story so largely based on good historical research. Some of their presuppositions are off with their odd view that God had a particular covenant with America as a nation akin to that of Israel, but on the whole you're not going to find a better blend of thorough history with a beautiful consistency around genuine Christianity..

lysslyss says

Historically-speaking this book was a wealth of information. It's based more from a Christian viewpoint. There were a few things I didn't agree with, ie. the fact that America is the 'new Israel'. However, the authors made it a point to show how God's hand was in the forming of our country, and how the foundations of our country were built on morals and ethics.

The book was NOT an easy read as it was close to 300 pages and wasn't really engaging. There were some amusing parts, but it was overall a serious, straightforward book. Well written, but not something I would read again. I picked it up once a week and it felt like a chore. Finally finished it after almost a year

David Holford says

I originally read this book in an American history course at a Christian college. At the time, I probably would have given it four stars. With hindsight and a graduate school education in Colonial and Revolutionary America, and aged much more than 17 as I was at the time, I'm much less impressed.

If David Barton had a patron saint, it would be the late Peter Marshall. They are from the same mold of historical eisegesis. They know the result they want and an eclectic set of period quotes "prove" it. Unfortunately, history is not the sum total of quotes.

This book is one of the early examples of populist Christian history which does a disservice to real history, which, when demonstrated by proper research, isn't that much less Christian in terms of the personalities and policies. The problem is that history is the result of the decisions made by all of the people - even if just all of the people in political power - and not a select few.

Ron says

"God would provide grace commensurate with the call."

An excellent development of one exceptionalist view of the founding of the United States of America. Written in 1977, some cultural references now seem either quaint or prescient. Like *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Fully Updated*, this book draws heavily from primary sources (eyewitness accounts, letters and journals, not just other histories), in this case to argue for divine participation in the discovery and development of America.

"What if God had conceived a special plan for America?"

This book has an agenda. The subtitle reveals it. Naïve readers may miss that this isn't purely history. It's "historicism." (Wikipedia has a good description.) Historicism views history through a lens of a priori (preconceived) rules. Hegel did it. Marx did it. Marshall and Manuel do it. Marshall and Manuel are not deterministic; Marx and Hegel were.

To be honest, everyone who sees cause and effect relationships in human affairs engages in historicism, even/especially the writers of history. What you see often depends on what you're looking for. What you're looking for stems from who you are; what is real and true to you. As discussed in my blog "Defense of Reading Fiction 104," realities differ. The empiricists ("what you see is what you get") may not be as right as they think. Reality may be more--much more--than what we experience with our senses. (Another discussion for another time.)

"... raised the curtain for a drama far different from that which God had in mind for America."

Having said that, Marshall and Manuel do a good job marshalling their facts to support their premise. They explore where history doesn't support their narrative and dig deeper to find why. Each chapter opens with an entertaining chat about where their research was or was not taking them. Clearly, Marshall and Manuel recognize that the plan went off the rails several times, and seems to be in jeopardy now/then. That's the point of writing it. They examine their hypothesis warts and all; this is not a hagiography.

"We learned ... not to believe that someone felt strongly about Christianity, simple because he said he did."

Quibbles: Their narrative is New England centric, despite George Washington's central role. Northern Puritans and patriots are praised as heroes. Patrick Henry, a devout Virginia patriot, is labeled (libeled?) as a "political opportunist." They neglect the critical contribution of Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians, which would have strengthened their argument.

“Well-ordered families naturally produce good order in society,” Cotton Mather.

This is how history used to be taught in American schools. Some will praise it's passing, but it's instructive to understand this formerly-dominant interpretation of the nation's founding and imputed destiny.

“We as a people have thrown away our Christian heritage.”

Jeannie Romanello says

I am reading this book, as a devotional. I have had it for years and have tried to read it many times before... always thinking to myself... this is just so boring.

Well, I may be mature enough now to read it and thoroughly enjoy it. Though not done I just have to review it has a family & friend MUST READ.

Christianity is a power religion. Christ has the power to re-create men from the inside out, as every man who has ever met Him knows. And one of the early lessons a new Christian learns through experience is that the power of Christ is greater than the power of the Enemy. When Jesus shed His blood on the Cross, He broke the back of Satan's power, then, now and forever. One of the ways God teaches a Christian this is by letting Satan harass him, to the point where he calls out to his Saviour- and discovers that, in the name of Jesus, he has authority over the greatest powers of hell!

For that reason, Satan avoids open confrontations with seasoned Christians wherever possible. He will send his dupes and unwitting servants to do his dirty work, and he will indirectly concentrate his most cunning wiles on breaking down citadels of Light from within, on the ground of hidden sin. The only place where he can safely flaunt his power openly is where men do not know that he is a defeated foe- or where faith in Christ has grown dim. pg 235 THE LIGHT AND THE GLORY Did God have a plan for America? What an awesome read this book is!!!

Annette says

Summary:

The secular world has tried hard to erase any reference to God, especially in regards to the founding of America. They laugh at Christians who believe God had a plan for the nation of America. Public schools and the textbooks used for students are void of reference to Judeo-Christian values that are taught in the Bible. For Christian parents, they struggle with making a right choice in teaching children the full history of America.

The Light and The Glory began with the early European discoverers of America: Christopher Columbus, the Franciscan friars, Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, Robert Hunt, and John Smith. The Puritan period leading up to the American Revolution, and George Washington as the nation's first president, is in the first installment of God's Plan for America series.

In the first chapter, Peter Marshall and David Manuel, share how the series of books came to be, including their reading and research. They have made a strong effort to let the men and women of history tell their story.

My Thoughts:

There are three strong points that led me to give this book 5 stars for excellent.

Biographies of historical people I'd not read about before. For example, "Father Eusebio Kino, a Jesuit." "He founded a mission in the Sonora region of northern Mexico." He left behind a promising and safe career in Austria, "to serve the Indians in America."

Hard questions are explored. For example, what happened to the Puritans? What was the real reputation of the Puritans? What was George Washington's religious beliefs?

Several times through the book, Marshall and Manuel, expound on Christian ethics and beliefs. For example: "Why are some Christians called to make the supreme sacrifice? Is it because they have the faith to do so? Is it because through their example the faith of the entire body of Christ is strengthened?"

The emphasis in the book is on showing the "truth of Christianity in history of nation's birth."

I would have loved to read about more women in history. For example, Anne Bradstreet 1612-1672. Also, Pocahontas 1595-1617. Pocahontas is written about in this first book, but not in as much detail as I'd liked. The Salem Witch trials are written about, but not in great detail as far as the individual women are concerned. I'm aware that in adding more historical figures into the book it would create more pages, but women were apart of the founding of America and its history too.

Sheryl Tribble says

If you consider history to be the study of what actually happened, insofar as we can discover that, and believe that a U.S. history book should at least touch on most major events and offer the most agreed on explanations for things in elaborations (even if the author chooses to include factors not always considered), then this is not a U.S. history book. For instance, the book neglects to mention crucial factors in King Philip's war (like the death -- or even the existence of! -- Wamsutta, and also the land disputes); essentially ignores the French and Indian War, as well as the Christian Tories and pacifists who argued against the Revolutionary War (while discussing at length the biblical position of the supporters), etc. As the authors themselves say, "this book is not intended to be a history textbook, but rather a search for the hand of God in the different periods of our nation's beginnings." If you're interested in that search, this is a fascinating book, although I would say that the authors have some other preconceptions that make their search not so fruitful as they would like to think.

The authors embrace the Puritan belief that they were the "New Israel" and that the New World was the "new Canaan" for God's chosen people. The book is postmillennial, in that the authors essentially argue that the people of the U.S. and God are in a covenant situation, where God expects the people to create a Christian nation that he will ultimately use to lead the whole earth into Christianity. I'm postmillennial myself, but don't agree with any of that. IMHO, these guys are still a good ways outside of solidly Biblical arguments.

My first problem with their approach is that Christ himself clearly created and approved a division between Church and State, and the Bible teaches His Church inherits ancient Israel's role. His kingdom is "not of this world," and is made up of believers, not the people of a particular nation. OTOH, the United States is very definitely "of the world" and is made up of Christian believers, believers in other religions, and people who profess no religious belief at all, and has been made of this mixture from the very beginning. The Bible teaches that the Church houses Christ's kingdom on Earth, and however you may draw the boundaries of Christ's church, they are clearly not national boundaries. So separating out a particular nation and using the

Bible verses directed at the church to apply particularly to that nation, or even just to the Christians in that nation, is unbiblical.

They also neglect to point out that Christians who endorsed the Revolution were thoroughly steeped in some beliefs of their time that disagreed with the Bible. It can be argued that God intended to bring a new understanding of the Bible to the forefront (however these same issues are debated in the Christian church to this date), but it can't be denied that it was the Christians who *opposed* the Revolution who were standing on the historic Christian understanding of what the Bible had to say, and that those who endorsed the revolution were making a strong break with the historic Christian Church.

But none of this appears in *The Light and the Glory*, because it is less a book about Christians in U.S. History than about the authors' belief that God has set the U.S. aside as his own nation. The authors do not recognize how deep this split is, and spend no time discussing the American Christians who disagreed with the Revolutionaries, much less grappling with the fact that this new understanding of the Bible happens to fit perfectly with the beliefs of their non-Christian fellow revolutionaries rather than with the historic Christian church.

The authors, like the Puritans, tend to assume that bad times mean God is punishing people, and good times mean people are being rewarded, and that the way to make things go better when they're bad is to repent. While the Bible does teach that *ultimately* we will reap what we sow, it also makes plain that many people suffer for the sins of others, and that the wicked often prosper while the good struggle. Sometimes it seems like half the Psalms bewail that precise situation!

Job's comforters were convinced Job had done something deeply wicked to bring on such calamities; God told them otherwise. The disciples were convinced someone must have sinned to cause a man's blindness; Jesus corrected them – the man was born blind not because he or his parents had sinned, but in order to demonstrate the works of God (in his healing, presumably). If obeying God resulted in earthly reward, there'd be a lot fewer Christian martyrs. The idea that God might have blessed the U.S. despite the disobedience of the Founding Fathers (and, Biblically speaking, there were a LOT of disobedient Founding Fathers!) is completely off their radar.

The authors get awfully close to implying that Columbus, through his sins, forced God to change his plans, and also poke at the idea that Christians can control God's blessings by jumping through the right hoops. But as Jesus pointed out, if believers aren't doing their job, God has other resources – "the very stones would cry out." God controls the direction of the king's heart; he doesn't *need* his followers to accomplish his goals. He clearly prefers to work with and through his followers, true, but at the same time the Bible is full of examples where he uses unbelievers to get things done.

So while I tend to agree with Marshall and Manuel that God did intervene in U.S. history, and even agree with some of their specific examples, I'm less convinced they rightly interpret the message (if any) that God was sending through these acts. The Bible tells us that God is our defender and support, so it is not surprising when he acts as such, whether the Christians in question were doing some "great work of God" by forming the U.S. or not.

The authors ignore the clear evidence of history that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were as strongly grounded in the Enlightenment as they are in Christianity, and they make George Washington out to be much closer to Biblical Christianity than he was. Washington was not a classical Deist, in that he believed in an active providence rather than some kind of watchmaker who'd wandered off, but he was not a true Christian either. (I have the edition attributing "Daily Sacrifice" to Washington and offering

other quotes he likely didn't say, but as I understand it the later editions removed the false quotes while still not recognizing that Washington wasn't a true Christian).

What's astonishing is that they begin the book with a John Adams quote, "I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the gloom I can see rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is worth more than all the means." and end with "And if the candlepower of each covenanted Christian were to be joined to the whole, the result would truly be the blaze of glory which John Adams foresaw. America would yet become the citadel of light which God intended her to be from the beginning!"

Adams was a Deist who rejected Christ's divinity and the Cross, and he was the President at the time of the Treaty of Tripoly, which in article 11 says, "As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion". Whatever "blaze of glory" Adams foresaw, we can be pretty sure it's not the one Marshall and Manuel are looking for.

The U.S. has always been a strongly Christian nation in the sense that, since the days of the early colonists, Christians have been a large percentage of the population and a powerful source of salt and light. But it has never been a Christian nation of the kind Marshall and Manuel are trying to describe, and there is no Biblical evidence that their version of a Christian nation is even part of God's plan. So while I find this book interesting and worthy of discussion with my older kids, I would never use it as a primary history text.

Carol says

I am so grateful to have read this history book. The 4th of July will have more meaning for me from now on. This book was hard for me to get through in the beginning chapters, but once through them, it came alive for me. I learned the history of our nation from the Christian (true!) perspective -- nothing left out -- the plain truth where God's role and honor are not left out nor minimized. Stories of heroes of the faith inspired me and reading of harder times sobered me. I learned and was ministered to (in the Word) at the same time in this work. I encourage everyone to read it.

Kent Horner says

I love U.S. history and Peter Marshall (Wasn't that the name of the guy who hosted Hollywood Squares?) wrote this in a way that held my interest. Why was Jamestown a failure while Plymouth prospered? This is a history book that reads like a story leaving me no doubt of the divine providence that formed our great nation. The only thing I would say negatively is Marshall has, I believe, a sort of "works mentality" when it comes to grace of God but this may very well be the most enjoyable non fiction book I have read. I found the story of a lone native american (indian) who walks up to a colony and, to the surprise of everyone, asks if they had any beer, in perfect english.

Alexis Jones says

Over the summer going into my sophomore year of high school, I was given a list of about five books to read for my honors English class. The Light and the Glory was on the list, and I chose it because it seemed to be

the easiest to read. As many students my age do, I procrastinated and did not pick up the book until about two weeks before my first day of class. I rated this book three stars, with the intention of saying "liked it" for the following reasons: History has never been my cup of tea, so reading a book that was basically an American history textbook with some literary elements was not the highlight of my summer; however, the lessons that I learned from this book are invaluable. The main point that I took away from this book was that if you want to be on the winning side, you have to change your life around the way God wants you to. Those that live their lives the way that they wish to will not receive the gifts that God has offered. Although I have grown up in a Christian family and a Christian school, this concept never really stuck and connected to my life until I read this. As a result, I have grown closer to God, and my faith in him has significantly improved. In conclusion, this book was not the most amazing book I have ever read in the world because of the content and the genre, but it is the most impactful book I have ever read, and I thank God that I was forced to read this.

Ora says

Interesting concept and I think the authors were right on. Appreciated all the research they did. Great read!

Tom says

This is a strange book. If I am just looking at the book as history, it needs one star. The thesis will be laughable to most people - that the reason that the United States exists is that God had a plan to create a 'New Israel' in America. There is really no way to evaluate this thesis. The authors offer 'proof' of their thesis, which is that Columbus, the Pilgrims, and the Puritans all believed that they were called by God, therefore it must be true. All of the outrages committed by Columbus are a result of him allowing his pride and greed to pull him away from God's calling to bring light to the darkness of the new world. Everything bad that happened in Jamestown was because the settlers weren't sincere Christians and were just looking for gold, where everything bad that ever happened in Massachusetts was God's loving way of disciplining his children in order to accomplish his mission. Marshall and Manuel ignore the existence of Virginia once the colony is established and thriving - apparently there is no way to fit this into their thesis. In any case, the thesis is ultimately religious, not historical, so maybe it's not even fair to evaluate it as a book of history.

There is one other flaw - the authors use a lot of quotes, which does strengthen the book, and they are well documented. They also make up a lot of dialogue. They do mark this by writing things like this: '...we can imagine Winthrop saying...' They then go on to relate a long and completely fictitious dialogue between John Winthrop and Thomas Hooker in New England. It is sometimes hard to keep track of which dialogues are real and which are made up.

On the other hand, I have learned a lot from reading this book. The details they give on Columbus were not new to me, and Columbus' story is laid out much more completely in the excellent book by Charles Mann '1491.' I actually learned a lot about Jamestown, Plymouth and Salem from reading this, however. The authors do a thorough job of portraying Jamestown as an unmitigated disaster, and contrasting that with the early successes of Plymouth and Salem. They give a much more nuanced account of the Puritans' exclusion of Quakers, Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson than I have seen in standard US History textbooks that paint this very simply as examples of Puritan intolerance. The extensive quotes from various Pilgrim and Puritan leaders effectively paint the Puritans not as saints or as bigots, but as human beings trying and

sometimes failing to create a more perfect society.

I would have a hard time saying if I recommend this book or not. If you are interested in learning more about the religious roots of New England, and the lack of such roots in Virginia, this could be a good place to start. If you would like to understand the 'America was founded as a Christian Nation' argument, this book certainly lays the foundation for that particular thesis. If you think that a book based on that thesis sounds unreadable, you should certainly avoid this. I don't subscribe to the 'Christian Nation' thesis, but I like to understand other people's points of view, which made this book worthwhile for me.

Mr. Graham says

The Light and the Glory was a fascinating read. It accomplishes its purpose in exposing some of the Christian tradition of America that isn't taught in history classes, and isn't mentioned in textbooks.

Though Christians always talk about the Christian foundations of our nation, the cynical side of me wonders to what extent that is true. This book cites primary sources that sheds light on some of these things that I have been cynical about. It's especially enlightening how many of the writers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution relied on God, and considered God the most important factor on which to build our new nation.

I must say, however, that I'm not quite convinced of everything conjectured by the authors. I don't think they sufficiently proved that Columbus was a devout Christian. It's hard to see some of the blessings that are declared from God when so many people end up dead. The book talks about how the Puritans were materially blessed when they followed God, and unblessed when they started forgetting God. However, America now is extremely blessed materially after almost completely pushing God out of the picture. I have a hard time reconciling things like that. Also, hanging over all this is the way the whites came and took land that belonged to someone else.

The thing that has gotten me thinking most of all, is the declaration that America is God's new Israel. I'm not saying that the Pilgrims and the Puritans didn't believe this. I'm not saying they weren't good righteous Christian people. However, I question the right of any group of people to declare themselves the new Israel, and to assume the covenant promises that were made to a different group of people a couple thousand years earlier. It seems a little arrogant to assume as much, and also to assume they have a right to take the land from its inhabitants in the same way God sent the Israelites into the promised land to take it.

A good read. Very informative.

Dean Morgan says

Great book...one of the best history books I've ever read. It took me a long time to read this, but not because it was dull or slow reading. On the contrary, it was very informative and exciting. Part of the reason it took me a bit to read this book is that I left it and came back to it a couple of times. There is a lot to absorb here...this book takes the reader from the discovery of the Americas by Columbus, through the American Revolution and First Constitutional Congress. The book is fascinating and absorbing. Also, I did not just read this book...as I often do with histories, I really want to learn the material, so I took copious notes to help me

learn and be able to review the subject matter (and this, of course, is quite time consuming). I, like many, like to read for leisure, and when you read a book to study and take notes, it's not very leisurely. Still, I learned and retained a lot, which was my ultimate goal with this book. I highly recommend this book...it provides so much insight and direction into where our Country is headed.

I often discuss politics with people, and being a Christian, I always try and approach this topic from a biblical standpoint. I have found it very common for people in political discussions to claim that the Founding Fathers are on their side. I have often felt the beliefs of the Founding Fathers are contemporaneous with my beliefs...but how do you effectively or reasonably argue this when you don't really know what exactly the Founding Fathers believed? It has been claimed that George Washington was a Deist (he wasn't). Thomas Jefferson was said to be a Rationalist and a fan of the "Enlightenment" (he was). This book provided so many insights into these issues, giving thoroughly researched details, as well as eye-witness accounts and journal entries from the respective time-periods. This book covered a lot about the various missionaries to the Native Americans, and some of these stories were heart-wrenching in their description of man's struggle against the elements, and torture and killing at the hands of some of these tribes. The re-telling of the journey of the Pilgrims, and the first harsh winters in the Americas were also fascinating, and gave me such a deep appreciation of what our ancestors went through to give future generations a better life. The authors painted such a stark picture of the struggles of the first colonists to American shores, that it was apparent these were people of great faith, and their faith in God alone and God's intervention on behalf of the faithful were the only things that sustained them through some of the devastating times of starvation, sickness, and the brutal New England winters. Also, the authors devoted a chapter to the Salem Witch Trials, and the broader witch trials in New England, and this information was very powerful, disturbing, and insightful (as there is no implication that the witch trials were merely superstition and fanaticism, but that in some cases, there truly was a dark, spiritual element to what was happening).

Of course this book is written from a Christian perspective, and some have accused the authors of trying to make Christian links in America's history that are not there. I disagree. I think the evidence of God's hand in the formation of this Country is quite evident, and one does not have to look far at all, or research too deeply, to see this truth. Still, that is for the individual to decide, but the in-depth research done in this book, to include numerous quotes and journal entries from the first explorers and colonists, to many, many of the founding fathers...it is very apparent that men and women of faith had a great deal to do with the foundations of America. Similarities are drawn between Israel and America, in that when the Israelites of the Bible were faithful to God and obeyed His commands, then they were prosperous, but when they strayed and were disobedient, then they sometimes incurred God's judgement and just punishment. The authors pointed out many times in American history when such obedience or waywardness had similar results for the first explorers, colonists, missionaries, and patriots.

After having read this book, I felt my knowledge of American history had increased by leaps and bounds, and I gained insights that will help me to have much deeper dialogues with others about America and where we came from and where we are going.
