



"The axe forgets, but the tree remembers."
—African Proverb

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Remember

Remember when? Remember the time? Remember the Alamo! Remember the good ol' days? A recent Internet article proclaimed the 1950s to be the good old days, as many remember it fondly. That decade witnessed many changes in American culture like the birth of rock and roll with stars like Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly. There were sock hops, poodle skirts, and drive-in restaurants and theaters. It also saw the birth of the muscle car era in Detroit. But the Korean War was fought then too, and over five million people lost their lives, 40,000 of them Americans.

Perhaps the 1950s are called "the good old days" because the '30s and '40s, with the Dust Bowl, the Depression, World War II, and the atomic bomb, were so troubling. Some might consider the 1960s to be the good old days, or maybe the '70s or '80s. We can all find times in our lives that we thought were morally or economically better, or maybe just less hectic.

According to Brooks Atkinson, a *New York Times* drama critic in the mid-1900s, "In every age 'the good old days' were a myth. No one ever thought they were good at the time. For every age has consisted of crises that seemed intolerable to the people who lived through them." An anonymous quotation suggests, "Sometimes you don't realize how good the good old days were

until they're gone." French novelist Marcel Proust remarks, "Remembrance of things past is not necessarily the remembrance of things as they were."

Many in the church of [God](#) have fond memories of the good old days when we had large congregations and huge feast sites all over [the world](#). A fair portion of the [Sabbath](#) day was spent talking about the truth and God's work. All ages had numerous activities and socials to choose from. Softball, basketball, and volleyball tournaments and track meets filled our calendars. Many church groups are trying desperately to duplicate all that the church did then, acting on their nostalgia for those times. By the way, *nostalgia* means "the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return." We can never go back to the good old days.

Maybe the Israelites should be credited with originating the phrase, "the good old days," because every time things got a little rough, they were ready to stone [Moses](#) and Aaron and head back to Egypt. In [Exodus 16:3](#), just weeks after gaining their freedom, they cry, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (see also [Exodus 17:3](#)). Did they have selective memory, remembering only the good times and forgetting the oppression and cruelty of the Egyptians?

The Israelites came into Egypt when Joseph was vizier of the kingdom. Before they were enslaved, for perhaps nearly two centuries, they lived prosperously in Goshen. Moses writes in [Exodus 1:7](#), "But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty, and the land was filled with them." So these Israelites probably did have "pots of meat" and "bread to the full"!

Exodus 1 and 2 reveals that there were faithful Israelites among them. Their midwives, despite being ordered by Pharaoh to kill the newborn males, refused because they feared God ([Exodus 1:17](#)). Likewise, Moses' mother ignored the edict and hid Moses for three months ([Exodus 2:2](#)).

Why, then, did God allow the Israelites to go into bitter slavery at the hand of the Egyptians? Ezekiel 20, which records history while pointing to the future, may provide an answer. It begins with certain elders of Israel coming

to Ezekiel to question God. Their questions are never stated, but God does not wait for their questions, nor does He want to hear them. Instead, at least three different times God pleads with Israel to obey Him. For instance, notice verses 5, 7-8:

On the day when I chose Israel . . . and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I raised my hand in an oath to them, saying "I am the LORD your God." . . . Then I said to them, "Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. . . ." But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said to them, "I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt."

God made Himself known to them in the land of Egypt. Then in verses 7-8, God tells them to throw away their Egyptian idols. This was long before they left Egypt, and when they refused, God poured out His anger on them—they were enslaved because of their rebellion. Of course, their descendants also rebelled in the wilderness (verses 10-13).

One of Israel's greatest problems was their failure to remember. The greatest thing they forgot is God Himself, which is said six times in this chapter ([Ezekiel 20:13](#), 16, 21, 24, 27-28). God put the children of Israel into slavery because they profaned His holy Sabbaths and forgot His statutes and His laws. They especially despised the [fourth commandment](#), which begins with "remember": "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" ([Exodus 20:8](#)). The Israelites had been instructed about the Sabbath, but in their prosperity, they forgot it and paid dearly.

Has modern Israel also forgotten God? If we were to ask a random person on the street if it is a [sin](#) to kill someone, to steal, to lie, or to commit [adultery](#), chances are he or she will say, "Yes." Then, if we were to ask him or her if it is a sin to break the Sabbath, we would probably get a blank stare in return. Many do not even know what the Sabbath is!

In [Ezekiel 20:35](#), 37-38, God prophesies of a future time: "I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead my case with you face to face. . . . I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me." Modern Israel will learn that they must not forget God and His instructions. But not all is lost, because He says that some will remember their ways and loathe themselves (verse 43), leading to [repentance](#).

Our Savior has a similar warning for the church. In His [letters to the seven churches](#), [Christ](#) tells two of them to remember: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" ([Revelation 2:5](#)). "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent" ([Revelation 3:3](#)). Do we need to be told to remember?

If we "contend earnestly for the [faith](#) which was once for all delivered to the saints" ([Jude 3](#)), we will not need this stern reminder. In doing so, we will see that the best days are still before us!

- Ronny H. Graham

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Remembering Who We Are](#)

by John O. Reid

Unless we realize who we are, we won't have the zeal or motivation to overcome, becoming an easy target for Satan. We desperately need to realize that we are being made ready to be the bride of Jesus Christ, preparing for this marriage by obediently following the lead of our Husband-to-be, diligently overcoming and inculcating His law deeply into our inner being. When we consider the awesome contrast of what we were before we were called and what God has fashioned us into, we cannot allow ourselves to commit spiritual fornication or become unfaithful harlots. We must consider

our future Husband's work, His way of thinking, His likes and dislikes, endeavoring to fit as a perfect companion to Him in every way.

From the Archives: Featured Article

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by Ted E. Bowling

Lot's wife is best known for that fact that she looked back and became a pillar of salt. What was so important that she yearned for Sodom? Ted Bowling explains why her example is important to us today.

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