

DO NOT REMEMBER

“Thus says the Lord,
Who makes a way in the sea,
A path in the mighty waters,
Who brings out chariot and horse,
Army and warrior;
They lie down, they cannot rise,
They are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
Do not remember the formers things,
Or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing,
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honor me,
The jackals and ostriches;
For I give water in the wilderness,
Rivers in the desert,
To give drink to my chosen people,
The people whom I formed for myself
So that they might declare my praise.”
- **Isaiah 43:16-21**

Thirty years. The Israelites have been living in exile for over thirty years at this point. Thirty years. One full generation has passed since they have been exiled from their land, and their homes. Thirty years they have been strangers in a foreign land. For over thirty years their God has been silent and foreign gods have been competing for their attention. Thirty years they've had to remember when God brought their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt, when God led them safely across the red sea, when God provided for them in the wilderness and led them into the promised land. They've had over thirty years to remember all God has done in the past. Thirty years to wonder why God won't do it again. Thirty years they've been in exile, without a home, and seemingly without a God.

When Isaiah speaks then, he names from the very beginning what they've been thinking. He comes in the name of the Lord, the one who made a way in the sea, a path through the waters. He comes bearing a message from the God who defeated chariots and horses. Remember? Remember? Isaiah seems to ask. Remember when God did that?

Well remember no more.

Do not remember the formers things he commands.

Do not consider the things of old.

For God is about to do a new thing. Have you not seen it?

It's so easy to get stuck in the past. So easy to remember all the good things God did for us back **then**: back when things were good; back when things were as they should be. So easy to have 20/20 hindsight. I don't know about you, but I know when my life gets overwhelming or seems more than I can handle I go back. I remember when life seemed easier. When school was easier. When relationships were less complicated. Back when everything made sense. Back when it was sunny all the time and smelled like roses, or at least that's how I like to remember it.

It's not always a bad thing to remember the things of old. The times when life seemed easier. But it is a problem when we get stuck. It was a problem when the Israelites got stuck. They were so busy remembering all the times God made it better in the past that they couldn't see how God was trying to make it better for them. They were so busy seeing God make a way through the waters, that they couldn't see that God was making a way through the wilderness, a way home, for them. They were so busy remembering how God brought their ancestors out of Egypt that they couldn't see God was trying to bring **them** out of exile.

And who can blame them? It's hard to see what we cannot imagine. The Israelites had spent over 30 years in exile with a wilderness dividing them from their homes. They had pretty much given hope of ever returning. They had fairly well settled into their routines in exile. They were waiting for God to part water, and they couldn't imagine God watering the wilderness, providing a path home.

God works in amazing and startling ways. The only trouble is, we have to be able to forget what we're expecting, what's come before, in order to see what's happening even now. We have to be able to imagine the unimaginable. Otherwise we run the risk of missing it.

Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. God is about to do a new thing. It is springing forth already. Do you not perceive it?