

On Course in the Ever-Similar Storms of Change

The Values of Pondering the Past

(Borrowed from *A Godward Life* devotional – J.Piper, p.210)

There is a gigantic statue outside the National Archives building in Washington, D.C. A noble Greek figure sits with spread knees and a huge book in his lap. On the front of the massive base are the words “Study the Past.” That’s good advice – and biblical too.

As you read this, there is probably some threatening crisis in the world. Perhaps in your own life. One way to have ballast in the boat of your life, so that you are not swamped by these things, is to know that it has happened before. For example, does it make you feel differently about our crises to learn that in 1893 the Philadelphia and Reading Railroads filed for bankruptcy, great financial trusts began to collapse, and 500 banks failed? The next year 142 more banks failed, one-quarter of all heavy industry was idle, in one seventeen-day period in January there was an eleven-million-dollar run on the gold of the federal treasury, and a forest fire near Hinkley, Minnesota, destroyed 160,000 acres and killed 400 Minnesotans.

The past is a record of setbacks and how people coped with them. It is a reservoir of folly to be avoided and wisdom to be loved, of lessons to be learned and warnings to be heeded, of heroes to be admired and villains to reject. It is full of the sovereign hand of God and the sinning hand of man. It keeps us from exaggerating the present. It makes us mature and steady in the storms of change.

The bible commends the great values of pondering the past. For example, it teaches us that studying the past:

Gives reassurance when we are discouraged –

I will call to mind the deed of the LORD; yea, I will remember thy wonders of old. (Ps.77.11)

I remember the days of old, I meditate on all that thou hast done; I muse on what thy hands have wrought. (Ps.143.5)

Reminds us that God is God –

Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. (Is.46.9)

Strengths us for hard times –

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. (He.10.32)

Enables us to build on good, old foundations –

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in. (Is.58.12)

Lets us recover long-lost, precious truths –

Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." (Je.6.16)

Helps us stay humble under God's mighty hand –

You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm. (De.5.15)

And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you. (De.8.2)

Teaches us the lessons of God's great deeds –

Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? (Mt.16.9)

Warns us against the folly of the foolish –

Remember Lot's wife. (Lk.17.32)

Stimulates repentance –

Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and repent. (Re.3.3)

Shows what is truly unique and marvelous –

Ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. (De.4.32)

Points to a glorious new and unprecedented future –

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing. (Is.43.18-19)

I recently read a historical account of religion in America. It was like a rushing spring rain, washing away much fretting about the present times. It put God on the throne, paradoxically, by showing both the faith and the folly of God's saintly, sinful people. Let's put the necessary ballast in the ship of our lives so that we stay upright and on course in the ever-similar storms of change.