

NATION OF ISRAEL - “The Myth Of Nostalgia”



1. **(Background)** This propensity to “forget” God is one of the key themes of the Old Testament book that addresses the Israelites *after* their 40-year wandering—Deuteronomy. The words, “remember,” “forget” or “forgot” show up 25x in the book. Perhaps the most sobering statements are these:

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children...” Deuteronomy 4:9

“Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Deuteronomy 8:11-14

2. **(Q1-Exodus)** I think the main point here is *not* merely a “steak and bake buffet,” but the *leisure*. The picture of “sitting” by the meat-pots and “eating bread to the full” is as much a statement about not having to hurry as it is good food.
3. **(Q1-Numbers)** Like the above focus, this too must *not* be seen just as having food. Their complaint has to do with *variety* (free fish, cucumbers, leeks, melons, onions, garlic). They seem to recall a seafood and salad buffet in this account.
4. **(Q2-Ex 2:33)** The word that is translated “cry for help” (NAS) and “cry for rescue” (ESV) is the Hebrew word, *shav*. It is used to describe what the Philistines in Ekron did because of the diseases that were breaking out among them due to the presence of the Ark of the Covenant:

“The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.”

1 Samuel 5:12

5. **(Q4-Deut 15)** This recollection of my actual condition prior to my inclusion in God’s covenant family is supposed to be an ongoing, regular and life-long mental effort. Paul’s admonition to the Ephesian believers nearly 1,500 years after the Israelites rebellion (Eph 2:11-16) to “remember” their prior condition is a present imperative in the Greek (i.e., “do it and keep on doing it!”)
6. **(Q6)** Here is an excellent example of an *accurate* comparison of the past and present. The younger Jews would have been born in captivity. They would never had even seen the first Jewish Temple. However, the older Jews would have remembered the first Temple. The foundation that was laid could only have revealed the size and shape of this second Temple. Their response tells us that it must have been much smaller than the Temple of Solomon.
7. **(Q7)** Our basic problem with the “myth of nostalgia” is *not* that we look backwards. It’s that we don’t look *far enough* backwards! We should start with Abraham and work our way to the present. This “re-hearsal” of salvation history was an actual part of Jewish *worship!* (cf. Pss 105, 106)
8. **(Q9)** The older Jews were reflecting on the gap between what they recalled and what they saw. It caused them to forget they were still alive and hadn’t been killed in the siege 47 years earlier. They had also been given a “free ride” back to Jerusalem by Cyrus (Ezra 1), and had a pagan king “finance” the rebuilding of their Temple! They also saw Yahweh execute judgment on Babylon by Persia, so the “score” had been made even and their prayers had been answered:

"O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!"

Psalms 137:8, 9

9. **(Q12)** Our life will always be moving in the direction our soul is longing. This principle is much bigger and more serious than having a "bad attitude."
10. **(Q13)** Life must be lived in chapters, not as one long "paragraph." And, I must learn to truly close one chapter with grace and gratitude as the next one begins. Marriage before children is a chapter, having kids at home is a chapter, being a parent of an unmarried child is a chapter, etc. If I insist on keeping a previous chapter "open," I will fall prey to the myth of nostalgia *and* miss what God has for me in this present chapter.



"Stumbling Stones"

1. **(Q3)** The real issue here is *not* simply our view of the past, but an unrealistic understanding of the part God played in that era of our lives. If our past really was "better," it was so because of the Lord, *not* because of me or my circumstances.
2. **(Q7)** Unfortunately, this is a very difficult question to answer if one doesn't read the larger context of the Haggai passage in Q6 above. Have group members read Haggai 2:4-5, and then answer this question together. (NOTE: The focal point here is Yahweh's promise of His presence, and a reminder of the Mosaic covenant. In other words, the fact that they are back in the land should eclipse the "smallness" of the current Temple in contrast to the former one. God wants them to go back *further* in their recollection to Egypt, not merely Solomon's Temple. The reason they had a Temple in the first place is where their focus needs to be.)
3. **(Q8)** Although the passage in Lamentations doesn't address the issue of "failure" directly, the affliction in his life (which he blames Yahweh for) *all* came as a result of his prophetic ministry. And his message was "repent and Yahweh will forgive."
4. **(Questions 9-11)** Ingratitude *is* the absence of gratitude or thankfulness, but it's also based on an unspoken assumption that what God did for me at one point in my life, He "should" do again or perhaps even continually. In other words, God "owes" this to me because He did it before. What was at first an exceptional provision becomes an expected demand.



"Going Deeper"

5. **(Q2)** Take time to let group members share on this question, but be alert to signs that someone is falling back in the myth of nostalgia rather than reality. Carefully lead those who are sharing to focus on what the *real* situation was not the imagined one.
6. **(Q10)** "How does ingratitude squeeze God out of our thinking?"
7. **(Q11)** "Do you think a grateful heart produces a thankful mouth, or is it the other way around?"
8. **(Q12)** "Someone has said, '*My life will always be moving in the direction my soul is gazing.*' What do you think this means?"
9. **(Q13)** "It's been said, '*We must learn to live life in chapters, not one long paragraph.*' What do you think this means, and what does it have to say to what we've studied this week?"