**THE DYNAMICS OF THE PAST**

Sunday School Lesson 1

*FORMER THINGS*

Isaiah 43:18

2/6/2022

**Introduction:** Our new lesson series is called *Former Things.* The title is based off of this same phrase that is found in eight different verses in the Bible. Most of these verses are in the book of Isaiah. *Former things* refers to things that have already taken place. It is a clear reference to the past. The Christian’s relationship with the past is a very interesting topic. How are we supposed to view the past? What is our response to it? How much influence should it have in our lives as we make decisions in the present? Over the last several years, our culture seems to have become fixated on some former things. Some are stuck on former things that they wholeheartedly disagree with and are seemingly still frustrated by them. Others are stuck on former things that bring up fond memories of childhood or general youthfulness. None of this is actually all that new though. History shows us that just about every generation over the last couple of centuries (maybe longer) has dealt with times where the entire culture seemed to be returning their collective thoughts back to a former time. Thankfully, the Bible is not silent on this topic. In fact, It has much to say to the believer to help us navigate through our thoughts and feelings concerning those former things. For our first lesson, we will observe a few general thoughts about the dynamics of the past. Let’s go ahead and dive in!

1. **THE PAST IS FIXED AND COMPLETELY UNCHANGEABLE.**
2. **Notice that while all things are possible with God, He has never altered the past (Isaiah 48:3; Revelation 21:4; Isaiah 41:22; Galatians 1:4; Matthew 19:26).** As I prepared for this lesson, I stumbled across a blog post where an individual was speaking of their prayer request. For years, they had been praying that the Lord would allow them to go back in time and redo a decision that they had made. They used the fact that nothing is impossible with God as their basis for their request. Amazingly enough, many of the responses to the post were from others who had also made similar requests to the Lord. I can’t deny that if God wanted to allow someone to go back in time, He has the power to do so. What I would note, though, is that we find nothing of that sort occurring in the Bible. I believe it is best for us to realize that God is working in the present and the future. It does not seem to be His desire to change what has already occurred. If so, we would all love for Him to go back and change the decision that Adam made in the Garden. The Lord says in Isaiah 48:3 that He has declared the former things from the beginning. He knows what will be, and He works within what we understand as the present for us.
3. **Notice that the Lord has a specific process of time (2 Chronicles 21:19; Judges 11:4; Exodus 2:23; Genesis 4:3; 38:12; Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Ephesians 1:10).** The Lord has a specific process of time. We only find two examples in all of Scripture where we might draw a conclusion that time worked outside of its natural order. The one example is when the sun stood up longer than usual for the children of Israel. This allowed them more daylight to fight their battle against the enemy (Joshua 10:12). It is unclear whether time stood still or whether the Lord just extended the daylight for that day. The other example is where Hezekiah asked the Lord to turn the sundial back (Isaiah 38:1-8). Again, the Bible does not say that the Lord altered time, but we do know that He did cause the sun to return back up which goes against the natural daily order of time. The Lord has a process for time. Everything occurs at its time, and then it comes to pass. That’s a familiar phrase in the Bible. We find it over 200 times! Those enamored with science-fiction dream of a day where man can travel in time. Christians should not anticipate such an occurrence. God created time and space, and He shows us that the past is fixed and unchangeable.
4. **THE PAST IS ONLY REVISITED THROUGH OUTWARD REMINDERS OR OUR THOUGHTS.**

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1. **Notice that there are many outside sources of communication that help us to revisit things that happened in the past (Isaiah 41:22; 43:9; Ruth 4:7; Malachi 3:4; Psalm 78:8; Ephesians 2:11).** The Bible is an outside source by which the believers in this present day are able to revisit the events that occurred in the past. We are able to read of stories of David and other Godly men and envision what things were like at that time. We would have no trusted way to revisit these past events if it were not for the Word of God. There are only two ways to revisit the past. We must do it through our own memories, or through the recordings of someone or something else. The Lord often reminded the children of Israel of things that had taken place in the nation’s history. Paul reminded several of the churches of the way things used to be before they had received Christ. When we find ourselves revisiting the past, it’s important to understand the means by which we have been taken on this visit. Those means will play an important part in our understanding of why we are there and what we are to do with these former things.
2. **Notice that the mind may often revisit the past, but it is not always a trusted source (Isaiah 46:9; Ecclesiastes 1:11; Hebrews 10:32; John 16:21; 2 Peter 1:9; Exodus 16:3).** Remember is a word that is used often in Scripture. When it comes to our own past, our primary source of information is our mind. There are many examples in Scripture where we are commanded to recall the past into our minds. The danger with this, of course, is that our minds are not the most reliable. We revisit the past from a position that is different than when we experienced those former things to begin with. Thus, we can often be guilty of altering the past in our minds. The nation of Israel did this in the wilderness. There can be no doubt that the Israelites hated the situation they were in when they were in Egypt. They were being oppressed by the Egyptian people. Yet, when the Israelites were in the wilderness, they had a totally different perspective of what had taken place in the past. While we cannot change what has already come to pass, our present circumstance can change how we recall it. We must not let our minds deceive us.
3. **THE PAST IS A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF THE PRESENT.**
4. **Notice that the past informs the decisions of the present (Romans 15:4; 2 Peter 1:12; Deuteronomy 31:13; Hebrews 11; Romans 11:1-5; Genesis 30:27; Lamentation 3:20-22).** For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning. There is no doubt that the present is informed by the past. The past is the map that guides our present decision making. I hear so much said about the Christian forgetting his past, but do we fail to realize that the past is a necessary component for the present and even the future? Literally everything you do is based upon your past or someone else’s past! Could you go to work tomorrow and be effective in your job if you forgot the past? That training you got years ago is still helpful in the present. We’ve likely all seen the terrible effects that are caused by the disease known as dementia. The person suffering through this disease has a hard time functioning in the present. We rely very heavily upon the past. We are here today to study the Holy Bible that was recorded by man from God thousands of years ago.
5. **Notice that there is great accountability for the present-day believers because of how much former things we have available for us today (Mark 6:11; Ephesians 3:5; John 12:28; Luke 12:48).** Regarding the past as a component for the present, let us consider how that makes us even more accountable than generations before us. We have more former things for us to regard when it comes to serving the Lord. We have past events revealed to us that the Old Testament prophets only got a glimpse at during their lives here on this earth. I believe we will be held accountable for how we allowed the past to inform us in our Christian walk. We are without an excuse even more than any generation that ever came before us on this earth. It will be more tolerable for Sodom than it will be for those living in the last days. God is not winking at our ignorance today. Without getting too far ahead of future lessons, I believe it’s important for us to understand that many mistakes are made because the past is not regarded. It should be a component that we gladly utilize as we seek to serve the Lord in the present.
6. **THE PAST CONTINUES TO PRODUCE OUTCOMES SEEN IN THE PRESENT AND FUTURE.**
7. **Notice that the principle of sowing and reaping guarantees the past to play a role in the present and future (Proverbs 22:8; Matthew 13:39; John 4:36-37; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:7-8).** While we have no control over the past in this present hour, we do find that the past still has some control over the present and the future. Actions that have been done in the past cannot be undone, and there are certain fruits that will be produced as a result of those actions. This is the principle of sowing and reaping. Sowing is the past, and reaping is the present and future. We have to live with the consequences of our decisions. We also have to live with the consequences of the decisions that others made that also had an effect on our lives. We cannot change what has happened. That is just the tough reality of life. It is not just that the past informs our present, but the past produces outcomes that we must deal with in the present. Even at this very minute, you are dealing with outcomes based on past actions.
8. **Notice that the Lord does intervene and often limit the power that the past has on the present (Luke 19:21-22; Micah 6:15; Jeremiah 12:13; John 3:18; 8:10).** The mercy of the Lord limits the power that the past is able to have on the present and the future. After all, our past condemns us to a future in Hell with Satan for all of eternity. Yet, the Lord’s mercy intervenes. While the Lord does not change what has happened, we do find that the Lord can and will change what is happening and what does happen. This thought should help us as we consider the dynamics of the past. While there may be some things that are set in the present because of the past, there are many things that are in flux. David’s sin set in motion things that happened in a later present time for him. He prayed for the Lord to remove one of those things. The Lord did not remove that item, but the Lord did spare David. His present and future were not controlled by his past. Thank the Lord that our past does not have final say on the present.