

# Trying to Live in the Past

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## Introduction:

A. Num. 13:32 - 14:4

B. Human beings are known for selective memory

1. Some wrap themselves up in the horrors of their youth, blaming every misfortune on what had happened to them in the past.
2. More common though are the people who remember the good things that happen and suppress memory of the bad that came along with it.
3. "An East German entrepreneur canned the noxious-smelling exhaust fumes of East Germany's poorly made Trabant car and is doing a brisk trade selling the scent to those nostalgic for the former Communist state. "The smell is something very special and scarce nowadays," said Thorsten Jahn, whose cans of "Trabi" exhaust sell online for 3.98 euros (\$4.46). "I wanted to preserve the past in an original way." Fifteen years since reunification, nostalgia for East Germany has been running strong as rosy memories of the communist state's social safety nets, holiday camps and quaint consumer products like the tiny, box-like Trabants increasingly eclipse its negative aspects." (Yahoo News, 7/17/05)
4. Some in Iraq are longing for the days when they lived under a dictator. It is not that they desire the repression, but they remember and want some of its advantages.

C. Warning about longing for the past - Ecc. 7:10

1. "The past is never where you think you left it." (Kathrine Porter)
2. "When we are tired, we are attacked by ideas we conquered long ago." (Friedrich Nietzsche)
3. "The present changes the past. Looking back you do not find what you left behind." (Kiran Desai)

## I. THE DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL

A. Jacob's family moved to Egypt to escape a famine, but they stayed for years afterwards - Ex. 1:8-14

B. Eventually Egyptian oppression became so severe that Israel cried to God for deliverance - Ex. 2:23-25

C. God sent Moses to deliver them from Pharaoh and bondage - Ex. 12:29-33

D. Pharaoh came after Israel with an army. God destroyed it in the Red Sea - Ex. 14:23-30

E. God provided for Israel's every need during their journey

1. Guided by day with a pillar of cloud and by night with a pillar of fire.
2. He gave them water in a desiccated desert
3. He gave them uniquely special food each day
4. When they were attacked, God gave them victory

## II. ISRAEL'S RESPONSE

- A. Just 45 days after leaving slavery behind - Ex. 16:1-3
  - 1. They wanted to return for the food they remembered
  - 2. Momentary hunger made even life-long slavery appear good to them
- B. When water ran low - Ex. 17:1-3
  - 1. Even though God gave them water not long before (Ex. 15:22-25), the people complained when water became scarce again.
  - 2. Complained they were brought out of Egypt to face hardship and die
- C. Though God had been feeding them miraculously for almost two years, it wasn't enough for them - Num. 11:4-6
  - 1. First it was food, then it was water, and now a varied diet
  - 2. People are willing to exchange one set of hardships if it relieves them of the current difficulties.
- D. After hearing the unfavorable report of the spies concerning the new land - Num. 13:32 - 14:4
  - 1. In spite of repeatedly witnessing God's power, the people considered their current situation as hopeless.
  - 2. Not only did they want to go back, they wanted a different leader to take them there
- E. God's patience came to an end - Num. 14:20-23
  - 1. Because they keep yearning for the past, because they kept looking back over their shoulders, as every set back was an excuse to turn and abandon their course.
  - 2. Because they did not focus forward, they died in the wilderness

## III. THE DANGER IN LOOKING BACK

- A. We live in a world of desire for pleasures to satisfy our appetites of the flesh - 1John 2:15-17
  - 1. We are wandering through our own wilderness in life - 1Peter 1:1-2
  - 2. We are headed toward the promise land, heaven - 1Peter 1:3-5
- B. When we obeyed the Gospel, we left the bondage of sin behind - Col. 1:13
  - 1. We are seeking the land of eternal rest - Heb. 4:1, 11
- C. The question is, are we looking over our shoulders as did Israel? Have we deceived ourselves into thinking that what we left behind is better than where we are going?
  - 1. Sin is deceitful - Heb. 3:13
  - 2. Pleasure is temporary - Heb. 11:25; Ecc. 3:1, 4
  - 3. Our lives as Christians seeking righteousness, salvation, and a home in heaven, is not always pleasant here on the earth - Matt. 7:14, 5:10-12
  - 4. It is so easy to mistakenly believe that what we left behind was easier, more fun, and more pleasant - 1Peter 4:1-3
- E. It is so easy to forget the truth about the world
  - 1. In sin, we were separated from God - Isa. 59:1
  - 2. We were slaves to sin - Rom. 6:16
  - 3. We were under a death sentence - Rom. 6:23

4. Why do we permit current hardships to lead us to forget the misery we bore in the past?

F. We cannot look back - Luke 9:62

#### **IV. RESOLVE TO PRESS FORWARD**

A. Phil. 3:1-14

B. Are you pining for the Egypt of sin you left behind, or are you facing forward, longing for your home in heaven? - Rev. 2:10