

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: Going Back Is Not an Option, Various Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION: There is one question I want us to look at today, but it has many parts. Pay close attention, because we're going to cover a lot of information.

QUESTION: WHY DID ISRAEL WANT TO GO BACK TO EGYPT?

Last week, I preached about Korah's rebellion from Numbers 16. Many of you told me you'd never heard about Korah before. Korah wanted Moses' job, but it wasn't meant to be. He referenced Egypt as the land flowing with milk and honey. He looked back on Egypt with fondness.

Before this, Moses heard something similar from his people.

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 16:1-3 ¹*The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.* ²*In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.* ³*The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."*

Now turn to Numbers 11:4-6—

SCRIPTURE: Numbers 11:4-6 ⁴*The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat!"* ⁵*We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.* ⁶*But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"*

EXPLANATION: So, Moses was no stranger to people who wanted to go back. They'd forgotten how awful it was, and even though God revealed himself often and in miraculous ways, many of the people preferred slavery. God had always been faithful to them, and there was no indication that he wouldn't continue to be faithful.

Why did Israel want to go back to Egypt?

I've thought about this many times, and I think I know why.

- 1. It was easier to be told what to do.** As slaves, they didn't have to think for themselves. They didn't have to make decisions. They didn't have a government. They did what they were told. Now, as free and independent people, they were going through the challenges of nation building.
- 2. Next, as slaves, their lives were predictable.** They had a routine. Get up, have a miserable day of slavery, go to bed, only to get up and do it all over again. Sometimes the Egyptians put someone to death, but hey, not every day. Now, as free and independent people, each day was unpredictable.
- 3. As slaves of Egyptians, they had some degree of things much of the world did not have.** They had roofs over their head and food to eat. Now, as a free and independent people, they were nomads, camping out every single night.
- 4. I think another reason they wanted to go back is because they didn't know any different.** They'd been slaves for 400 years and had no idea what life was like before they became slaves. Living under oppression for them was their baseline of normal. Now, as free people, they longed to return to the sense of normal, which was ingrained in them.

ILLUSTRATION: All of this reminds me of a man who leaves home and wants to return because of the comforts of mom and dad who tell him what to do, who buy his clothes for him, and who give him a place to eat and sleep. Everyone who leaves home is faced with decisions he or she has never made before.

It's easy to daydream about life as a child living with your parents: about Santa Claus, the tooth fairy, and birthday parties.

But, going back is not reality is it? I think about those Israelites. If they wanted to go back bad enough, why didn't a group of them just do it?

ILLUSTRATION: I know a man who had a terrible habit. His family learned to live with it. His habit dictated everything about their lives. They learned to function quite well around him, but they prayed he would be delivered from this bad habit. Then one day, he repented of his sin and started a new life. The family did not know how to function normally. Everything went haywire. His daughter told me it was like a different man was in the house. Their prayer was answered, but instead of rejoicing with the man's newfound freedom, they focused on how they had learned to live with him before he had changed. Eventually, the family fell apart. You see, once he was free to be the husband and father he was really meant to be, the family decided they liked him as he was and refused to learn to live with this new person, free from his ugly habit. What a tragedy.

SCRIPTURE: Ecclesiastes 7:10 ¹⁰*Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.*

APPLICATION: I believe wanting to go back is human nature because it's part of a survival instinct. *If I can just rewind the clock, then I have longer to live.* It's really nothing more than a mind trick.

ILLUSTRATION: Joe McKeever, a retired Southern Baptist pastor, writes articles about a variety of things. Joe served seven Southern Baptist Churches and served as a Director of Missions in New Orleans until he retired in 2009.

Recently, he posted an article about a change in worship and noted some people in our churches seem to want to return to the 1950s. One commenter, who found absolutely nothing to like in the piece, said, "I'd love to live in the 1950s."

Joe decided to write a response to that. Keep in mind, this was written by man who was 74.

The 1950s: Are you sure you want to live there?

- *Happy Days*
- *Chevrolet convertibles with the huge fins*
- *Malt shops*
- *Sock hops*
- *Mayberry was America and America was Mayberry*
- *Ike was in the White House*
- *Elvis was in his ascendancy*
- *Andy Griffith was sheriff*

What's not to like, right? I smiled at that. No one loves the 1950s more than those who never lived them.

Joe's wife, Margaret said, *"In the 1950s, every time a plane went overhead I thought it was possibly carrying an atomic bomb to drop on us."*

Such was the attitude of fear pervading this land during this time.

Joe went on to say, *"In the early 1950s, I recall walking home from church with my grandmother after one of those meetings in which the preacher scared the living whatever out of us, and hearing the planes overhead—hey, this was Birmingham and they had lots of planes!—and I was thinking the same thing as Margaret: "'We're goners.'"*

You want to return to that?

The Civil Defense was training people to stand on rooftops and spot aircraft, just in case one from the USSR showed up.

People were building bomb shelters, and television ads told how to survive the initial blast of an atomic bomb.

At the same time, the preachers were decrying the worldliness of the churches, and very few congregations were doing anything about missions. There were almost no witnessing programs by any denomination, and volunteers traveling to foreign

mission stations to do short-term projects were discouraged by mission boards because they interfered with the work of the career missionaries. No denomination had disaster relief ministries.

The 1950s was not a golden age of anything. I lived through it. I graduated from high school in 1958.

The so-called golden age of television—that’s what they called the Fifties—gave us the dumbest, most boring, mind-numbing programs you can imagine. These days, at least you can turn to the *National Geographic* channel, or see what the weather is doing anywhere in the world, or switch over to an old western. In those days, we had *Milton Berle* and *Omnibus* and 15 minutes of news each night with cigarette-smoking John Cameron Swayze. Yes, he smoked right there on the tube. The *Today Show* had a chimpanzee as a regular. The *Tonight Show* had Jack Paar. It was uniformly awful. Oh, and we had three channels – count ‘em, three.

In the 1950s, cigarettes were everywhere, and no venue was safe from the deadly fumes. You could actually smoke inside hospital rooms. Signs were posted on doors to alert you to the presence of oxygen tents—“Oxygen is flammable,” so you were not allowed to smoke in ICUs and such.

You want to return to that?

The automobiles were “unsafe at any speed” and turned highways into death traps. No seat belts, no air bags, and no unbreakable windshields. If you went on a long trip, you could expect a few blowouts along the way. Eventually, toward the end of the decade, someone came up with the idea for the interstate system, for which we are so grateful.

Jim Crow laws were in existence all over the south, and racial prejudice thrived throughout the land (not just in Dixie). The schools which blacks were asked to attend were an embarrassment, and most churches proclaiming “God is love” would have turned into battlegrounds if the pastor had suggested opening the doors to all races.

There were a few good things in the 1950s. They were better than the 1960s, that's for sure—with their rioting, assassinations, and the Vietnam War—the most divisive engagement this country was ever in.

Nostalgia is a liar. Nostalgia suffers from a poor memory. It cancels the negatives and embellishes the positives. You end up forgetting the low wages and horrible working conditions and racial prejudice and get teary-eyed remembering a time which they did not exist.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: In the difficult days of the wilderness wanderings, some of the Lord's people longed for the “good parts” of Egyptian slavery, if you can believe that.

SCRIPTURE: Numbers 11:5 ⁵ “*We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic.*”

EXPLANATION: How quickly they forgot the harsh slavery, dismissed the cruelties of the Egyptians who murdered the Hebrew babies, and overlooked their complete lack of freedom. Incredibly, they longed for the fish, the melons and the onions.

APPLICATION: So, with those who want their churches to resemble the 1950s—perish the thought.

Joe closes his article with these powerful words: *I cannot find one place in Scripture where the Lord approves His children wanting to return to yesterday.*

Each day brings new challenges and opportunities, and God is doing fresh things daily. If “*His mercies are new every morning,*” as they are, I suspect it's also because the needs of that day will be brand new also (Lamentations 3).

You have a choice: You can spend your days looking backward and longing for yesteryear, minus the hardships of course, or you can spend your days looking forward and thanking our Living God he's given us another day to live, another day to serve.

The only way we can recreate yesterday is to come up with a bunch of money and hire a movie director and actors and set designers to recreate it. Then, that would be fake. But, at least we could watch it over and over.

ILLUSTRATION: The only people I know who at least try to live in yesteryear are the Old School Amish. You know the Amish community is divided into different groups when it comes to living in the past. Most Amish believe their homes must be completely disconnected from the outside world. Some believe it's OK if you have a phone as long as it is not connected to the house and as long as it is a certain distance from a house. But, I hear it's OK in some of their groups to have a cell phone because it's not connected by a line to anything.

Now, the Old School Amish try their best to keep things frozen in the 1800s—that is, until they have to go to the hospital or take a bus to visit a distant relative. Now if an entire ethnic group of people, who spend their lives trying to live in the past, cannot do it, then it really cannot be done.

APPLICATION: Recently, I've been reading about churches who died. There is one key reason churches have died. Do you know what it is? Was it because all the people moved away? NO. Was it because the church ran out of money? NO. Was it because a split killed the church? No. Was it over doctrinal issues? NO. The number one reason that churches die is refusal to change.

There is a fear of change, isn't there? It's easy to have a routine—one that's predictable. Some people had rather have a routine of misery that's predictable than risk having a better life. Think about those Israelite people looking back to yesteryear. I can just hear them now! *“Oh, the food! Forget the slavery, the food was great. Forget the oppression; at least we had a roof. Forget the murders of our children; did we tell you the food was great?”*

Here's what I have learned. Everyone's idea of the “good old days” is relative. Everyone thinks of the good old days in terms of their own childish or young adult innocence. This means today's young people, fifty years from now, in the year 2074, will talk about how great it was in 2014! They won't remember the war in Afghanistan and the millions of veterans suffering from PTSD. They won't remember the earthquakes and famines, which killed millions around the world.

They won't remember the school shootings and planes that disappeared from the sky. What they'll focus on is something innocent and warm, and they'll build this false sense of reality around a handful of memories.

ILLUSTRATION: I grew up in the 70s, and all I heard was how great it was in the 50s. TV programs and movies seemed to be fascinated with the 50s. Literally, I grew up thinking the best was before my time. How terrible.

APPLICATION: If you have children still in your home, or if you have grandchildren now, don't raise them believing they missed out on great decades of the past. Raise them believing each day leads to a better day and they have opportunities you never had. Raise them believing that God is in charge of history and he has a plan for each one of them as they make a difference in this world.

Some of you here today need your mind completely reformatted. You are stuck in yesteryear, wishing you could go back, wishing you could relive the past. But, really – would you want to relive the past if you knew you would have to face all the things you've faced – all over again? Would you want to go through the hardships, the deaths, the grief, the sicknesses, the financial challenges, and the rejection of others, only to face it all over again? No, no one would want to do that.

But, we do want to experience the good things we've experienced before. I know I do. And, I've learned I can actually come close to reliving those experiences if I focus on making them happen.

ILLUSTRATION: Let me give you a few personal examples: I really miss my dad. I miss hearing him play the guitar. He played all the time when I was a boy. I've longed to hear him play and spent a lot of time wishing I could return to those days. Then I got guitar lessons for my son who now plays better than my dad ever played. He plays some of the same songs my dad played, only better. This brings a lot of joy to me. I could just sit around feeling sorry for myself, wishing my dad would walk in the room, pick up the guitar and play, but instead, now I hear my dad playing through my son.

ILLUSTRATION: Here's another example: Before my father went into the ministry, my family went to church chronically early. I wandered around the church

and found myself in the pastor's office sitting on his couch while he put the finishing touches on his sermon. What I liked about him is he always treated me like an adult. He never talked to me like I was a little boy. Now I could spend my time wishing I could return to yesteryear wishing I could return to all that, or I can pass Brother Binkley on to other children. I've made it a point to talk to children the same way he talked with me.

APPLICATION: I could go with these examples...but I'll spare you. Here's my point. Probe deeply to discover what it was about yesteryear that makes you want to return, and figure out a way to pass that on to someone else.

Now, I am going to talk a while about Tusculum Hills. This church has a rich history, doesn't it? Wow, the lives that have been changed, the goals that have been reached—it's quite a history. When I first came here, someone said (and I don't remember who), "If we can just get back to where our church was around the year 2000." For this person, there was something special about the church at this time, but for someone else that special time might be 1994, 1982, 1967.

But, think about those who've arrived within the last couple of years, which includes me. How many of you have been here five years or less? Who wants to join a church which focuses on the glory days of the past? Who wants to be a part of a congregation which longs to return to the past? I don't. I want to belong to a church that rises to meet the challenges of today just like those did who met on this hill long ago.

CALL TO ACTION: Folks, here's what we've got to do. Listen to me:

1. We must be optimistic about the future. We look at the past, not as something to return to, but as a foundation which has positioned us for such a time as this. To me, history is important, and I've taken the time to read and understand much of this church's rich history. And, I value the input of our charter members and other long term members. All of them want to see the church succeed. All of them believe there is a future for us. We cannot be like the Israelites, dreading the future and wanting to go back.

2. We must check our baggage at the door. Listen to me. I am wearing down from hearing all the recycled baggage. I wonder how many hours of ministry this church loses per week just shuffling baggage. I've never heard of a church named Baggage Baptist Church, but there are times when I've felt maybe this should be our name. A pastor friend of mine calls it "storying"—retelling the same who-done-someone-wrong stories over and over. I want to ask, what is the value of that? If we could afford it, I'd like to have a counselor come in one or two days a month to help some of you heal and move on. Part of being your pastor is helping the church move on to other things, so if I give you the time out signal...it means I've heard the story before and haven't forgotten it.

3. We must reach the Tusculum Hills community as it is, not as it once was, nor as we what we hope it will become (Ecclesiastes 7:10). We've not really sought any of it out, but just because we are smack dab in the middle of an interesting area, we have quite a diversity of people knocking at our door. If you don't like this, then you can be the person at the door turning them away. If you only want the church to be composed of people who look like you, either get your heart right with God or go away and don't ever come back...we don't need you. And, don't go out of here saying, "I do not want to reach white people." Most of those who've joined in the last year have been white. Look around, over 95% here are white. And, the funerals I've done have been for white people. But, you are in denial if you refuse to see the Tusculum area is changing. Now, you have a choice. You can sit around hating change and pine for yesteryear, or you can make a difference with people who God has brought to our front door.

A long time ago, Bill served a church right here in Nashville, and most of the members bailed when some foreigners moved in around the church. Instead of reaching them, they ran. Ask him to tell you about it.

4. We must seek God's will for Tusculum Hills Baptist Church. What an exciting time to be here! I cannot think of anywhere else I'd rather be! God is bringing the world to us. And, he's bringing people from other states to us. And, he's bringing young couples who are buying their first homes to us. The way God ministers to people through us will be different than how he ministers through other churches. Recently, I've had two pastors tell me how jealous they are of our location and the potential around us. As we seek God's will, I can tell you what

God's will is NOT. It is NOT God's will for us to sit here and do nothing. It is NOT God's will for us to reach out to people only like ourselves. How misguided would be it for us to be in the middle of the largest international population in the state and to miss it completely because we were so focused on maintaining things like they once were. God knows. At this time last year, God knew there was a woman in a foreign country who had never heard the Gospel. God knew Tusculum Hills was sitting here on this hill. God knew he would bring that woman from across the world to hear the Gospel in her own language.

Not too long ago, God knew a bunch of children who were starving in tent cities on the borders of war torn countries. He knew they'd heard bombs nearly every day of their lives. He knew they were sick. He knew they were hopeless. And, he knew Tusculum Hills sat here on this hill. And, he knew he had musicians and volunteers in ten different churches who would converge on this church in summer of 2014 and teach them songs about Jesus. And, now, these same children have returned several times to children's events here. And, how well-behaved they are! They've not torn up anything. They've not stolen anything. They've not destroyed the bathrooms, and they behaved on the school busses we rented. And, listen to me...they know the words "thank you."

God is doing a unique work here. Please don't stand in the way. Please pray. Please give your time and money. Leave a legacy for others to carry on after you.

And, someday when we check out of this world, I hope we do NOT hear, "Poorly done, you unfaithful servant, all you did was complain." May we hear, "*Well done, good and faithful servant, you reached out in love to others? You represented me well. Because of your love for me and your love for others, many more will enter heaven.*"

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Thanks to Judy Andrews and Nancy Claire Smith for their editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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