

# What Does the Bible Teach about Yesterday?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## Introduction:

- A. Yesterday is a common theme in literature, art, music, theater, education, wisdom, and education.
  - 1. It is praised for producing nostalgic good feelings, wisdom and direction for the present and future, for giving us a sense of place and belonging, and for adding richness to memory and experience
  - 2. It is criticized for its blindness, darkness and naiveté, for laments over lost opportunities and harmful, painful mistakes, and as a longed for but unreachable destination
- B. Read Psalm 90
  - 1. Yesterday has its power and uses; it can give us wisdom in the present and motivation for the future. God wanted us to use it
  - 2. Yesterday is limited in that our memory of it is subjective and returning there is impossible for humankind. God does not want us to be hindered by it; as good or bad as we remember it to be, dwelling on it can make the present miserable and the future even worse
  - 3. "It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then." (Lewis Carroll)
  - 4. "Realize the past no longer holds you captive. It can only continue to hurt you if you hold on to it. You can't have a better tomorrow if you spend today thinking about yesterday." (Sarah Breathnach)
- C. What constitutes yesterday?
  - 1. It exists only in subjective, fading human memories, in photographs, art and structures, in books and histories written from limited perspectives with incomplete information, and in stories passed from one generation to another. It is an imperfect, incomplete record preserved incompletely by imperfect record keepers on imperfect, insubstantial materials

## I. YESTERDAY IS A GREAT TEACHER

- A. It is a wonderful learning center, if we are willing to go there to learn
  - 1. Paul reminded the Philippians of the many things he had taught them in the past - Phil. 4:9
  - 2. Memories of past help from the Philippians sustained Paul in the present - Phil. 4:10
  - 3. Paul's memory of past experiences informed him how to understand and accept his present and all future circumstances - Phil. 4:11-13
- B. We can attend the learning centers of other persons' yesterdays
  - 1. Learn from family - 2Tim. 3:14-15
  - 2. Learn from the faithful - 2Tim. 2:2
  - 3. Learn from the record of faith - Rom. 15:4
  - 4. Unlike human records of yesterday, the Bible is Providentially maintained by our perfect God. It will not fade away - 1Peter 1:23-25

## II. YESTERDAY IS A POOR PLACE TO LIVE

- A. There is no living space in yesterday; we cannot linger there
  - 1. We cannot even accurately recall it - Ecc. 7:10, 1:11
  - 2. Yesterday is often bigger and better, or smaller and worse in our memories than it truly was in reality.
  - 3. What we remember and what really happened are often different
    - a. We only know what we experienced
    - b. Even then we emphasize what was more meaningful to us and what was overlooked by the filters of our perceptions and prejudices, because that is our nature
    - c. Ask ten conscientious people to describe the same event, and they will often deliver varying accounts
    - d. Our memories are not only limited and fading, they are highly selective in what they imprint and recall
- B. For some, the memories of yesterday are pleasant, but for others, memories are unhappy, painful places to be avoided
  - 1. Many have memories filled with mistakes and failures they regret and would like to forget
  - 2. We don't have control over what happens to us; we can only control our reactions to them - James 1:2-4
  - 3. Paul had very few pleasant memories of his past - Gal. 1:13-14

## III. YESTERDAY IS NOT THE PRESENT OR THE FUTURE

- A. Some people have yesterdays of faithful service to God, but not today
  - 1. 1Tim. 1:18-20; Heb. 6:4-6
- B. Some had yesterdays filled with evil, but not today - 1Tim. 1:13-16
- C. Some had good intentions in past, but not today - Acts 24:25; Matt. 23:29-31
- D. God's standard is not yesterday, but today - Ez. 18:20-24
- E. We don't have to continue in the same wrong direction - Luke 13:3

### Conclusion:

- A. "Your life is before you. Be careful of the choices you make now that you could regret later. This regret is the subject of an old poem whose author has been forgotten. I hope you'll never have reason to apply it to yourself." (James C. Dobson, Life on the Edge)
  - "Across the fields of yesterday, He sometimes comes to me  
A little lad just back from play— The boy I used to be.  
He looks at me so wistfully When once he's crept within;  
It is as if he hoped to see The man I might have been."
- B. "Someday", you said you'd do it yesterday; Yesterday, you said you'll do it today. Today, if you push it to tomorrow, it's likely tomorrow, you'll shift it to "Someday"! Do it now!" (Israelmore Ayivor)
- C. If you don't do it today, then tomorrow you will carry the regret that you allowed today to become yesterday without doing it.