

"I remember you ... Will you remember me?"**Joshua 4:1-5:1**

Joshua 3-4 form a unit: chapter 3 describes the parting of the Jordan River; chapter 4, the construction of a memorial to mark the event. The use of memorials is an aspect of biblical teaching on 'remembering', a prominent theme with a storied history that predates – and postdates – the crossing of the Jordan River. This week's devotional focuses on this theme, not just in this chapter, but also its background and its subsequent development in the teaching of Jesus. One point remains consistent throughout: in Scripture, 'remembering' is not a purely cognitive activity. It does not mean simply, 'to bring to mind, to recall'. Rather, 'remembering' impacts one's response and life.

Day 1: Exodus 2:24-3:22 God remembers his people

Fundamentally, it is not we who 'remember' God, but he who 'remembers' us. In Genesis 8:1, he remembers Noah and the occupants of the ark: this does not suggest that he had momentarily forgotten about them; rather, he brings a strong wind to push back the waters, rescuing them from the flood. In Genesis 9:15-16, he promises Noah to remember the covenant; in consequence, he will never again flood the earth to destroy all life. Later, when God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, he 'remembers' Abraham, and rescues his nephew Lot (Gen 19:29). He also 'remembers' the barren Rachel, and enables her to give birth, in answer to her desperate prayers and longing (Gen 30:22).

Similarly, when Israel is enslaved in Egypt, it is his 'remembering' which causes God to intervene: "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham... So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them" (Exod 2:23-25). God's remembering did not simply lead to an awakening of concern and sympathy, it led to action. He spoke to Moses: "I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant" (Exod 6:5). Later, when God threatens to destroy his people, Moses pleads, "Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel" (Exod 32:12-13). So when God remembers his people, he does not just call us to mind; he intervenes to rescue, to nurture, to guide, and to protect us.

Day 2: Deuteronomy 16:1-12 God's people are to remember him

Just as God remembers us, so we are to 'remember' him. The word retains a wider sense of 'recollection is expressed in action'. Though, of course, since God

does not require saving, the concrete ramification shifts: when God's people remember his gracious acts toward them, they respond in worship, obedience, and service. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exod 20:7-9). "You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes" (Num 15:39).

In Deuteronomy particularly, remembering features prominently. The generation which God delivered from Egypt had perished in the wilderness. Their children were now adults, but they had not seen God act. It was not they with whom God had made his covenant. So in Deuteronomy, God renews his covenant with this new generation. As part of that covenant renewal, Moses institutes the Passover feast. "Celebrate the Passover of the Lord your God, because ... he brought you out of Egypt by night" (Deut 16:1). They are to sacrifice an animal and eat it with unleavened bread, "so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt" (Deut 16:2-4). For six days they are to commemorate God's intervention on their behalf, not merely as a cognitive exercise, or an aid to recall, but so that God's grace might shape the direction and the character of their lives. As they – and we – remember him and his acts of grace, they – and we – will respond with love, worship, and obedience.

Day 3: Joshua 4:1-8 A perpetual remembrance

Which brings us to this week's passage, and the memorial God orders built from stones from around the feet of the priests, where they stood holding the ark, parting the river, bringing the Israelites into the promised land. God had remembered their fathers, delivering them from Egypt and through the Red Sea. Yet as this new generation faces its own tremendous, intimidating challenge, God graciously provides them a memory of their own (and, not coincidentally, at the Passover time, Josh 4:19; 5:10). This section is carefully and artistically structured (technically, a chiasm).

- A 4:1-3 God commands Joshua: choose 12 men to take stones from the river and set them down at their camp that night
 - B 4:4-5 Joshua appoints 12 men to take stones from the river, 12 representing the number of patriarchal clans
 - C 4:6 the stone structure will serve as a sign for Israel
 - C' 4:7 the stone structure is a memorial of the crossing of the Jordan
 - B' 4:8a the Israelites do as Joshua commanded, taking 12 stones, 12 representing the number of patriarchal clans
 - A' 4:8b the Israelites carry the stones to their camp, and set them down
- The content makes a point, and the structure underscores it.

The point: God has just worked a spectacular miracle for Israel. As the priests carrying the ark stepped into the river, the water recoiled, heaping up on both sides, and the riverbed became dry and firm. The memorial reminds them of God's great invention on their behalf: just as God rescued the previous generation out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, now he has delivered them through the Jordan and into the new land.

Once again, though, this is not just a mental exercise. It is to shape their lives. This memorial of spectacular deliverance is to sustain them, so that when the task of occupying Canaan seems insurmountable, or the challenge overwhelming, and God does not miraculously intervene, but seems both silent and absent, then the pile of stones from the Jordan River serves as concrete evidence that God is with them, and that he will see them through to a victorious end (provided they worship and obey him). Moreover, God apparently does not intend to intervene regularly for each new generation. Instead, this memory stands as mute testimony of his commitment and his grace, mute only until future generations see it and ask their parents, "What is this?" "This, my child, is proof of God's power, and his love for us: God heaped up the river on both sides, and our ancestors walked through on dry ground." Whatever challenge facing subsequent generations, these stones serve as eloquent testimony that God will see them – and us – through.

Day 4: Jeremiah 2:1-13 Out of sight, out of mind! But not with God.

'Remember' occurs nearly 200 times in the Old Testament (and especially frequently in Psalms, calling God's people to remember what he has done, and to worship him). Obviously there is neither space nor time here to review them all. But one time when Israel *fails* to remember God provides instructive contrast. "'What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. They did not ask, 'Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness?'" (Jer 2:5-6).

When Israel forgets God, they do not simply fail to recall his previous acts of kindness and salvation, they also fail to worship, obey or serve him. So God, for his part, *will* remember them, yet not for good, but for ill: "'They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet. So the Lord does not accept them; he will now remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins'" (Jer 14:10). God's memory is not merely cognitive; it impels him to action, whether to save his people or to judge them, depending on whether or not they also remember him. Still, Jeremiah's final word – and God's final memory – is not one of judgment, but of grace. So the prophet looks forward to a future day, and a better outcome: he quotes God, "'Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in

whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still *remember* him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him... I will forgive their wickedness and will *remember* their sins no more" (Jer 31:20,34).

Day 5: Luke 22:14-20 Remembering Jesus at the Lord's Supper: Part 1

All the preceding, and a great deal more, lies behind Jesus' words during the Last Supper, when he institutes Christian communion. "He took break, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me'" (22:19). As we saw from the Old Testament, 'to do in remembrance' of Jesus entails not simply cognitive recall, but having one's life shaped by the event remembered. In this case, by Jesus' death for us. As we celebrate communion, we remember not only in the sense of recalling his death for us, but equally by responding with love, worship, and obedience. "Do this in remembrance of me": as he gave his life for us, we give our lives to him.

Day 6: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Remembering Jesus at the Lord's Supper: Part 2

Paul recalls Luke 22 to elaborate a second way in which we remember Jesus at communion: not only by loving, worshipping, and obeying him, but also in how we treat one another. In the first century, communion was part of a meal: in typical Greco-Roman style, the bread was served with the main course, and the wine, after the meal. So first-century Christians sandwiched communion around a meal. In practice, a problem arose, however. The prosperous could come on time; the poor and slaves could arrive only after finishing their day's duties. So the wealthy got a head start on the meal, and the poor ended up hungry. This is not just another meal, Paul insists; if you are hungry, eat at your private home before coming for corporate worship. Because those who wolf down the meal and leave others nothing, and those who wolf down the wine and get drunk, sin both against their brothers and sisters in Christ, and against God. When they treat each other disrespectfully at communion, they sin against the body and blood of the Lord. And communion transforms from a celebration of God's grace to an experience of divine judgment.

This particular manifestation is no problem today, since the early Church, in fear of committing the Corinthian sin and facing their judgment, dispensed with meals. It is inconceivable that anyone would pig out on the little wafers and little cups of juice that churches typically serve today. In our time, though, the possibility of abuse extends in other directions, such as supposing that we can enjoy relationship with God while in conflict with one another. As we remember Christ at the Lord's Supper, we also remember our commitments and obligations of love and service, not only toward him, but also toward one another.