



THE VALUE OF MEMORIALS

WEEK 1
09.06.15

FOCUS VERSE

Deuteronomy 32:7

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.

LESSON TEXT

Joshua 4:1-7

1 And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying,

2 Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man,

3 And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night.

4 Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man:

5 And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel:

6 That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?

7 Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.

Exodus 12:26-27

26 And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service?

27 That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.

Deuteronomy 6:20-21

20 And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?

21 Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.



FOCUS THOUGHT

The old landmarks left by our godly fathers will guide us down the pathway of truth.



CULTURE CONNECTION

More than a Marble Wall

Every year more than two million visitors journey to a remote mountain in western South Dakota where the faces of four American presidents have been carved into the granite. These presidents were selected because of their role in preserving and expanding the republic. Hidden behind the carved faces of Mt. Rushmore is a chamber cut into the rock containing a vault with sixteen porcelain panels. The panels include the text of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, biographies of the four presidents, and the history of the US.

In Washington, D.C., is a famous black granite wall inscribed with more than fifty-eight thousand names of brave men and women who gave their lives during the longest war

in US history. Yet it is not the wall that is celebrated, but the sacrifices of those for whom the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall was built.

History remembers those who leave an enduring impact. One recent US president was accused of trying to establish a legacy during his final year in office that did not reflect his actual accomplishments. Mention abolition of slavery, and Lincoln comes to mind. Social security reminds us of Roosevelt, as the War on Poverty recalls Lyndon Johnson. The collapse of the Berlin Wall prompts memories of Reagan's memorable words, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Whether recorded in statues, marble walls, or literature, an individual's accomplishments become the greatest memorial.

OUTLINE

I. BIBLICAL MEMORIALS

- A. Old Testament
- B. New Testament

II. FAITHFULNESS TO BIBLICAL MEMORIALS

- A. Seeking the Old Paths
- B. Celebrating Apostolic Distinctives

III. LEAVING MEMORIALS FOR OUR CHILDREN

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., draws approximately three million visitors a year. Many people who go there have names of family members and friends engraved among the almost sixty thousand names on the wall. Some people carefully etch their loved one's name with graphite and a sheet of paper. Others contemplatively run their fingers over the engraved letters as if they are touching a vestige of the past. Still others kneel with bowed heads offering

a moment of silence before a name on the black wall. Some leave flowers; others leave small stuffed animals. All, in some way, are attempting to honor the person for whom the name is a symbol.

Rituals and ceremonies are powerful tools for expressing rites of passage, commemorating new beginnings, and honoring life's cycles or completions. It is a means for joining with others in fellowship for healing, mourning, celebration, or letting go. Consciously created rituals encourage self-expression and discovery on a deep level and can be used to connect with, amplify, and harness that which is greater than one's self. Special ceremonies celebrate, codify, and enforce institutions.

Ancient cultures practiced rites of passage for their young adults, coronation ceremonies for their kings, and various other pageantries for important events of life. The ancient Hebrews commemorated feasts, sacrifices, holy days, and various other ceremonies. In our culture we engage in marriage ceremonies, baby dedications, graduation exercises, retirement parties, and funerals to help us

savor life's essence and heighten meaning and significance. Ceremony gives time for pause and contemplation, heightening those moments of significance. These events provide anchor points in life's journey for later reflection, resulting in greater endurance of commitment.

North Americans also celebrate many special days—birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, initiations, and special achievements. We build memorials to honor great losses, heroic sacrifices, amazing achievements, outstanding leadership, and so forth. Our memorials teach the following generations what is important and what is of lesser importance. This is not only a North American practice, but history is also replete with lavish celebrations and memorials by all civilized cultures.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. BIBLICAL MEMORIALS

Our Creator understands what anchors our memories and evokes solemnity in our emotions. Because of this, God has implemented many memorials throughout His dealings with humanity. Some moments in life stand apart from all others. Certain events impact our lives and the lives of others in radical ways. We long to capture the significance of these special moments. We want our children and grandchildren to remember them. God implemented memorials not only to educate newcomers but also to remind the elderly. Memorials renew our appreciation for the past.

A. Old Testament

Crossing the Jordan River was a long-anticipated moment in Israel's epic journey to the land of milk and honey. After 430 years of bondage in Egypt and forty years of wandering in the Sinai Desert, the Israelites were about to enter the Land of Promise. This was truly a moment of passage. They were coming from a hot desert land to a lush, verdant country that would become their long-awaited home. But there was one imposing problem. Their destination was on the west side of the Jordan River, which was at flood stage. If hundreds of thousands of

people were to cross over, it would take divine intervention. God did not let them down.

Following God's instructions, the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders into the swollen river. In response to their obedience, God dropped an invisible dam into the river—reminiscent of the Red Sea crossing. The water to the south ran toward the Dead Sea, and the water to the north backed up toward the Sea of Galilee, leaving a riverbed suitable for crossing. Trusting God's unseen dam, Israel walked across the river into Canaan.

This day was one to remember. Such a spectacular event would be indelibly burned into the memory of those who marched across the dry riverbed, but those who were born afterward would have no personal knowledge of this occasion. They would know about this miracle only by word of mouth. The Lord told Joshua to ask twelve men to each take a stone from the riverbed, where the priests had stood, to be set up for a memorial. Joshua also erected a twelve-stone memorial in the river. The Jordan River resumed its normal flow only after all the people had passed over and the priests were safely out of the water.

After crossing the Jordan, the people camped in Gilgal, where Joshua set up the twelve stones taken from the river for a memorial. Later, when people would see this stone monument, they would ask, "What is this?" Then the story would be told again and again. God initiated this memorial and by it confirmed the importance of remembering past victories and of building memorials.

On the other hand, memorials can be overemphasized. Idols were a perpetual temptation for the Israelites. God once saved them from an epidemic of poisonous snakes by directing Moses to make a brass serpent and put it on a pole. All who looked at the brass serpent were healed of their snakebites. (See Numbers 21:5–9.)

Years later, however, instead of worshipping God for the miraculous way He had intervened on behalf of their forefathers, the Israelites began to worship the brass snake on a pole. It had become a god to them. When Hezekiah became king, he destroyed this idol. (See II Kings 18:1–4.)

God had forbidden the Israelites to worship idols: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:4). Paul warned about worshiping “the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). Nevertheless, memorials are good when handled properly.

Ancient landmarks. The writer of Proverbs wisely said, “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set” (Proverbs 22:28). The word *landmark* in this verse means a boundary or territory. Landmarks are imperative for keeping track of property lines. Many feuds have begun over territorial boundaries. Establishing permanent certifiable boundaries is critical for developing healthy communities. Fraudulently moving boundary markers destroys community.

Many buildings have cornerstones. In ancient times the cornerstone was the first stone set in a building’s construction and became an anchor point for all other measurements. Today cornerstones are more symbolic and can include information acknowledging designers, builders, dates, and special leaders involved in the construction of the building.

The psalmist predicted Jesus would become the cornerstone of the church: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” (Psalm 118:22). (See Matthew 21:42.) The church has no uncertainty about its founder and owner. Paul said we are “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:19–21).

The church must build memorials to preserve our Oneness Apostolic heritage. Honoring elders and building memorials are good things. Nevertheless, the best memorials we can provide are our lives. Being faithful to the truth is the best way to honor the ancient landmarks.

Heritage of our fathers. The Old Testament provides us with a rich history of cultural and doctrinal heritage. Paul said, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples:

and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). The temptations, failures, triumphs, and teachings of the Bible provide an abundant resource of life’s lessons. Seeing others survive and thrive inspires us to do the same.

The Passover was one of the greatest events in Israel’s history. The exodus from Egyptian bondage was not only a moment of deliverance for God’s people but also a benchmark for them for generations. The annual celebration of Passover would evoke the question, “What does this mean?” This question provided a teaching moment for the parents to tell their children of God’s miraculous deliverance (Exodus 12:26–27; Deuteronomy 6:20–21).

Paul reminded us of our heritage: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:24–25). The Law was not perfect, but it was important to teach the need for a Savior. It revealed God’s moral laws and human weaknesses. It revealed that God’s demands are unattainable without His help. The Scripture makes the principle clear: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:3–4). The Old Testament prepared us for the New Testament. Unless we reflect on the old, we do not appreciate the new.

B. New Testament

Communion. While sitting with His disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus “took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:17–20). Paul reminded us of these words and confirmed that Jesus was instituting a memorial of His death for the sins of the world (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). By drinking the fruit of the vine

and eating the bread, we reflect upon the enormous sacrifice Jesus made for the sins of the world. By partaking of the memorial collectively, we facilitate a bonding of the body of Christ. His life becomes our life as His body. While we reflect upon the blessing of redemption, we examine ourselves. We “do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (I Corinthians 11:26).

Footwashing. After the Last Supper, Jesus did something totally unexpected—He washed the disciples’ feet. Afterward He asked, “Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:12–17).

Due to a lack of paved roads and modern footwear, in ancient times it was customary for a household servant to wash the feet of guests entering the home. Such a practice was a practical way to maintain good hygiene and cleanliness. In washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus demonstrated the humility of a servant; He instructed His disciples to do likewise.

Today churches practice the memorial of footwashing—some regularly and others only on special occasions—to show humility. It certainly should be honored as a biblical memorial Jesus instituted to communicate the true role of a servant-leader. Acts of benevolence and hospitality toward others can be shown in many ways—taking a meal to a sick person, offering someone transportation, or providing home repairs for a shut-in, to name only a few.

II. FAITHFULNESS TO BIBLICAL MEMORIALS

Biblical rituals should be included in the calendar of every church. By not participating with religious acts of communion, footwashing, anointing with oil, and so forth, a church deprives its members of rich experiences that could deepen their faith. Ignoring traditional

holidays such as Christmas and Easter will cause a church to miss a great opportunity to reflect on its heritage. Even though the dates of these holidays can be challenged, it is a convenient time to remember and to celebrate the birth of Christ as well as His death and resurrection. Just because we do not know the exact dates of these events is no reason to abandon these memorial occasions.

A. Seeking the Old Paths

Our postmodern culture is splintered into many factions and beliefs, but generally it does not have a healthy respect for traditions. Being provocative is considered to be innovative and groundbreaking to many. Ours is a pluralistic society where people do not share a monolithic moral standard. They are able to pick from a vast array of philosophies, religions, and political and economic systems. Because people of each new generation tend to think they are smarter than those of the previous generation, they revel in the choices.

However, the exhortation of the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah is relevant today: “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein” (Jeremiah 6:16). We can avoid many pitfalls by having a good knowledge of and respect for the past. The “tested and tried” is worthy of consideration.

B. Celebrating Apostolic Distinctives

A number of distinctives separate Apostolic Pentecostals from other Christian denominations. The Oneness doctrine puts us in a minority within the Christian community. The doctrine of the Trinity is considered to be an orthodox doctrine by the majority of Christian denominations. Some theologians even classify Oneness Pentecostalism as a cult.

But so-called orthodoxy does not trump truth. The Bible clearly proclaims the Oneness of God. New Testament believers were baptized only in the name of Jesus Christ. Although the desire to be accepted by others may be a strong motivation, we should not compromise for the sake of acceptance

by others. Loving the truth will keep believers from wavering from the old paths.

Biblical holiness is another distinctive of Oneness Pentecostalism. It is essential to understand we are not saved by works but rather by the abundant grace of God (Ephesians 2:8). But grace calls us to holiness. A life of holiness is a discipline of the flesh rendered to God as an offering of worship. We want to be holy people to please God. We want to please Him because we love Him (John 14:15). However, living a life of austerity is not necessarily holiness. The Holy Spirit living within us must generate true holiness. God is the only one who is holy. He must impart His holiness to us; otherwise, our hal- lowed acts are just self-righteousness.

Those who were among the first to receive the Holy Spirit baptism at the turn of the twentieth century were considered to be fanatics. The Topeka and Azusa Street revivals were amazing displays of miracles and wonders wrought by the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is still considered a fringe practice in many circles, but not to the extent it was years ago.

Pentecostal pioneers demonstrated great faith and willingness to sacrifice. Denomina- tional church members who came to believe in the Oneness of God and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ in the 1940s were often expelled from their churches as heretics. Many Pentecostal ministers lived in poverty, spent days and weeks fasting, persevered through long prayer vigils, were threatened by hostile haters of the truth, and bore the stigma of being called “Holy Rollers.” Ag- itators harassed some of the tent revival meetings by throwing rotten eggs and toma- toes into the services. Vandals cut tent ropes and slashed the tent fabric, but none of these acts of vandalism dampened the fervor of the believers. Some believers were even arrest- ed for disturbing the peace.

Today’s hostilities against the church are more sophisticated, yet every bit as sinister. We now live in an age of tolerance. As a result, apathy is the greatest enemy of the church. However, we can draw new inspiration from the sacrifices of our Apostolic ancestors. Considering their sacrifices should make us appreciate our Apostolic heritage.

Jude’s epistle warned the church about doctrinal and practical errors. Although Jude’s theme regarding apostasy was spe- cifically directed to first-century Jewish Christians, its message is still relevant today. Believers of every generation need to be warned about the pitfalls of denying the faith. Every church member must guard against succumbing to sinful fleshly desires, rebel- ling against authority, being divisive, and living a selfish life.

It was said of the early church that “they con- tinued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). They passed on their faith to the next generation. We must do the same.

III. LEAVING MEMORIALS FOR OUR CHILDREN

Cornelius, a Gentile soldier in the city of Caesarea, was a devout believer in Judaism during the growth of the first-century church (Acts 10). These Jewish sympathizers were called “God fearers.” Cornelius was “a de- vout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. . . . and of good report among all the nation of the Jews” (Acts 10:2, 22).

One day Cornelius had a vision of an an- gelic visitation. The angel said, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memo- rial before God” (Acts 10:4). Based on the angel’s instructions, Cornelius sent three men to Joppa to find the apostle Peter. As the men approached Joppa, God revealed to Peter the men were coming and he was to go with them. When Peter arrived at Cae- sarea, he went to Cornelius’s house and preached Jesus to the crowd that had gather- ed. While he was preaching, “the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44). Then Peter “commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48).

Cornelius’s prayers and alms built a me- morial that attracted God’s attention. The regular prayers and devotional life of parents can act as a memorial to their children. The tradition of a family altar or family devotional time can help to develop similar devotional habits in the lives of grown children.

We influence one another for good or bad. Just as some diseases are transmitted from one person to another, there is another human contagion—behavioral influence! We are to be followers of Jesus Christ—to be heavily influenced by His life. Peter said, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (I Peter 2:21). Paul said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1). We are like runners in a race passing a baton from one to another.

Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). We do good works so God gets the glory. We want to be good examples of Him. Paul said, “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men” (II Corinthians 3:2). As we live the Christian life, we are building memorials for our children.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

As we eagerly go about trying to make a difference in our world, we should heed the following exhortation: “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee” (Deuteronomy 32:7). There are lessons only years of experience can teach.



A minister overheard an eighty-five-year-old man sitting in a coffee shop loudly proclaiming his frustration: “Parents spend forty thousand dollars on their child’s education these days. The kid graduates

from college with a good education but no common sense!”

Getting knowledge is important, but elders have wisdom they can impart. Learning about the past and taking heed to its wisdom is critical to coping with modern-day issues.

Our Apostolic Pentecostal heritage is not made up of old dusty stories of another era. God has given us many elders who provide sterling role models for today’s challenges. Some of our elders suffered persecution and deprived themselves of luxuries to preach the Oneness Apostolic message. Some were rejected by their friends and castigated by their enemies.



One pioneer minister told about his evangelistic travels. On the journey to preach at one church, he and his wife had to spend the night at a roadside park because they had no money for a motel. He gave his wife the front seat of their coupe, and he slept on the hood of the car. They went three days without a meal, and they were not fasting; they had no money for food. Hearing stories like this one makes our sacrifices seem small. The dedication of others should give us inspiration to do more.

Not only should we remember the great people and events of our past, but we should remember we are building memorials by the lives we live. After our passing, we will continue to live in the memories of others. Let us leave memorials to glorify God for His wonderful works and to encourage others to follow Jesus Christ. ■

REFLECTIONS

- How does our culture memorialize historical leaders and outstanding events? How are they useful?
- What was the purpose of building a stone memorial on the banks of the Jordan River?
- What are the principles Jesus taught by offering the Lord’s Supper?
- What were the principles Jesus taught by washing His disciples’ feet?
- How can we leave memorials for our children?