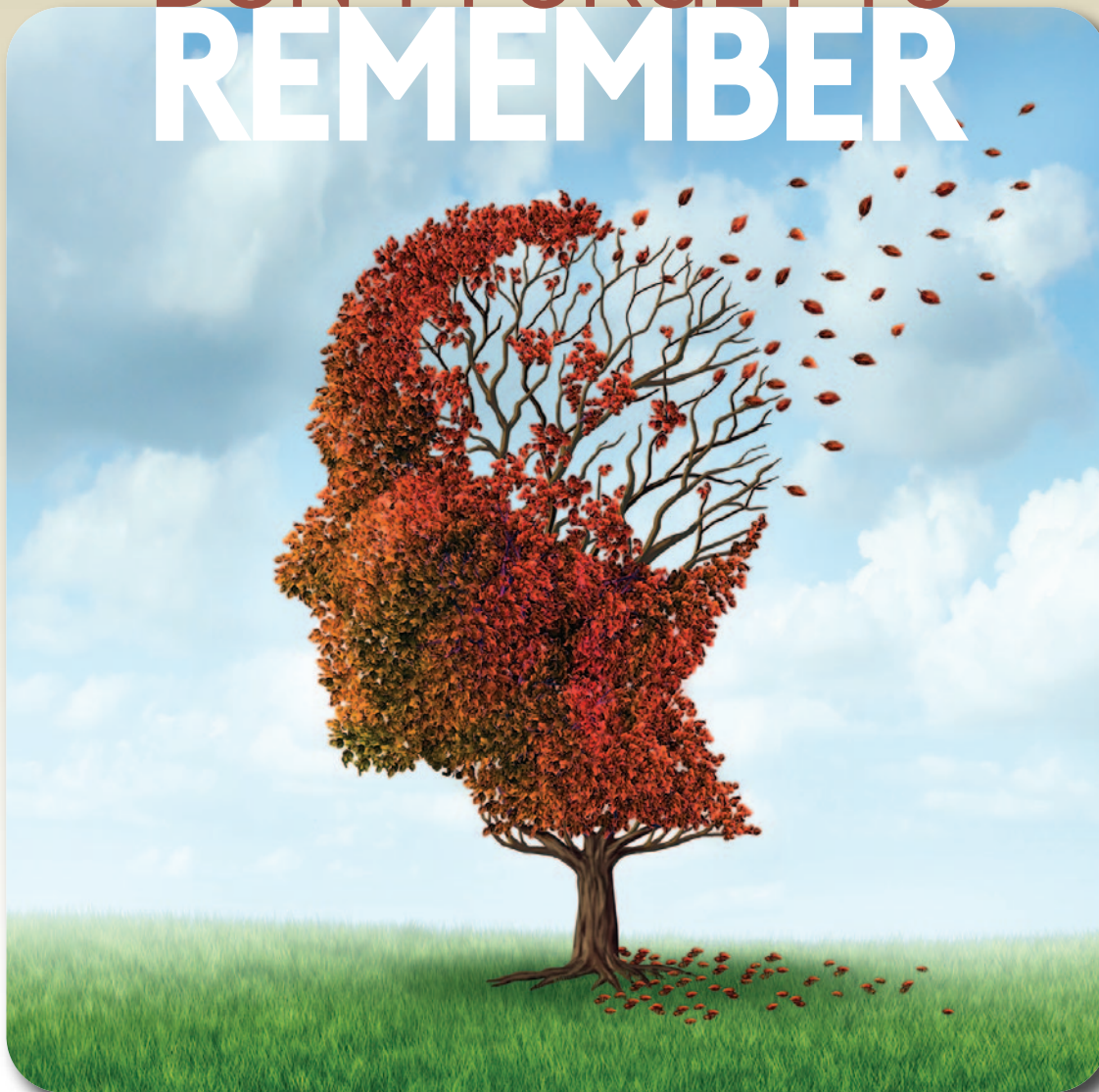


# DON'T FORGET TO REMEMBER



In his book, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, neurologist Oliver Sacks tells about patients caught in the baffling world of neurological disorders. Sacks describes one struggling human subject as “striving to preserve its identity in adverse circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> Memory loss is one of the most adverse circumstances a human can face. Sacks points out that along with the loss of

their memories, his patients have lost a great part of their identity and meaning in life, like Dr. P, who could no longer distinguish faces. People’s faces, even those of family and friends, appeared to Dr. P as abstract puzzles.

“He did not relate to them, he did not behold. No face was familiar to him, as a ‘thou,’ being just identified as a set of features, an ‘it.’ Thus, there was formal, but no trace of personal, gnosis. And with this went his

indifference, or blindness, to expression.”<sup>2</sup>

Medical reasons are not the only cause of memory loss. The apparent indifference toward learning and the inability of some students to remember what they study in school are often tied to causes that teachers can control. Based on Sack’s observations, lasting memory cannot be formed if (1) the object of study is

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like an abstract puzzle, and each piece of the puzzle appears unrelated to other pieces and the big picture; (2) one cannot relate to the content of the curriculum; and (3) there is only formal instruction and no personal understanding.

The principles underlying the numerous appeals to remember the past saving acts of God in Scripture seem to have already taken into account the issues reflected in these three points. The biblical calls to remember not only highlight the importance of remembering but also consider some strategies that can help people remember effectively.

### **“Remember the Days of Old”**

“Remember the days of old, Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; Your elders, and they will tell you” (Deuteronomy 32:7, NKJV).<sup>3</sup> Memory is crucial for life in Scripture. For the ancient Israelites, remembering afforded continuity with the past that was essential to their existence because their identity was anchored in God’s great acts on their behalf in the past (Deuteronomy 5:15; 8:2).<sup>4</sup> Without their historical memory, the ancient Israelites would have ceased to exist as God’s covenanted people with a particular mission to preserve and proclaim God’s revelation to the world (Exodus 19:3-6). Remembering also shaped their present because remembering in Scripture involves more than cognizance or memory; it always leads to action.<sup>5</sup> God remembers His people by remaining faithful to His covenantal promises. The Israelites remembered God by recounting His marvelous deeds in history and teaching their posterity to observe His commandments.<sup>6</sup> Remembering rightly the past would guard the people from repeating past mistakes (Psalm 78:1-8). Perverted memory caused apostasy (e.g., Numbers 11:5-10). Finally, memory afforded hope and vision for the future. The Israelites were told not to be afraid of the future challenges but to remember well how the Lord led them in the past (Deuteronomy 7:18). Speaking of

the future, the prophets often employed the language of the past, implying that God’s word did not change, nor should the faithfulness of God’s people (e.g., Genesis 2:9 and Ezekiel 47:12 in Revelation 22:2).

### **“Consider the Years of Many Generations”**

To remember the days of old, the people should “consider the years of many generations” (Deuteronomy 32:7). The Hebrew verb *bin* (“consider”) refers to “knowledge that is superior to the mere gathering of data” and depicts knowing how to use the knowledge one possesses.<sup>7</sup> Remembering their history had a practical bearing on the ancient Israelites’ everyday life, enabling them to distinguish between good and evil, and to do justice. It also helped to strengthen their trust in God.<sup>8</sup>

The phrase “many generations” indicates that the individual is part of a historical community of faith and points to collective learning and memory. Biblical religion is essentially a religion of fellowship and peoplehood. This does not mean that the individual in Israel assumed a secondary meaning. Indeed, individuals develop their fullest potential in close relationship with the community, both past (by remembering and continuing in its faith) and present (by sharing in the common present experience of God’s guidance).<sup>9</sup> “Many generations” also implies that people should consider the purposes of God as they gradually unfold in history, not only as disparate snippets, in order to capture the broad picture of God’s dealings with humanity, of which they are an integral part. Israel’s inquiries thus are never made in a vacuum but build on past revelations (Psalm 80:8-11).<sup>10</sup>

### **Ask the Previous Generations**

For people to properly remember the days of old, they must *inquire* about the events that occurred, not only from sources that exist in the

present day, but also from previous generations. Freedom to inquire is a condition for spiritual and academic growth and is often descriptive of the relationship between God and His children.<sup>11</sup> In Deuteronomy 32:7, the responsibility lies with both learner and instructor: The learner asks, and the instructor inspires interest and trust. “He will show you” (vs. 7) in Hebrew also means “He will place it conspicuous before you,” as in telling the solution (Judges 14:12) or providing evidence (Ezra 2:59).<sup>12</sup> The wisdom for the future is often found in the evidences from the past (Jeremiah 6:16).

### **Meditate on God’s Works**

Psalm 143:5 links remembering to “meditation.” Meditation involves deep thinking (Proverbs 15:28). It goes on day and night, implying that the subject of study must be the sustained focus of attention (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2). To seize people’s attention, God’s revelation is conveyed through different media (e.g., nature, human beings, conscience, Scripture, and the incarnation of Jesus). In Scripture, it is predominantly captured in a narrative (e.g., historical accounts, parables). Research has shown that most people understand and remember ideas better when they are presented in stories.<sup>13</sup>

### **Remember by Participating**

In Deuteronomy 16:3, remembering is tied to eating unleavened bread and so is reinforced through sharing in the experience of the past generations physically and engaging all senses, not only the mind. Remembering is not merely an occasional thought, but deliberate mindfulness and the decision to act according to what is remembered. All generations of the Israelites were to commemorate the Passover as if they had been present when Moses led Israel out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:3). Studies demonstrate that people learn more efficiently when multiple senses are engaged—including visual, auditory, olfactory, and taste.<sup>14</sup> In the New Tes-

tament, participating in the Lord's Supper strengthens the memory of Jesus' atoning death on the Cross and the expectation of His second coming, thus bringing together God's past, present, and future saving acts (1 Corinthians 11:26).

#### **Never Forget the Events of the Past**

An oath never to forget Jerusalem is one of the central themes in Jewish tradition, preserved in liturgy—for example, the breaking of the glass at the end of the wedding ceremony, which places the memory of the destruction of Jerusalem above one's greatest joy.<sup>15</sup> The commitment to remember Zion is so great that abandoning Zion is associated with the deterioration of one's physical well-being (Psalm 137:5). "We remembered" (vs. 1) is a passionate resolve to keep alive the hope in Zion's restoration. The psalmist would not allow even terrible anguish to cause him to forget God's past leading and thus abandon his greatest comfort and hope (Psalm 77:10). When God's people lose their memories of God's great acts in the past, they also lose their identity and purpose, resulting in spiritual lostness and apostasy.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Answer the Call to Tell and Remember**

Adventist history is full of stories of success, sacrifice, failure, fear, courage, faithfulness, crisis, victory, providence, and so much more. Ellen G. White powerfully describes the crucial role that history plays in the life of God's people. She said: "The records of sacred history are written, not merely that we may read and wonder, but that the same faith which wrought in God's servants of old may work in us. In no less marked manner will the Lord work now, wherever there are hearts of faith to be channels of His power."<sup>17</sup>

However, many stories remain untold to the broader public, and many may be forgotten and lost for future

***ESDA Online, the church's first online reference work, will have its official debut at the 2020 General Conference session. This free Website will continue indefinitely, to be constantly updated and expanded, drawing on the expertise of thousands of Adventist scholars worldwide.***

generations. To prevent that, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has initiated a global project to produce the first online version of the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (ESDA) containing an estimated 10,000 articles on Adventist history with accompanying photographs, media, and original documents. *ESDA Online*, the church's first online reference work, will have its official debut at the 2020 General Conference session. This free Website will continue indefinitely, to be constantly updated and expanded, drawing on the expertise of thousands of Adventist scholars worldwide. The print edition of ESDA will be published after most articles are published online.

The ESDA editors invite researchers, teachers, students, and members with expertise on various subjects to contribute articles on topics not yet covered by our invitation-

only editorial process. Teachers can assign students short articles to be written for course credit. Each article in the *Encyclopedia* will count as a scholarly publication, and its author(s) will receive full recognition.<sup>18</sup>

The ESDA editors are open to considering new research and unplanned articles.<sup>19</sup> Think of the former missionaries, evangelists, educators, medical workers, preachers, and church leaders who contributed to the development of the Adventist Church in your territory. To begin research, check the church archives, obituaries, yearbooks, newsletters, church publications, private collections of missionary letters and diaries, audio and video materials, and collect historical data from oral traditions. Let us work together to remember and recount God's wonderful leading. ✍



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## Sidebar 1. Potential Topics for *ESDA Online*

*ESDA Online*, the church's first online reference work, will officially debut at the 2020 General Conference session. *ESDA Online* will be a FREE Website, ensuring global dissemination of content. The print version of the Encyclopedia will be produced after the first online edition.

The editors invite researchers, teachers, students, and members with expertise on a given subject, not only history and theology scholars, to contribute articles on topics not yet covered by our invitation-only editorial process.

There is a variety of available topics including:

- Biographies of Adventist missionaries and workers (e.g., Eliza Happy Morton, Obeid Hamad, Bertha Kurtz, Francis Arthur Detamore);
- History of Adventist work and institutions (e.g., Établissement Médico-Social Le Flon Switzerland, Beirut Overseas School, Andapa Adventist Hospital Madagascar, native religions and Seventh-day Adventists in West-Central Africa, Aruba Mission);
- History of theology and ethics (e.g., Cremation, Bioethics); and
- Ellen G. White-related topics (e.g., The Conflict of the Ages Series).

ESDA makes special appeal to international writers to collect historical data from their world regions. Think of the past missionaries, evangelists, educators, medical workers, preachers, and church leaders who contributed to the growth of the Adventist Church in your territory. Good places to begin research are the church archives, obituaries, yearbooks, newsletters, church publications, private collections of missionary letters and diaries, audio and video materials, and interviews to collect historical data from oral traditions.

Each article in the *Encyclopedia* will count as a scholarly publication, and its author(s) will receive full recognition. Please check <http://www.adventistarchives.org/author-materials> for detailed information for authors and preferred topics and <http://www.adventistarchives.org/assistant-editors> for the ways of contacting the responsible division editors and learning about the available topics. Visit also <https://www.esda-europe.org/>, <https://www.esdana.org/>, and <https://esda-nsd.weebly.com/>.

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 6.

2. *Ibid.*, 13.

3. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version® (NKJV). Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

4. James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1994), 256. Some scholars distin-

guish between Israel's actual history and sacred history (history as it is remembered and transmitted through the generations). Others argue that biblical history is Israel's sacred history. For a critical assessment of this view, see, for example, Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 115-138, 196-201.

5. For example, the accusation against Israel's judges in Psalm 82:5 that they know nothing indicates more than mere lack of information; it is a lack of integrity in dealing with other people (Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988], 306).

6. Genesis 8:1; Exodus 2:24; Psalm 78:3-11.

7. Louis Goldberg, "Bin, Understand, Consider, Perceive, Prudent, Regard," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Publishers, 1980), 1:103.

8. Psalms 78, 105, 106; Isaiah 51:1-4.

9. Psalm 42:4; 122:1-9; Hebrews 10:24, 25.

10. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), 99.

11. Numbers 14:11; Job 7:19-21; Psalm 88:14; 89:46-49; Jeremiah 2:21; Habakkuk 1:2, 3.

12. Lenard J. Coppers, "Nagad, 'Tell, Make Known,'" *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2:549.

13. About storytelling, see <https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/30-storytelling-tips-for-educators/>.

14. John Hattie and Gregory Yates, *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 115, 126-128, 176.

15. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbane, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring the Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1435.

16. Deuteronomy 8:19; Ezekiel 16:22; Psalm 106:13-21.

17. Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1917), 175.

18. Please check <https://www.adventistarchives.org/encyclopedia> for detailed information about the Encyclopedia project.

19. E-mail your suggestions to [https://encyclopedia@gc.adventist.org](mailto:https://encyclopedia@gc.adventist.org).