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Title Preserving and Enlarging the Memory of the Saints

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Abstract Midgley applies Yosef Yerushalmi's discussion of the ways of remembrance as illustrated in Jewish history to the Book of Mormon.

PRESERVING AND ENLARGING THE MEMORY OF THE SAINTS

Louis Midgley

Remembering

In 1983, when my attention was first drawn to Yosef Yerushalmi's remarkable study of Jewish history and memory¹ and then to the careful examination of memory in ancient Israel,² I uncovered a similar and related pattern in the Book of Mormon. I was elated by this and closely related discoveries. I was delighted to see the subtle and complex way in which remembrance was linked with covenants, with blessings for obedience, and also with the very survival of the covenant people of God, as well as with the dire consequences of forgetfulness, rebellion, and failure to honor our covenants.

I felt a certain joy upon finding something in the Book of Mormon that I had not previously noticed. The ways of remembrance had been hidden right before my eyes. I even imagined that I might have been the first Latter-day Saint to notice the central role of remembrance in the Book of Mormon. Although, as I now believe, I was probably not the first, my passion has not diminished for this crucial element in our scriptures, ancient and modern. It is also a central, though not always

1. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, originally published in 1982 by the University of Washington Press and subsequently revised and republished twice. See the discussion of this book in the Book Notes section of this number of the *Review*.

2. See especially Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1962). There are many publications dealing with memory, identity, and history.

fully appreciated or understood, element in our communal worship—that is, in the renewal of our covenant with God (see Moroni 4–5; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79).

In 1984 Gary Novak and I fashioned an essay entitled “Remembrance and the Past: Jewish and Mormon Memory and the New History,” which Novak read at the Mormon History Association meeting that year. In this essay we tried, among other things, to call the attention of those interested in the Mormon past to the cautionary tale told by Yerushalmi about the impact on Jewish identity of the revived interest in the Jewish past—an interest that is now driven by motivations other than merely preserving the memory and fidelity of the Jewish people. We discovered that our project was overly ambitious; we had addressed far too many issues, and we also managed to ruffle some feathers. Our endeavors, for various reasons, were ridiculed, and our paper was never published. I was not deterred.

I have striven to draw attention to what I call the “ways of remembrance” and also to the dire consequences of forgetfulness for the covenant people of God. In addition, I have argued that the Saints live both by and in stories and not by creeds or carefully worked-out theology, either systematic or dogmatic.³ I have, with my colleagues, attempted to examine in detail these and related topics in previous essays published in the *FARMS Review*.

A New Zeal and Passion for the Ways of Remembrance

It very much pleases me that others have discovered and made much of the ways of remembrance. In this number of the *Review* we have brought together four essays on the ways of remembrance. I have already mentioned one of these—Novak’s and my “Remembrance and the Past,” now edited and published for the first time. We are also pleased to republish in a slightly edited form a fine address given by James Faulconer in which he describes his own encounter with the

3. See, for example, Louis Midgley, “Two Stories—One Faith,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 55–79.

ways of remembrance and his sense of the importance and dynamics of memory in grounding the faith of the Saints.

In the April 2007 General Conference held in the Salt Lake Tabernacle (for the rededication of that wonderful building), Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy delivered a powerful sermon entitled “Remember and Perish Not,”⁴ in which he urged the Saints to pay close attention to the ways of remembrance in our scriptures. He also linked the scriptural injunctions and warnings about remembrance to our efforts to write and preserve the history of the Church of Jesus Christ. Subsequently, Elder Jensen, who is currently Church historian and recorder, has spelled out what he and his associates see as the scriptural mandate grounding the massive efforts supervised by the Church historian.⁵

Elder Jensen has been asked, “What is the purpose of recording and teaching Church history?” His response is instructive:

The primary purpose of Church history is to help Church members build faith in Jesus Christ and keep their sacred covenants. In fulfilling this purpose, we are guided by three main considerations:

First, we seek to bear witness of and *defend* the foundational truths of the Restoration.

Second, we desire to help Church members *remember* the great things God has done for His children.

Third, we have a scriptural charge to help *preserve* the revealed order of the kingdom of God.⁶

We have also included in this number of the *Review* an essay by Steven Olsen entitled “The Theology of Memory.” Olsen, who is

4. Marlin K. Jensen, “Remember and Perish Not,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 36–38. Others have taken up some of these matters. See, for example, Henry B. Eyring’s address at the October 2007 General Conference entitled “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 66–69.

5. See Marlin K. Jensen, “There Shall Be a Record Kept among You,” *Ensign*, December 2007, 28–33. For an even more detailed account, see Marlin K. Jensen and David F. Boone, “A Historian by Yearning: A Conversation with Elder Marlin K. Jensen,” *Religious Educator* 8/3 (2007): 1–13.

6. Jensen, “There Shall Be a Record Kept among You,” 28–29, emphasis added.

Elder Jensen's assistant, elaborates on the themes mentioned in the two interviews cited above.⁷ In addition, we have included an essay by John Murphy in which he deals with the ways of remembrance and the role of the archivist in preserving the record of the past—something he describes as “a sacred commission.” The essays by Olsen and Murphy should be read in conjunction with the two interviews with Elder Jensen.

It should also be noted that Elder Jensen's summary of the scriptural mandate for the massive effort to record and preserve the written and artifactual remnants, as well as the understanding of the Mormon past, includes the key words *defend*, *remember*, and *preserve*. I am pleased to be associated with those at the Maxwell Institute who see each of these as vital to building the kingdom. What we now call the *FARMS Review* has been, since its modest beginnings nearly two decades ago, a prime vehicle for defending the faith and preserving the history and memory of the restoration. This it does by, among other things, providing detailed, refined, and accurate versions of the truly remarkable and wonderful story that constitutes the shared ground and content for Latter-day Saint faith in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah or Christ, and hence Redeemer of otherwise lost souls.

7. Steven Olsen and Elder Jensen addressed these issues in detail at the 2007 meeting of the Mormon History Association, held in Salt Lake City on 24–27 May.