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‘Remember The Deeds of The Lord:’ Collective Memory’s Role in a Reasonable Faith

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by

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Approach

“Without memory we would live in a timeless present, an undifferentiated now, that spacious moment between what was and what may be.”¹

Memory plays an important role in every aspect of one’s life; human relationships are no exception. I have heard it preached from the pulpit that in order to move forward in relationship with God, one must forget how the relationship has looked in the past. The idea behind this preaching is that any negative or positive interfaces one has had with God will adversely affect their ability to process future interfaces. However, I find this claim to be fundamentally flawed. First, the reasoning is flawed because God is a perfect being and in any given situation His actions are just and good. While one may often need to forgive and forget actions of the past in human relationships to move on, this is not the case with God. In human relationships, people often fail. Consider the example of a person whose father abandoned them as a young child but then reentered their life, this person would need to move past their interfaces with their father, or lack thereof, in order to cultivate a future relationship with him. This will never be the situation with a God who is good and perfect. Second, this notion is flawed because trust is built on memory of another person’s faithfulness. Without the confidence of the past faithfulness of an individual, one has little assurance of their future faithfulness. In relation to God, one is only able to have faith that He will advocate on their behalf because He has done so in the past.

¹ Steven T. Katz, *Obligated by Memory* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 55.

Establishing the Problem

Many scholars across a spectrum of beliefs have suggested that faith is blind and irrational as it functions contrary to reason. Scholars that allude to this ideology of faith include Søren Kierkegaard and Richard Dawkins. While these two authors could not be more different concerning theology and philosophy, their approach to faith is surprisingly similar. Kierkegaard criticizes the reasoned approach to faith stating,

Thus, if naked dialectical deliberation shows that there is no approximation, that wanting to quantify oneself into faith, along this path is a misunderstanding, a delusion, that wanting to concern oneself with such deliberations is a temptation for the believer, a temptation that he, keeping himself in the passion of faith, must resist with all his strength, lest it end with his succeeding in changing faith into something else, into another kind of certainty, in substituting probabilities and guarantees, which were specifically rejected when he, himself beginning, made the qualitative transition of the leap from unbeliever to believer.²

Kierkegaard's words reflect a distaste for a reasoned and rational faith, implying that once a faith has been reasoned, it is stripped of the primary characteristics that constitute its nature. Richard Dawkins agrees that faith is unreasonable by definition. As a result of this definition, he has worked against faith. Unlike Kierkegaard, Dawkins believes that every aspect of a person's belief should be reasoned. This view is problematic on its own, but nevertheless reveals how a view of faith as irrational can lead those who are more logically based to shy away from religion. Both Kierkegaard and Dawkins believe that faith works contrary to reason as is exemplified in Dawkins statement, "religious faith is an especially potent silencer of rational calculation, which usually seems to trump all others."³ Not only does this statement imply that faith works contrary to reason, but also that it functions in opposition to the common good. The book in which

² Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments Vol. I*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013) 11.

³ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), 346.

Dawkins argues against faith, *The God Delusion*, is incredibly popular and well-known even many years after its publication. *The God Delusion* displays the understanding that average Western people have concerning faith and rationality. Such views of faith are growing exponentially in the West as many cultures pursue scientism.

While this view of faith functioning contrary to reason did not result in a loss of faith for Kierkegaard, its power to produce loss of faith has increased as society has grown, and culture has changed. Scientism has become a more moving argument for understanding of the world as much of the folklore and superstitions of culture have been phased out. Many of the everyday functions of society and nature now have explanations found in science. The unknown and unexplained have lost their value in western culture and therefore, the belief that faith is irrational produces a specific barrier to faith for the modern, western culture.

The concern, displayed through numerous examples, is “that theistic and Christian belief lacks warrant.”⁴ Plantinga recognized this concern and has worked against it along with many other authors and philosophers. He saw this charge against faith made by philosophers including Bertrand Russell who famously stated that if he were ever to come before God, he would say that there was “not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence!”⁵ The expanse of work that has been done by theologians and Christian philosophers in response to this charge exemplifies the massive reach of its claims. It is of utmost importance that Christians have a response and potentially multiple responses to the claim that faith is irrational.

⁴ Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 30.

⁵ Kelly James Clark, “Religious Epistemology,” In *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed August 2, 2019, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/relig-ep/>.

Rationality of faith is clearly a concern that has been in question for many years and, while I will not attempt to solve such a massive area of conflict in Christian theism, this thesis progresses from the premise that faith does require reason in order to function properly. Christian philosophers such as Alan Pagett and Craig Boyd have suggested that reason is helpful to the pursuit of faith.⁶ However, it may be beneficial to better define reason according to the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology which claims that reason is “the capacity of the human intellect to carry out organized mental activity such as the association of ideas, induction and deduction of inferences, or formulation of value judgements.”⁷ Given this definition, it becomes clear that faith and reason may be difficult to explore as separate entities which Kierkegaard and Dawkins suggest they are.

Faith is inextricably tied to reason. This is not to say that reason is more valuable than faith is, Christians are saved by faith, however, it is impossible to approach faith without reason. This is because true reason, drawing a conclusion based on facts or premises, is how one comes to a saving faith. Whether those facts and premises be experiential occurrences, logical arguments, or the history of how one was raised, there is reason behind the action of a person coming to faith. Therefore, because faith requires some level of reason to function, the rationality of faith should be defended.

Memory plays a specific role in the rationality of one’s faith in that it ties together all instances of a person’s life to reflect the rationality or irrationality of a decision to have faith.

⁶ Steve Wilkens, *Faith and Reason: Three Views* (Downers Grover, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

⁷ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 990.

While a certain decision to have faith may appear to lack rationality when examined apart from past experiences, the validity of a past experience may contribute to a reasoned instance of faith.

The defense of a reasonable faith is powerful and effective. Memory can be one way in which Christians produce an effective defense to the charge that faith is illogical and unreasonable.

Approach to Establishing the Apologetic Value of Collective Memory

Through an assessment of the psychological, biblical, and philosophical data concerning collective memory, I hope to reveal the value that collective memory has in cultivating faith within individuals. In some cases, I will be applying the phenomenological approach with respect to rationality and memory as one can only experience their own memories and the value of such memories cannot be quantified accurately. The memory only needs to be effective for producing trust within the person therefore this approach will be most effective in evaluating the role of memory. While the memories of an individual are not the focus of this research, one can only experience memory, even collective memory in a first-person sense.

The psychological approach will include an overview of the psychology of memory. This overview will address collective memory and the ways in which it differs from individual memory. Information concerning memory will provide a background to accurately assess and apply the role of memory in the modern church.

Following a careful study of memory, the biblical approach will produce an analysis of relevant biblical texts concerning collective memory and its ability to produce faith within a believer. The study of this data will show both the philosophy behind collective memory practices and the application of them in the church. The psychological data and the biblical data

will be assessed to produce principles that can become practices for the modern church as it attempts to bolster with the rationality of collective memory.

Chapter 2: The Psychology of Memory

There are many aspects of memory; memory can function in relation to an individual or a community. Both personal memory and community memory are crucial in the functioning of individuals and societies. While one's immediate reaction may be to perceive individual memory as more important, the memory that is held by a group of people and passed on through generations carries a significant impact. Much of the information a person has is not learned directly, but rather passed down and taught through generations. As one considers their own knowledge obtained through the collective memory, the impact becomes clear.

Memory is further categorized in both semantic and episodic ways. Each is useful to address in questioning the value of memory as an apologetic. The primary type of memory employed by this thesis will be semantic memory. However, semantic and episodic memory function in relation to one another and not as individuals and thus it is crucial to define and examine both types of memory in order to employ memory as an apologetic.

Semantic Memory

Semantic and Episodic memory differ in their relation to history. Semantic memory is that memory which deals with knowledge and its relation to other types of knowledge.⁸ Semantic memory relates directly to history, recognizing the dates, places, and times of a certain event.⁹ In relation to God's actions in ancient Israel, one may remember the numbers of opposing troops overcome in a triumphant battle or the exact words that God spoke to the Israelites. Memory of

⁸ Katz and Rosen, *Obligated by Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics*, 44.

⁹ Ibid.

God's actions throughout history is valid even though one may not be an eyewitness because "what other people tell us is the main source of our knowledge about the world beyond our immediate experience."¹⁰ This is true of historical events as in the case that there are no living witnesses. While there may be no living eyewitnesses, there is validity to the historical nature of the events.

The Testimony Principle

"Beliefs about the past... these seem typically to be basic beliefs: one simply finds oneself believing them."¹¹ One may be tempted to reject the notion that beliefs about the past are, in any sense, properly basic. However, the testimony principle is an inductive principle which all men accept.¹² The testimony principle simply states "that, other things being equal, if someone tells you *p*, then probably *p*."¹³ The testimony principle qualifies as an inductive principle because it is learned independent of experience.¹⁴ Some have argued that the testimony principle is a secondary inductive principle because it is justified from our experience in the past that those things told to us have usually been shown to be true.¹⁵ This cannot, however, be the case as we

¹⁰ Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 40.

¹¹ Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 127.

¹² Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

could not even understand what people say to us, which is necessary for determining the truth of their statements, unless we had already made the assumption that they normally tell the truth.¹⁶

There is validity to the concern of history being classified as an inductive principle because history can be falsely recorded or intentionally changed. However, the testimony principle only states that *other things being equal*, if someone tells you p , then probably p .¹⁷ In the case that someone has knowledge leading to suspicion of a false record or intentional change in the testimony of another, then all things are not equal. Therefore, the testimony of others concerning the historical record may still be considered an inductive principle.

Practical History

In addition to the evidence presented concerning the inductive nature of the testimony principle, the result of a complete rejection of history and testimony as an inductive principle is far reaching and results in a lack of information impacting almost every area of a person's knowledge. The knowledge that a person gains throughout their lifetime builds upon the properly basic beliefs that they have gained through the collective memory of a society. A rejection of this form of memory would adversely affect all areas of knowledge and leave an individual functioning in relation to the society much as an animal relates to its species, which does not progress, but rather only seeks to fulfill its basic needs. This claim is demonstrated through the example of mathematics. If a person were to reject the historical understanding of mathematics and attempt to use mathematics, they would not get much beyond basic addition and subtraction. The value of the work done by previous mathematicians would benefit the student who attempts

¹⁶ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 40.

¹⁷ Ibid.

to do mathematics in this circumstance. Through this example, it also becomes clear that for a society to progress the younger generation must accept and build on the work done by the members of the older generations.

In relation to the Bible, events such as the history of Israel, preserved in oral and written tradition, begin to function as basic beliefs. The facts and events of these narratives can be remembered through semantic memory. Through the use of semantic memory, one is able to argue for the historicity of the biblical narratives.

Episodic Memory

Episodic memory refers to the information of a specific event stored by the person himself.¹⁸ This type of memory has a specific role in understanding events as it recalls location and context and often contains rich sensory elements.¹⁹ Episodic memory differs significantly from semantic memory even to the extent that the two types of memory are stored in different parts of the brain.²⁰ This fact is exemplified in the circumstance that a person who has brain trauma may retain semantic memory while failing to recall any episodic memories.²¹ In this instance, it is conceivable that a person may know the current year or president while failing to remember the names of their family members.

¹⁸ Katz, *Obligated by Memory*, 45.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Memory plays a central role in interpersonal relationships. Memory is what allows for the building of trust between two individuals. In order to build trust in others, humans rely on the other person's fulfillment of their word. Trust grows in direct relation to the number of times that the person has or has not fulfilled their word and the seriousness of the circumstance in which they do or do not fulfill their word.

Negative Memories and Their Effect on Interpersonal Relationships

Negative memories from adolescence can also play a role in one's trust of others. In cases such as these, a person receives the negative effects of another person's actions. The person who did not perpetrate the negative actions is punished for the actions of the one who did. This can be seen clearly carried over in relationships of a similar nature. Such as in the event that a wife is cheated on by her husband. She may carry, and society may even expect that she does carry, those issues of trust into her next marriage or romantic relationship with a future boyfriend or husband. This phenomenon is easily seen in relationships such as the one previously described, however, it can also take place in less obvious ways. One example of this is displayed in paternal lapses carrying over to one's understanding of God. In the mind of an individual who has been abused or neglected by a paternal figure, such actions and deeds can be attributed to God as well. However, as previously mentioned, these instances are often less obvious than that of the unfaithful spouse. Parental abuse is often buried and forgotten as the individual attempts to cope with the daily realities of living in a dysfunctional environment.²² In other words, the abused or

²² Leslie Ellen and Frances Spaulding, "Is God Like My Father?: Exploring Abusive Family Relationships Through Sibling Narratives," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 5, no. 1 (2012): 109-31, accessed December 12, 2019, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/10.1525/irqr.2012.5.1.109?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

neglected individual may be projecting past memories of his or her father upon God without any awareness of the projection. This is one situation that represents many in which memory has a negative effect on a person's faith in God. While it may seem a highly specific situation and thus less relevant to the issue at hand, this is not an isolated or even uncommon situation.

Unfortunately, there are hundreds of thousands of cases each year in the United States alone.²³ In 2014, there were over 702,000 children victimized with 78% of these children having been abused by a parent.²⁴ This epidemic is significant enough that its effects are apparent as apologists work toward cultivating faith in the Christian community. As apologists work to show the value of memory in growing faith in God, it is crucial that one recognizes the potential psychological damages that may need to be addressed when employing memory as an apologetic.

Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach may be more useful in assessing and employing episodic memory. The phenomenological approach assesses a criteria through the perception of the person experiencing it²⁵ –it is “interested in the activities of consciousness and the objects that present themselves to consciousness.”²⁶ With respect to rationality and memory as one can

²³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Child Maltreatment 2014,” accessed February 1, 2020, 15, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2014.pdf#page=15>.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Child Maltreatment 2014,” 15.

²⁵ S. Waller, *Serial Killers: Philosophy for Everyone* (Maldon, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 19.

²⁶ Amedeo Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method,” *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 43, no. 1 (2012): 3+, accessed December 2, 2019, https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=vic_liberty&id=GALE%7CA293966590&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon.

only experience their own memories and the value of such memories cannot be quantified accurately. The memory only needs to be effective for producing trust within the individual person therefore this approach will be most effective in evaluating the role of memory. Just as emotions are affirmed as real to the individual, memories should be affirmed in the same sense. While these subjective matters have sometimes dismissed as evidence, they should be recognized and affirmed.²⁷ Subjective matters should not be dismissed as a result of their subjectivity. Eyewitness testimony is subjective, but is, in many cases, the strongest evidence presented in favor of a certain argument. Many claim eyewitness testimony is one way to determine historical trust, but forget that testimonies of historical records and events are indeed subjective and can also be true.²⁸

Near death experiences can exemplify the validity of a subjective experience. While some are veridical and verifiable, others relate to information and events not available to humankind. Even the non-verifiable NDEs are effective in producing faith within the individual. In many cases, NDEs have the ability to produce faith in the life of the experiencer. As one can see, in this case, the only person that must be convinced by the memory of such an event is the experiencer himself. In some cases, collective memory can function in a similar way as it does not necessarily need to be verifiable, but only convincing for the experiencers to bring about action as a result of the memory.

²⁷ Clifford Williams, *Existential Reasons for Belief in God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

²⁸ David Clark. *To Know and Love God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003).

Franciscan Approach

Memory and psychology do not always reflect the sufficient conditions to be categorized and assessed accurately or completely. Because of the elusive nature of these concepts, it may be beneficial to assess memory as it relates to psychology and evidence through a different approach. "In cases where necessary and sufficient conditions for something are hard to find or in the nature of things not available, then Franciscan categorization or typology may be in fact more accurate."²⁹ Franciscan categorization is difficult to describe due to its irreducibly vague quality.³⁰ However, the Franciscan categorization is typified best as a contrast to the more common Dominican categorization. Dominican categorization functions by defining and summarizing a cluster of abstract properties.³¹ This is commonly how things are categorized –by their properties. The Franciscan approach contrasts this by grouping based on their relation to a person's life or a person's specific narrative who has a striking feature.³² While the Dominican approach is unable to succinctly reduce and categorize the relationship between memory, psychology, and relationships, the Franciscan approach may be more effectual. Applying the Franciscan approach to memory and faith, narratives and relation to persons will be employed heavily. This is due to the nature of the Franciscan approach which cannot be simplified into quantifiable data. The Franciscan approach is not less valuable in purporting claims, but rather

²⁹ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 47.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

this appeal to a logic of relations enriches one's understanding of the world by viewing psychological matters more holistically.

Memory as Evidence

The Value of a Claim

Memory is effective as evidence in many cases, but not in all cases. Assessing the value of a claim is the first step to differentiating memory as effective evidence and memory as ineffective evidence. For example, the credibility of the witness will directly affect the value of a claim and result in more or less evidential use. On the one hand, if a person has been shown to have altered memory their claims have less credibility. On the other hand, if a person has been shown as a credible source in the past, their claims have a higher value than the average person.

Other criteria can affect the value of a claim as well. Some of these criteria include: multiple attestation, attestation by an enemy, embarrassing admissions, eyewitness testimony, early testimony.³³ Each of these criteria can enhance the value of a claim and deem it more useable as evidence. In the case of multiple attestation, the claim functions as stronger evidence in the event that more than one witness can testify to the claim. Attestation by an enemy enhances the value of a claim by arguing that the enemy attesting to this claim has no self-interest in recording the event. Embarrassing admissions function in a similar way by arguing the opposite of a claim in one's own self-interest. A witness which argues for an event that embarrasses themselves of their cause raises the value of a claim. This is because it is unlikely

³³ Gary R. Habermas, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004).

that an individual would fabricate a claim that results in their own embarrassment. Eyewitness testimony holds a high value for a claim as a person is claiming to have actually seen the event take place. Early testimony is also highly desirable as there is less time for memory to change and develop over time as the event is discussed and processed.

Value of Later Testimony

It is crucial to clarify at this point that the early testimony is often desirable, but in prolonged substantial events it may be beneficial to wait to testify to the event after a period of time. Memory value can increase, in some ways, with time. The events can be too large to comprehend, therefore, the passing of time (even from generations) can allow the reader to grasp the significance of the events rather than their unfolding.³⁴ For instance, in relation to the holocaust, the early testimony of an individual who experienced it may be most accurate relating to the timeline of events or facts and dates recorded in semantic memory. However, the comprehension of the event as a reality may change over time. In traumatic events such as these, the individual who undergoes the abuse is often clouded immediately after the event. This is shown in Stockholm Syndrome, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and other ways in which those undergoing abuse cope with the trauma they are experiencing.

Memory and Other Forms of Evidence

Memory that aligns with other forms of evidence is also increased in credibility even when other approaches to credibility may not be present. For example, a person who has deliberately misinformed others concerning a historical event in the past would generally not

³⁴ Katz, *Obligated by Memory*, 48.

have a high credibility in historical events. Now imagine if this person stated that a neighbors home was burglarized. Those hearing the person's statements may be unconvinced. However, if this claim aligns with the evidences clearly seen, such as a broken window and missing electronics from the neighbor's house, then the testimony will likely be held with higher value even though they are not a highly credible witness. There are other possible explanations for the broken window and missing electronics. One possible explanation is a teenager was playing baseball in the street and accidentally broke the neighbors window. Out of fear that the items would be stolen through the broken window, the teenager took the electronics to his own house for safe keeping until he could inform the family of the accident. Even though this situation is still a possible interpretation of the broken window and missing electronics, many will likely believe the witness's testimony. The witness is not credible and the evidences clearly seen allow for many possible scenarios, but the alignment of the testimony and evidence suggest that the claim is true. The other forms of evidence that align with a witness testimony could vary significantly as it depends heavily on the claim and the situation. In each situation the evidence may change, but the significant aspect of these evidences is that they support the claim of the witness giving the testimony more value.

Shortcomings of Memory

Memory can and should be used as evidence in many cases, however it is necessary to address the shortcomings of a subjective form of evidence such as memory. Memory is prone to errors and undetectable deletions.³⁵ One can recognize this in their own experience with memory.

³⁵ Lara M. Mitias, "Memory, Reality, and the Value of the Past" (PhD diss., Graduate Division of the University of Hawaii, 2008).

One may attempt to recall an event holistically but fail to remember or record certain facts about the event until these facts are mentioned by another. This is a common occurrence and should be recognized and accounted for when dealing with memory as evidence. In addition, as time passes, the possibility of exaggerations increases.

Memory can function as significant evidence in many cases, however its shortcomings of subjectivity and occasional non-veridicality ought to be recognized to use memory effectively.

Chapter 3: Memory's Role in the Faith of Israel

Condensed Exegetical Analysis: Deuteronomy 8³⁶

A careful study of the Deuteronomy 8 passage will yield a more holistic understanding of the principle set forth in the Scriptures. While collective memory plays an important role in the Old Testament, there are few passages that correlate collective memory with obedience and faith as clearly as Deuteronomy 8 does.

Text

Chapter 8 is a self-contained writing; however, it is helpful to recognize the broader work and context of the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is scarcely paralleled in its theological significance for the nation of Israel. It prompts Israel to respond to the grace and mercy of God with obedience and love; in this way it functions as a theological manifesto for early Judaism.³⁷ Deuteronomy is the final book of the Torah—in Jewish tradition the first five books of the Bible. Among other purposes, the book is written as a series of exhortations.³⁸ These exhortations are often individual, sermon-like writings that remind the audience of God's faithfulness in the past and encourage obedience from the Israelites in the future.³⁹ While many of the laws are

³⁶ This analysis is a modified version of the outline for exegesis in the book Douglas K. Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

³⁷ Daniel Block, *Deuteronomy: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

quotations from the earlier book of Exodus, the style is more explanatory than the lists of law that Exodus presents.⁴⁰

Chapter 8 of Deuteronomy, like chapter 7, is a delimited teaching –it is defined by a *petuhah* at both the beginning and the end of the chapter.⁴¹ A *petuhah* is a dividing form which functions to separate paragraphs, similarly to an indent in the English language.⁴² This reflects to the sermon style of the exhortations which function individually within a series. Moses’s role in authoring the book of Deuteronomy reflects a pastoral role rather than that of a lawgiver.⁴³

Context

A preliminary reading of the text reveals that Deuteronomy self-reports more about its composition than any other book in the Old Testament.⁴⁴ Key information is given regarding the setting of the narrative. Verse three of chapter one dates the book as the fortieth year on the first day of the eleventh month.⁴⁵ This information along with the dates put forth in 1 Kings reveal

⁴⁰ Block, *Deuteronomy: The NIV Application Commentary*, 25.

⁴¹ Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 346.

⁴² David Marcus, “Alternate Chapter Divisions in the Pentateuch in the Light of the Masoretic Sections,” *Hebrew Studies*, no. 44 (2003): 119-128, accessed February 1, 2020, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/216675003?pq-origsite=summon>.

⁴³ Block, *Deuteronomy: The NIV Application Commentary*, 32.

⁴⁴ Block, *Deuteronomy: The NIV Application Commentary*, 28.

⁴⁵ Following the departure from Egypt as stated by Exodus 12:2.

that the date would likely have been about 1406 BC.⁴⁶ Verse three also clarifies the Mosaic authorship of the text.⁴⁷ The authorship of the book of Deuteronomy plays an important role in Jewish tradition as well as contemporary interpretation. Moses is incredibly significant in the history of Israel as the lawgiver and this was recognizable to audiences then as well as throughout Jewish history.

The social culture of the time is crucial to correct interpretation of Deuteronomy because the exhortations came to the Israelites at a specific time in their history. The setting carries a dramatic emphasis as this address was delivered to a nation on the verge of entry into a new land.⁴⁸ Israel was entering into a land plagued by idolatry to the extent of thousands of gods.⁴⁹ The strict monotheism that was reiterated in this book set a precedence for their presence in the land as unique from those who worship many gods.

The date of this work is disputed by many scholars. However, the dating of the building of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings can be placed at 967/966 BC. According to the same book, the dating of the exodus would be 480 years before this, resulting in a 1446 BC date for the exodus. Then the natural conclusion is to date the writing of Deuteronomy around 1406 BC, after including forty years for the wandering in the desert.

⁴⁶ Doug McIntosh, *Old Testament Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 17.

⁴⁷ The authorship of Deuteronomy and the other books of the Torah have been brought into question by various scholars. The controversial nature of the authorship of the Torah and especially Deuteronomy should be recognized, however, for the purpose of this research, assuming mosaic authorship in accordance with tradition and research is sufficient to draw conclusions of exegesis.

⁴⁸ Edward J. Woods, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 27.

⁴⁹ McIntosh, *Old Testament Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 18.

Form

The overarching genre of Deuteronomy is open to interpretation. Deuteronomy does fulfill the role of biography in that it finalizes the story of Moses that began in Exodus.⁵⁰ It also could be understood as a narrative with embedded speeches or sermon-like teachings.⁵¹ Yet another interpretation of the genre of Deuteronomy is contained in its similarity to Ancient Near Eastern Treaty forms.⁵² Such similarities provide insight to the meaning of the text which would have been recognizable to the immediate audience as reminiscent of covenantal literature. The relation of the book to Ancient Near Eastern Treaties solidifies the covenantal nature of Israel's relationship with God and His commands for their obedience.

Chapter 8 is one of the speeches or sermons embedded within the book of Deuteronomy. The genre of this chapter then, is different than the overall genre of Deuteronomy. While the book's overarching theme has implications for this chapter, the specific commands and themes are communicated within the chapter itself. Deuteronomy is theologically rich, but chapter 8 highlights specifics including the history of Israel's relationship with God. This memory is employed to call Israel to obedience and faith in their God.

Lexical data

The lexical data from Deuteronomy is incredibly significant when considering interpretation. Of many considerable words, "remember" stands out. In translation, it is often

⁵⁰ Block, *Deuteronomy: The NIV Application Commentary*, 32.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

stated that context determines meaning. The context of the word remember here is slightly different than the common context in which this word is used. Typically, remember is understood as bringing to mind past events, however this is not for the purpose of nostalgia.⁵³ God commands Israel to actively remember their past experiences with God, then to act upon the recollection of that experience.⁵⁴ This usage of the word remember is also employed in Exodus 20:8 when God commands the Israelites to remember the Sabbath.⁵⁵ The command is not only recall the memory, but also implies a future action in obedience. The usage revealed in Exodus give clarity to God's command in Deuteronomy. The Israelites are called remember the faithfulness of God; this remembrance is recollection accompanied by actions in faith and obedience.

In addition to the command to remember, God calls the Israelites not to forget the Lord. The word "forget" contrasts the call to remember. In the same way that "remember" implies an action, "forget" implies action or lack thereof. We see this prohibition on forgetting on the heels of the command to remember multiple times.⁵⁶ The meaning of the word forget in this section is different from other common usages considering the action that is implied.

⁵³ Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, 348.

⁵⁴ William Henry Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York City, NY: Doubleday Publishing, 2006), 175.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, 353.

Biblical Context

This passage plays into the larger biblical teaching of remembering the Lord and acting in accordance with one's knowledge of past experiences. Even when, from a limited human perspective, Christians are unable to see the plan of God, there is a call to have confidence because He has followed through in the past. In narratives throughout the Bible, the confusion of the main character is often clear. However, God calls each character to have faith. This is exemplified in the Old Testament by Job. While there are times that Job questions the Lord, he has confidence in the Lord because of the character of God that he has seen.⁵⁷ In the New Testament, there are also examples of those who have confidence in the future actions of the Lord because of His past actions. John 13 exemplifies this when Jesus washes the disciple's feet. He says, "you do not realize now what I am doing, but soon you will understand."⁵⁸ The disciples needed to have faith in Jesus in order to be obedient. Their prior interactions with Jesus allowed them to have confidence even when they could not fully understand.

Condensed Exegetical Analysis: Psalm 77:1-11

Text

The book of Psalms is a collection of poems that collectively form one book.⁵⁹ This means that the authorship, setting, and audience can vary from chapter to chapter. The passage is

⁵⁷ Job 23:1-7.

⁵⁸ John 13:7.

⁵⁹ Tremper Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 32.

self-contained, however, the teaching of the chapter does relate to the additional psalms. This relation can vary depending on the psalm, as psalms written by the same author are likely to create more context for the individual psalm than those written by differing authors. While there are similarities and themes among the Psalms, one can address each psalm independently because the concepts and explication of those concepts are distinctive in each psalm. The relation between the teachings is even more significant among psalms that are composed by the same author –which in this case is Asaph.

Context

Psalms 77 is one of the twelve psalms attributed to Asaph, a musician who presented music to the Lord as the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem.⁶⁰ Asaph is the author of multiple psalms, but this psalm is unique as the poetic genre is different than Asaph's other psalms. In addition to the stylistic differences, Asaph writes Psalm 77 with differing theological implications than others; he reveals how a person can have faith through difficulties.

The historical context of this passage is contained in the setting of its composition as well as the setting of the events to which it refers. In Psalm 77, it is notable that the precreation realities illustrate historical ones.⁶¹ This creates a linear form of God's actions in history leading

⁶⁰ Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, 27;
1 Chronicles 15:16-22.

⁶¹ Dennis Sylva, "Precreation Discourse in Psalms 74 and 77: Struggling with Chaoskampf," *Religion and Theology*, no. 18 (2011):244-267, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://web-b-ebshost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=b33e5006-96a2-47b1-b809-a6922987baf0%40pdc-v-sessmgr01>.

up to the event in which the psalmist finds himself.⁶² The relation to history and the events of God in the past, this history is the essential focus of the psalmist as he endures trials. Thus, the historical context of this passage contains the theological significance as well. The psalmist exemplifies how one is to apply the Word of God and history of Israel in their own personal struggles.

The author links the pre-creative struggle to the miracles of Israel's history creating a continuum of divine support.⁶³ The event described is the parting of the Red Sea as recorded in Exodus 14. The continuum created provides a context for this psalm as the author praises the past works of the Lord and is given a confidence in the actions of God on which he can rely through his current situation.

There is little definitive evidence concerning the historical context of the text, but the allusions and references contained inside the text as well as the authorship of the text shed light on the meaning and interpretation.

Form

Psalms is a book of lyric poetry.⁶⁴ Some of these psalms may have been composed solely for the purpose of being sung, while others have a varied purpose and composition. The specific form of poetry of psalm 77 is in the genre of remembrance.⁶⁵ This form of poetry is commonly

⁶² Sylva, "Precreation Discourse in Psalms 74 and 77."

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, 39.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 41.

characterized by a lament in which the psalmist looks to the past to gain confidence in the future acts of God.⁶⁶ This genre is also revealed in Psalm 136 in which the psalmist calls to memory the great miracles of God to produce faith in His actions.

Lexical data

The word remember in this passage deeply reflects the usage of remember in Deuteronomy. The author is not only recalling to memory but choosing to base future actions on the actions he recalls. This form of remember is unique from other usages as it is explicit in its call to action based on the memories being recalled –in this passage the collective memories God’s dealings with Israel.

The author of this Psalm is practically applying the response to trials that the author of Deuteronomy explicates. While the generations have passed since the miraculous events of the Lord, the psalmist recalls these events from long ago to his own mind in verses 14 to 20.

Biblical Context

The relation of this passage to the rest of Scripture is significant as much of Psalm 77 is a reflection on the events recorded in other passages. Most significant of these reflections is the allusion to the parting of the Red Sea. The way that this passage relates to the Bible plays a role in the very interpretation of the text. Due to the historical nature of the events, the reader must understand the miraculous nature and provisional hand of God in the events recorded in Exodus in order to grasp the theological implications of Psalm 77.

⁶⁶ Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, 41.

Collective Memory and The Divine

In ancient Israel the primary expression of collective memory was familial settings.⁶⁷ This would include settings such as in-home oral tradition and commemorative narratives on Jewish holidays. There is a shift in which collective memory and expression of that memory affects the overall understanding of the God of Israel. This shift takes place as the primary transmission of collective memory moves from familial settings to community settings. “As religious locations and social segments shape the overall amalgamation of massive narrative, so they also reshape the presentation of the deity in the texts.”⁶⁸

Collective memory, contained both in familial settings and significant structures, thus has the power to influence generations concerning the nature of the divine. However, as a community feature takes shape (such as a monument or transmission of narratives in larger settings) the influence concerning the divine becomes more solidified in the community. Thus, if the monument or narrative purports a distorted view of the divine, the community memory can also be distorted.

The conceptual construction of the nature of deity read backwards into the biblical corpus can be a false cornerstone cultural memory.⁶⁹ Various fragments of older ideas about divinity were preserved by the collective memory of the nation of Israel through several means.⁷⁰ “In the

⁶⁷ Mark S. Smith, “Remembering God: Collective Memory in Israelite Religion,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2002): 631-651, accessed January 12, 2020, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/220253047?pq-origsite=summon>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Mark S. Smith, “Remembering God: Collective Memory in Israelite Religion.”

⁷⁰ Ibid.

later vision of a monotheistic Divine King with angelic hosts and other divine servants, Israel would retain in the record of its collective memory some features of the Godhead that it had forgotten.”⁷¹ Such a community recollection reveals the benefits of collective memory and its ability to bring to memory important theological concepts of the God of Israel.

Through this analysis of Israel’s collective memory, it is clear that there is a potential pitfall of collective memory to avoid as one moves forward in the argument that collective memory has significant value in apologetics. That is, that collective memory has the power to both communicate truths about God, and the power to communicate falsehoods about God.

Biblical Traditions

Throughout the history of Israel, many practices that reflect collective memory are visible. Some of these practices include Passover and Hanukkah. In the study of Psalm 77, one can see the individual psalmist employ the collective memory of God parting the Red Sea, however, in Passover celebration, the community employs the same collective memory to produce similar results on a larger scale. Understanding of the past generated by collective memory plays an essential role in shaping attitudes and actions of individuals and societies in the present.⁷² Given the importance of generating collective memory, one may be led to ask how this task has been accomplished throughout the history of Judeo-Christian belief. A partial answer lies in the liturgy and traditions.

⁷¹ Mark S. Smith, “Remembering God: Collective Memory in Israelite Religion.”

⁷² Alana M. Vincent, *Making Memory: Jewish and Christian Explorations in Monument, Narrative, and Liturgy* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2014), 1.

Passover

The Passover is a feast of remembrance recalling God's liberating acts in the history of Israel, and his promise of deliverance in the future.⁷³ The remembrance of Passover functions similarly to remembrance in Deuteronomy 8 and Psalm 77 as it recalls to memory and prompts a future action from the individual or community. Passover memory reminds the people of God's provision and also promises that God will intervene on their behalf in future times of affliction and suffering culminating with ultimate deliverance from sin and shame.⁷⁴ Remembrance through this celebration carries important value for the nation of Israel in politics, culture, and religion.⁷⁵ Significant truths about God including His provision and power are communicated through the celebration of Passover and thus create a collective memory for the Jewish people of God's actions in their history.

Feast of Purim

The Feast of Purim commemorates the Jews escape from the attempted genocide recorded in Esther. This was a feast of remembrance that recalls the Jewish predicament in a foreign land in order to show the significance of God's saving acts in Esther.⁷⁶ The continual celebration of Purim is another indication of how important remembrance was in the development of the

⁷³ Jakobus M. Vorster, "Down Memory Lane to a Better Future," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009):323-327, accessed February 29, 2020, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/297/286>, 324.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 326.

faith of the Jewish people and the formation of their ethics.⁷⁷ Remembrance through celebratory feasts reveals the integral nature of memory in their religion and culture.⁷⁸

Communion

The significance of memory in Judeo-Christian belief is not confined only to the remembrance of Old Testament miracles. Holy Communion employs the same form of remembrance to signify the deeper meaning of God's deliverance of humankind from the bondage of sin.⁷⁹ In Jesus's call to communion, one can recognize the purpose of recalling to memory the pivotal features of Jesus's death and resurrection narrative. This practice of collective memory persists in most Judeo-Christian churches today and is effective in not only communicating the theological significance of the death and resurrection of Christ, but also in creating an experience with which the individual can partake and recall events even though they were not eyewitnesses.

⁷⁷ Vorster, "Down Memory Lane to a Better Future," 326..

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Transferrable Principles and Application

Following a careful study of the relevant passages and their application, one is able to better recognize the transferrable principles presented in the Scriptures. The significance of the message of Deuteronomy can hardly be overstated. The teaching confined in Deuteronomy 8 is no exception. As explicated above, Deuteronomy 8 teaches one theologically significant way in which to increase faith during trials –remembrance of the Lord’s actions in history. Deuteronomy 8’s teaching is practiced by the Psalmist in Psalm 77. This teaching and the psalmist’s application of it is useful for believers today as they seek confidence in the Lord through difficult times.

Transferable Principle from the Scriptures

Throughout its history, memory is directly related to the faith of Israel. In Deuteronomy, Israel is to bring its past into active remembrance, then to act upon that remembrance.⁸⁰ This teaching has modern relevance as Christians attempt to bolster faith during a point in time in which their future and the plans of God are not clear. As seen in Deuteronomy and Psalms, the biblical call to remembrance often implies action on the part of the individual as a result of such recollection. This can be applied to the modern church as believers use recollection of God’s actions in history to bring about their own action of faith.

Trust and confidence are built by recollection of the past faithful actions of a person. This is a principle that each person inherently knows. Explicating this principle, however, reveals the ways in which it can be applied to relationships with the divine in addition to relationships

⁸⁰ Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, 348.

between humans. The past faithful actions of God can be seen through a reflection of His deeds toward one individual or humanity. The deeds of the Lord toward humanity are clear experiences as one can recall the miraculous provision of the Lord in many situations throughout history. “Spiritual experiences are a major source of development in trust in God and strengthening of that trust.”⁸¹ As one considers this statement and applies it to the collective experiences and memories of many generations, there is an apparent opportunity to employ these second-hand experiences and memories in an effort to reinforce one’s faith.

A shift to memory is, in some sense, a shift from physical to spiritual reality.⁸² As one considers the nature of memory, it becomes clear that memory affects and inhabits each and every aspect of human life. Human relationship with the divine is no exception as God resides in and is sought in memory.⁸³ Recognizing the spiritual impact that memory can have is crucial as collective memory seeks to find its role in the modern church.

Application

Much of the benefit of this information relates directly to believers and those inside the church. However, in relation to non-believers and their perceptions of Christianity, the validity of collective memory can help break down the barrier to Christianity that faith is blind and irrational. This has been a barrier to faith for many.

⁸¹ J. P. Moreland and Klaus Issler, *In Search of a Confident Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 134.

⁸² Todd Breyfogle, “Memory and Imagination in Augustine’s Confessions,” *New Blackfriars* 75, no. 881 (1994): 211, accessed April 4, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43249589?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 214.

Doing apologetics in the wake of New Atheism can be difficult as the value of passion often overtakes the value of truth in this movement. As one author puts it, “New Atheism is a historically contingent phenomenon. It is a rationalist utopianism as unlikely to withstand history as the dreams of every other empire constructed by humanity rather than God.”⁸⁴ The culture that is produced by New Atheism, both in and outside of the church, is highly specific and can be addressed as such. Due to its differentiation from the past forms of atheism and critiques of Christianity, the responses to these concerns will also differentiate from past responses. Apologetics should look different when approaching this worldview. While subjective evidence has not always been perceived as convincing, what I have attempted to show is that it is useful in creating objective arguments both for Christians and non-Christians just as God displayed throughout the Old Testament.

One way to apply the scripturally indicated value of collective memory is through memory traditions. Traditions that evoke a collective memory response from the audience and experiencers may be a beneficial practice to revive in church services. Many church traditions affirm these practices and holidays, whether for the reason of evoking collective memory or not. In the celebration of these traditions, the audience members change roles from viewers to experiencers. The value of tradition is entrenched in the value of memory to influence one’s

⁸⁴ Christopher Villiers, “The Unknown God: Responses to the New Atheists,” *The Heythrop Journal* 59, no. 3 (2018): 631-632, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/doi/full/10.1111/heyj.12980>.

future actions.⁸⁵ Incorporating traditions that recall the actions of God in history could benefit our church.⁸⁶

There are many examples of ways to employ collective memory in church settings as well as in the relationship between God and an individual. The psalmist of Psalm 77 gives a clear example of ways in which collective memory may be employed in one's own prayers and communications with God. The ways in which collective memory can be used to strengthen faith in church settings is not as concisely exemplified in the Bible. There are, however, many examples of its use, specifically in the roll of traditional ceremonies and celebrations. Passover, Feast of Purim, and Communion are three examples of biblically based traditions that evoke a collective memory from the participant.

Collective memory can also play a role in apologetic, interpersonal relationships.

⁸⁵ Vladimir Lossky, John H. Erickson, and Thomas E. Bird, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 141-168.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As American scientism increases, the charge that faith is illogical and unreasonable gains more ground. Many scholars have responded to this concern giving an array of evidences which address the rationality of faith. Collective memory is one practice and evidence that has apologetic value in addressing this objection to Christianity.

Throughout the Bible, collective memory functions to produce faith within both a nation and its individuals. In both Deuteronomy and Psalms, the authors appeal to a remembrance of God's divine provision in the past to bring about future faith through trials and uncertain circumstances.

This information may be useful for supplementation of faith in the wake of New Atheism. As more evidence is sought for a logical foundation to faith, the historicity of the collective memory of the church and its members is significant in presenting the factual and historical basis for a belief. There are many applications of this overarching principle of collective memory to bring about actions in faith. One potential applicational possibility is to reexamine the value of traditions and ceremonies and their role in church –specifically those traditions that elicit memories of God's provisional acts in history. Another potential application of these principles is to employ memory of the divine acts of God, which have been passed down through generations, to bring about faith in personal trials.

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