Provision of God in our Lives:
Examining Impact of Church Memorials

by

Jeff Johnsen

Thesis Research Project

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Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

__________________________________________  
Dr. Steve Lowe, Mentor  
Graduate Program Director, Christian Leadership & Church Ministries  
Liberty University, Liberty School of Divinity

__________________________________________  
Dr. Chet Roden, Reader  
Instructor, School of Divinity  
Liberty University, Liberty School of Divinity
Abstract

The study assumes that church memorials have significant meaning in our faith journey, are visible within the church, and have little meaning if no interpreter is present. If the membership is aware of a memorial’s history, it draws them to understand the memorial as a provision of God. The study’s research question is, “Will people remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial regularly with an interpreter present?” Memorials used in the study were within Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.

The Bible was the primary literary resource in God’s provision to redeem and restore humanity. The Patriarch Abraham built four types of altars, which were identified as the Altars of Praise, Prayer, Peace and Provision. Creswell’s Phenomenological Research provided a research framework for data collection and analysis. Church members served as the sample for the qualitative study, using a pre-test post-test design. Five key results were identified. First, memorials have an impact on the provision of God as a way to remember their loved ones, and form a shared history. Second, the role of the interpreter is foundational to explain and sustain the memorial’s purpose and intention. Third, the Bible served as the research thesis foundation. Fourth, viewing the Bible through the lens of God’s provision from Genesis through Revelation is foundational to understanding memorials. Fifth, opportunities exist for church governance of memorials. The results of the study provide foundational steps for Mount Pisgah and other churches and a pathway for everyone to become a part of the church’s shared history.
Acknowledgements

Three people have inspired me to complete the Doctor of Ministry. First, my wife, Kristi, has stood by my side for now 27 years of marriage. Together we have raised four awesome kids and served four churches in the United Methodist Church. Second is Dr. Steve Lowe, from whom I first heard the impact of the altars of Abraham when he was a professor at Erskine Theological Seminary. Third is Dr. Nancy Cassill, who God sent to guide me through the Thesis Project.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the year 2000, I was first introduced to the concept of altars in a course on the Old Testament, with the altars erected by Abraham. The course, taught by Professor Dr. Steve Lowe, was a Doctorate class at Erskine Theological Seminary. This lecture captivated my attention and it has been on my radar for the last 19 years. It was stimulating to learn how altars were so pivotal in the journey of faith of several central characters in the Old Testament. When these characters experienced a God-moment, they were prompted to erect an altar as a memorial that something significant happened. Initially, this was a rock formation of significance uniquely crafted to be symbolic. A bystander would be drawn to this formation, curious about its uniqueness, and realizing something significant must have occurred in this location. This teaching of the significance of the altars had apparent implications. When people encountered the altar, they encountered Yahweh.

The altar Noah erected is first introduced in the Book of Genesis when he was confined on the ark for forty days and forty nights in the great flood. After this forty-day period, Noah opened the door of the ark with his family, erected an altar, and made a sacrifice to Yahweh.\(^1\) What is unique about the creation of altars in the Old Testament is that each time they are erected, the reason, purpose, and circumstances are different. This was illustrated in how Abraham erected altars in different locations and under different circumstances, such as his return from Egypt or when God provided a ram when he was planning to sacrifice his son, Isaac.\(^2\) These altars were significant when they were erected, but over time, altars and church

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1 Genesis 8:20.
memorials often lose significance. They tend to be forgotten because no one knows their meaning.

The Problem Thesis for this study is, “Will people remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial regularly with an interpreter present? The Research Purpose is “to demonstrate how the memorials of God’s provision found in Scripture can be illustrative models for the memorials of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church and the Church universal.”

Even though God is omnipresent, Americans are lonelier than ever; and the fastest growing faith segment in America is the “Nones”—“a person reporting no religious affiliation.” Even though God is omnipresent, Americans are lonelier than ever; and the fastest growing faith segment in America is the “Nones”—“a person reporting no religious affiliation.” The “Nones” population in America is now projected at 34 percent, which is higher than the Protestants at 33 percent and the Catholics at 21 percent. These statistics support the problem statement in how almost 50 percent of the population is not cognizant of the provision of God. It is assumed that if people are not active in a church, then they are searching other religions aimlessly, or claiming no faith at all in meaning or search of God.

God is always providing the way to restore and redeem His people. The altar was a simple evangelism tool used as a provision of God. One illustration occurred when Abraham experienced the near sacrifice of his son, Isaac, but in God’s timing, God provided a lamb (Genesis 22:8). Modern memorials should be like those altars of old. They should be simple reminders of the provision of God. Thus, as we ask the poignant question, “What would an altar look like and function like in the 21st century?” Could a model be developed to serve as a plumb line for Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church or other churches? If a model was proposed, it would have the potential to empower and effectively connect others to the provision of God.

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4 Ibid.
The Ministry Context

Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church has historically been a strong evangelical church that has a conservative understanding of scripture.\textsuperscript{5} The District Superintendent and Bishop would confirm this reputation in the Western North Carolina Annual Conference. Their history, dating back to 1845, has included numerous occasions in which God did a significant work among the people. This work by God has given the church some incredible testimonies. The historical context of a church that has remained faithful for 175 years tells the story of the faithfulness of God and the church members. The church has modeled the statement, “What you have done for the least of these you have done to me.”\textsuperscript{6}

Though these strong encounters with God are etched in the history of the church, the church has the beginning stages of spiritual amnesia due to the aging membership and substantial member deaths each year. Presently, one out of every six members of Mount Pisgah is over 80 years old. Within a decade, when this generation is gone, the church history will likely fade into a short paragraph in a pictorial directory or scrapbook. It is essential for the church to find new ways to retell the story of God’s provision through the years. The story of the faithful is important, but everything fades over time as generations die out. When memorials are forgotten in churches, they function more like a mausoleum of something that happened in the past but have little bearing on the present. This is most evident on our mission fields among the Native Americans.

The Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe lives on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota—an area called “The Badlands.” Their landmass is larger than the state of Vermont and Rhode Island combined. It is staggering to see the number of churches that are abandoned inside

\textsuperscript{5} https://www.mountpisgah.org/.
\textsuperscript{6} Matthew 25:40.
the reservation. These churches were once meant to reach out as a witness to the Sioux but are now abandoned and deteriorating. These abandoned church buildings serve as memorials or altars in a negative sense because they have been forgotten. There are no pastors or missionaries left, and no one is present to tell the Good News.

The next ten years will be crucial to Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church if it desires to be a vital witness in Greensboro, North Carolina. Mount Pisgah was founded in 1845 on the outskirts of town in Greensboro. This location is four miles west of the downtown courthouse on the corner of Pisgah Church Road and Battleground Avenue. This is a prime location for a church because this is a busy intersection. Since 1990, we have a pumpkin sale fundraiser every October for our Youth, a group called the “Whobodies.” In the October 2017 Our State Magazine, Mount Pisgah was featured as “The Pumpkin Church.”7 This labeling is well-known in Greensboro as thousands have bought pumpkins in our pumpkin patch.

The church is landlocked on only 2.6 acres between the Battleground National Park and commercial businesses. The church owns two lots in the vicinity of the church building, but these lots are not easily accessible and would require some capital and creativity to be useful to the church. There are no definitive plans for these lots, which is a sore subject to those who felt their purchase was not thought out and the price paid was too excessive. On the church property lies a church cemetery, which is at capacity, and in 2016 a columbarium was added to meet the needs of the majority of congregates who were choosing cremation.

Mount Pisgah has been a strong Methodist church in the Western North Carolina Annual for decades, but it is in danger of losing its rich history. It is time for the church to document and then plan strategically so that its rich history will not be forgotten. The next five years will likely

7 www.ourstate.com.
see the departure of long-term staff, and then the church will be in danger of losing much of its church history. The continuity of the history has not resided with the Senior Ministers but has continued through the long-term staff. These staff have given Mount Pisgah the continuity it needs to continue to keep the stories and church memorials alive through sharing the story of the past provision of God.

Since the founding of the church, only one Senior Minister has served the church for at least a decade. Rev. Tom Cassady served the church from 1991-2001. The last four Senior Ministers have retired from Mount Pisgah. When I came in to lead the congregation, I was under the age of 50; and I had quite a learning curve within the culture and mindset of an established congregation that has been plateaued in growth for decades. This mindset had bearing on the church leadership, worship services, hiring of staff, and in outreach ministry.

Mount Pisgah has been blessed by some supporting staff who have served the church for decades. In 2012, the Director of Children retired after serving for 30 years. The piano/organist, Cynthia Wall, retired in 2016 after 28 years of service. Both of these retired ladies are still very active and continue telling the story of the church. A Diaconal Minister, whose concentration was in youth ministry, served the church for 12 years ending in 2001. The Choir Director, also a Diaconal Minister, served the church for 20 years before leaving abruptly in the transition of the music ministry. These long stays of support staff have helped perpetuate the stories of the provision of God in the church up to this point.

As Mount Pisgah enters the year 2020, the church has three long-term support staff in positions that have helped to keep the stories alive. This has been beneficial to me as the new Senior Pastor, having arrived in 2016, and to others who have become part of the staff and church family. Our Operations Manager is in her 17th year; a Membership/Financial Secretary is
in her 22nd year; and an Administrative Assistant is in her 30th year. None of the other current staff have served more than 8 years consecutively. These three long-term staffers know the stories of the church well and are invaluable. Unfortunately, I doubt that in the next five years any of these long-term staff members will still be on staff due to health concerns, retirements, and attrition. The turnover of these church staff members will leave the church in danger of losing much of its history. While these long-term staff members are still in place, it is prudent to document the stories of the congregation. History is invaluable to the faith community. The church has averaged sixteen deaths a year the last three years (2016-2019), and these significant losses keep the church in a season of nostalgia—remembering past events and former pastors.

Memorials have accumulated at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church since the church was founded in 1845, but there have been three huge movements of God in the church in the last thirty years. These movements are evidence of the provision of God. Listening to the staff and laity tell of these movements would make an awesome testimony service or Christian movie. There have been three significant movements that span the last forty years, which have been impressed upon me since I became Senior Pastor in July 2016.

First was the story of Senior Pastor Rev. Herb Penry. Though Herb died in 1982, his ghost still fills the hallway of the education wing at Mount Pisgah, called the Penry Wing. Herb was an innovator and an evangelist at heart who truly loved people, and they loved him. His personality was contagious, and the church became alive with innovative ministries that are still in existence in 2020. The Whobodies Youth Program is one of them. This name was given to the youth group who would travel with him when he preached revivals. A legendary story goes that in a meeting, Rev. Penry commented he could not be their Pastor if they did not have a bus to
pick up the kids.\(^8\) This resulted in the immediate purchase of the church's first bus. Another ministry still thriving today from the Rev. Penry’s era is called ELP (Ernestine L. Penry Scholarship), which each May awards over $50,000 in scholarships to students in seminary. From inception to November 2019, the fund “paid out $763,279 to 166 students.”\(^9\) The Endowment does not touch the principal of the student loans; it pays only interest. The committee's goal is to raise the endowment from nearly $800,000 presently to over $1,000,000 by 2023. This vision of assisting a ministerial student to get out of debt continues to grow stronger with each passing year. This provision of God has empowered the ELP to partner with seminary students to alleviate a portion of their debt and allow them to concentrate on leading the church.

The second story occurred in 1995 when an Associate Pastor, Mark Hicks, served Mount Pisgah. This was during an era when the church had over 300 people participate in Disciple Bible Study. This study was created by Bishop Wilke in 1987, in which over three million have participated both within the United Methodist Church and beyond in learning the Bible.\(^10\) This study was originally based on thirty two weeks of Biblical themes, meeting for 2.5 hours each time. It is a powerful way to learn the Bible during the reading of nearly 70 percent of the Bible during this time period. In this course, you learn the Word of God individually and collectively as a group. The study encourages you to use your spiritual gifts in ministry to make a difference. Disciple Bible Outreach (DBOM) was a vision from Associate Pastor Mark Hicks and two laity, Darrell Hayden and Darrell Sayles, who took this study to a nearby prison.\(^11\) The birth of Disciple in the prison occurred during a class break when Darrell Sayles asked the question,

\(^8\) Email from Jerry Snyder on February 15, 2020.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) http://www.umc.org/.
\(^11\) https://disciplebibleoutreach.org/.
“Wouldn’t it be nice if people in prison could experience Disciple?” There has been continuous teaching in the prisons from this study for the last twenty-five years due to their initial efforts in the prison system in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Disciple Bible Outreach is now in 16 states and over 70 prisons. It has taught the Bible to thousands of incarcerated individuals. This provision of God has empowered DBOM to be a vehicle to take Disciple Bible Study into prisons around the country.

The third story is from Greensboro, which is a city in North Carolina in which political refugees relocate. A group of young boys called the “Lost Boys of Sudan” relocated to Greensboro in 2001. These men had nothing and were looking for a congregation to love them. Thankfully they knew how to speak English. Randy Lewis said, “The church members embraced these young men and helped with SSA, Green Cards, shots, job interviews, ESL classes at GTCC. They were taught how to cook with electricity, shop for groceries, pay their bills, ride the bus, drive cars, obtain driver’s licenses, and clean their apartment and much more.” The church rallied together for several years and helped to basically raise these young men. This amazing testimony of the provision of God shows how God used Mount Pisgah to welcome immigrants from the Sudan and assimilate them into American culture.

These three movements within the church are evidence of the provision of God. The church must capture the provision of God in the past while living in the present in a healthy, vital way. Mount Pisgah is a healthy United Methodist Church poised to continue to teach people on the provision of God in the year 2020.

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13 https://www.rescue.org/article/lost-boys-sudan.
14 Email from Randy Lewis on November 17, 2018.
Purpose of the Applied Research Project

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the memorials of God’s provision found in Scripture can be illustrative models for the memorials of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church and the Church universal. Thom Rainer reports, “Eight out of ten of the approximately 400,000 churches in the United States are declining or have plateaued.”15 Nonetheless, memorials are common in these churches. If congregants could connect with these memorials of the past as a provision of God, then an opportunity exists to re-engage those presently attending or searching for a church home. These memorials are reminders of deliverance, faithfulness, and dedication of the saints who have gone before us.

Basic Assumption

The basic assumption of this study is that church memorials have significant spiritual meaning in our faith journey. For memorials to be effective, it is important that they be located in places that are visible within the church, but memorials have little meaning if no one is present to interpret them or if no thorough description is given. This assumption or belief is that if the membership is not fully aware of the memorial’s history, they may not see the memorial as a provision of God. If the memorials are in front of them, they have been devalued and will have little influence on the observer. Churches tend to memorialize the past, but with the loss of the story behind them, memorials ultimately will lose meaning and will not be seen as a provision of God.

Definitions, Limitations and Delimitations

Definitions

Memorial: A memorial is a physical item that is placed to remember a time in the past.

Altar: An altar was a rock formation erected during the time of Abraham to be a witness to a movement from Yahweh.

Evangelical: A conservative view of the scriptures of the Bible.

Provisional: God has provided.

Limitations

This study focuses on memorials within Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church. A convenience sample was used in this research study with eighteen church members who were available on Wednesday nights from 5:15-5:30 pm between January and March 2019. These participants were active church members who are present for our adult Bible studies on Wednesday nights.

This study focused on five memorials located within the church. While there are additional memorials in the church, these five memorials were part of a larger listing of memorials as compiled by two long-term church members. Other memorials that are not a part of this study may have different recognition and relationship with the sample. For each memorial, the interpreter (who is also the researcher) shared the reason, purpose, and particular circumstance for the church memorial. I also acknowledge that there may be additional memorial components that may not be included.

In the New Testament, the term “altar” does not have the same meaning as in the Old Testament. The differential meaning is that Old Testament altars that were erected required a
blood sacrifice, and in the New Testament this practice subsided as Jesus was considered the sacrificial lamb.

**Delimitations**

Limited research exists regarding the term “memorial.” Those that are available are functional as to what kinds of memorials are there to purchase. A church memorial can be a gift given in honor or memory of someone, whether it is a stained glass window or plaque hanging in the nursery room. The memorial remembers someone's faithfulness as a provision of God.

**Thesis Statement**

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the memorials of God’s provision found in Scripture can be illustrative models for the memorials of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church and the Church universal.

**Research Question**

The question this study will ask is: “Will people remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial regularly with an interpreter present?”

The specific research objectives are:

1. Compilation of a list of memorials located within Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church: This listing will be compiled by two long-term members (40+ years) of Mount Pisgah who will independently compile the list (each will have thirty minutes maximum to compile). This listing will be used by the researcher to identify a total of five
memorials, which will used in the study—one memorial for each of the five sessions; each memorial is a “treatment.”

2. Development of five sessions or "meetings," with each session focusing on a different memorial: Each session is a "treatment" and will consist of four components: 1.) when the memorial was given; 2.) why (Provision of God); 3.) where it is located; and 4.) who provided the memorial. The researcher will be the interpreter of these components.

3. Completion of a pre-test by participants (prior to beginning of study) and completion of a post-test will measure the impact of church memorials.

4. The researcher will share results with the two long-term members (who participated in Step #1) and develop plan of assimilation/dissemination for Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Theological

The Bible is comprised of 66 books known as the Old and New Testaments. It was “not until 367 AD that the church father Athanasius first provided the complete listing of the 66 books belonging to the canon.”\textsuperscript{16} Athanansius’ complete listing of books occurred over centuries of reflection with numerous scholars. In the Protestant Church today, these are the books that are recognized as the biblical canon. Even though there are numerous translations available, they adhere to these canonized books comprising the Bible.

These canonized books are not in a random sequence. The writings ebb and flow from Genesis through Revelation to remind humanity that they are never alone and never far from returning to God. The provision of God reaching out to humanity began when God placed Adam and Eve in paradise in the Garden of Eden. The first couple in the Bible had it all but lost it all and received only the immediate satisfaction of a piece of fruit. They disobeyed God by going against the only parameter for living in paradise. God said to Adam and Eve, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat it you shall surely die.”\textsuperscript{17} The consequences from this initial sin ushered in death, which is now unavoidable to them and all their descendants. No one knows the time when Jesus will appear again, but each of us is to be ready. Even though humanity has fallen continuously, the Bible has provisions to help and restore our fallen nature back to a right relationship with God.

Sin always separates us from God. When Adam and Eve first sinned, they realized they were naked. Before the initial sin on earth, nakedness was not an issue for Adam and Eve because they had never attempted to hide from God. Since this sin, humanity has yearned to be

\textsuperscript{16} www.biblica.com/resources/bible-faqs/how-were-the-books-of-the-bible-chosen/.

\textsuperscript{17} Genesis 2:17 (English Standard Version).
restored but needs provisions from God in order to do so. These provisions are found throughout the Old Testament, such as the rainbow after a rain, Abraham’s altars, Joshua’s stones, the tabernacle, the temple, and house churches. These provisions kept the Israelites near the presence of God when they drifted from God’s love, helping them return to or reminding them of the love of God.

**Rainbow / Altar**

Amid the evil of the known world since the fall of Adam and Eve, “God remembered Noah.”\(^{18}\) God asked Noah to build an ark in the desert with his family. Noah listened and obeyed God and built an ark with the exact dimensions provided to him. His obedience allowed Noah to save himself and his family from the worldwide flood. After forty days and nights, the rain subsided and Noah left the ark. Two initial things occurred, which are significant to how God’s provision is a stream that runs throughout the Bible. First, Noah erected the first altar by taking “some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.”\(^{19}\) This was a thanksgiving altar that Noah erected to God for saving him and his family. Noah’s altar was a reminder of God’s provision in his life. Second, God gave Noah a covenant that applies to all subsequent generations: “I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”\(^{20}\) Every time a rainbow appears in the sky, people look up and point to it and grab their cameras in awe. This provision of God reminds humanity that a flood of this magnitude will never again occur.

\(^{18}\) Genesis 8:1 (*English Standard Version*).
\(^{19}\) Genesis 8:20 (*English Standard Version*).
\(^{20}\) Genesis 9:13 (*English Standard Version*).
Altar

Though Noah is credited for erecting the first altar, Abraham erected altars in multiple places. Abraham’s altars did not focus on the sacrifices of animals but in marking the territory that God promised to him: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” Abraham listened to God and left everything to travel with his family to unknown territory all because of a promise from God. In the life of Abraham, the provision of God came when he erected altars. These were not random altars but were reminders of what God had promised and provided for him erected in strategic locations to claim the territory for God.

R. Dawes Lesmahagow wrote that Abraham had four primary altars. These altars “mark the unforgettable peaks of Abraham’s spiritual experiences in the pathway of faith.” Lesmahagow breaks down how Abraham erected altars, focusing on praise, prayer, peace, and provision. He alludes to the valuable lessons learned of Abraham erecting these altars, which are still speaking today. Through Abraham, “three major religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—trace their roots.” Abraham listened to God and embarked on a journey where only God knew the destination.

The “Altar of Praise” is the first altar Abraham erected. Abraham was originally from Ur, which was a town where “most of Ur’s citizens worshipped a sun god.” In Genesis 12, Abram received his initial call to leave his native country. The people of Abraham’s day were nomadic,
living in “tents much like the Bedouins still live today in the Middle East.”25 On this trade route, his first altar was erected, which signifies one of the four boundaries for the land promised to Abraham. It was in this same location that the foreign deities would place allegiance to their gods. This altar was erected under the “oak of Moreh.”26 Moreh in Hebrew means “teacher.” Pagans taught and worshipped under these same oak trees, claiming loyalty to their gods. Abraham erected his first altar as one of praise for all God had done for him, claiming the land for God under the oak of Moreh.

Abraham continued on his journey as he “moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.”27 This was significant because Bethel means “house of God” and Ai means “heap of ruins.” The second altar was erected as an “Altar of Prayer.” Abraham erected this altar, consecrating it to God. When I first received the appointment to Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church in 2016, I traveled almost two hours from Denver, North Carolina to Greensboro, North Carolina to go on a prayer walk around the church. Abraham was setting his boundary through an “Altar of Prayer” for the land God had given him as I was marking my new church in Greensboro, giving my ministry to God.

The first two altars Abraham erected marked his boundaries given to him by God. He has a miscue during a season of “a famine in the land” brought on during drought in the land.28 Abraham conceded that God had either punished or forgotten him, so he acted on his own when his prayers for rain were unanswered. During this season of his life, Abraham took his eyes off God’s provision and took a detour down to Egypt. Abraham, while in Egypt, is in a season of his life that he would rather forget when he pretends his wife, Sarah, is his sister.29 Though this is a

27 Genesis 12:8 (English Standard Version).
28 Genesis 12:10 (English Standard Version).
half-truth, his reason for saying so was a result of disobeying God. This detour delayed Abraham’s journey to erect his third altar and mark another boundary. When Abraham called out to God, he left Egypt as abruptly as he came, only by the grace of God. Abraham longed to be back on his journey with God. The road back home to God is often filled with regrets, reflection, and peace. Throughout the Bible, God gives provisions for humanity to be restored. Abraham was restored but had to “retrace his steps to Bethel where he pitched his tent and built his altar as at the first.”

We can see God’s provision through these altars, which were used by Abraham not only to give thanks but to signify his restoration.

Like humanity, Abraham was a work in progress and after going to Egypt, he found himself back in the land of promise assisting his nephew, Lot. Both Abraham and Lot’s livestock grew to such a large herd that they needed to be separated. Abraham graciously allowed Lot the field of his choice and he chose to “settle among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.”

Abraham was restored spiritually for the provision God showed him in Egypt when he left there with Sarah. The third altar was erected as the “Altar of Peace” between Abraham and his nephew, Lot.

Before the fourth altar is erected, both Abram and Sarai’s names were changed to Abraham and Sarah. This altar is referred to as the “Altar of Provision.” This altar was erected during one of the most radical and thought-provoking stories in the Old Testament. Abraham and Sarah had prayed desperately for a child. It was the assumption that in not being able to have children, they did not have the favor of God. Abraham was so rich and so righteous, but his prayers for a child were not answered. Even when a stranger tells him they will have a child, his wife, Sarah, overhears and laughs at the messengers from God. Twenty-five years later, their son

is born. He is given the name of Isaac, meaning “son of laughter.” Nobody would have been more spoiled than Isaac. In Abraham’s impatience, when Sarah was not becoming pregnant, he sleeps with his servant, Hagar, and has a child, Ishmael. Sarah has problems with Hagar, her servant, and Ishmael, which causes strife in their home. Abraham sends Hagar and Ismael into the desert but this solution is only temporary and the effects of this decision continue to cause conflict in the Middle East. Abraham’s impatience with God’s provision is a continuous issue in his life, as it is in many of our lives.

One day, Abraham arises early with his servants to offer a sacrifice where God was leading him. “God tested Abraham and said, ‘Take your son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’”\(^\text{32}\) Abraham listened to God and had Isaac gather wood and place it on the altar for the sacrifice. Isaac asked, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”\(^\text{33}\) Abraham was willing to do anything for God—even sacrifice his only son. Abraham had learned to wait for God in his journey, and in the very last seconds before sacrificing Isaac, God provided a ram to replace him. His obedience would have cost Abraham everything he ever wanted: a son. But God again provided for Abraham. Abraham’s offspring continued to erect altars and dig wells as provisions of God for generations.

In tracing the altars through Abraham’s four different boundary markers, it is evident how the provision of God continued in the generations that followed in the Patriarchal Fathers of the Old Testament. The altars were not initially used for blood sacrifice but over time became locations for sacrifice. Leviticus 17:11 says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes

atonement for life.”34 The use of the altars stayed the norm throughout the Old Testament and carried into the time of Jesus, when the blood of lambs flowed freely in Temple sacrifices. John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”35

The four prominent altars were all erected on a major travel route that marked the territory God had given Abraham. The altars were rock formations that were placed in locations that marked territory and marked where God’s provision occurred. The rock formation was significant because rocks do not form overnight but occur when “chemical composition of the rocks, the temperature those rocks are exposed to, the length of time they are subject to those temperatures, and the degree of external pressure imposed.”36 The formation of rocks was not random but was craftily and prayerfully put together. It was a sacred formation. The purpose of the formation was to get the attention of someone passing by and for someone to be a witness to testify in this sacred space. If no one is present to tell the story of the altar, then all anyone sees is rocks that are arranged but have little meaning or significance.

This is the case throughout churches that have memorials within and outside their church facilities. Few people know the story behind the memorials. People see the memorials but walk right past them without feeling and understanding the power of the memorials being a provision of God. The altars were significant in Abraham’s time because a witness was present to tell about the provision of God, which made all the difference. This is a direct correlation between the altars of Abraham and in memorials in churches today.

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34 Leviticus 17:11 (English Standard Version).
35 John 1:29 (English Standard Version).
36 https://www.answers.com/Q/How_long_does_it_take_a_rock_to_form.
Stones

Another example of the provision of God is the setting up of memorial stones, which was a common practice in the Old Testament. It can be closely linked to a “plaque or historical marker,” which was something tangible and moveable.37 These stones were used by Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:18-22) or in agreement at Mizpah (Genesis 31:45-52). When God helped the Israelites defeat the Philistines, Samuel set up the famous Ebenezer stone (1 Samuel 7:12). Other stones were used as grave markers in the death of Archan (Joshua 7:26) and the king of Ai (Joshua 8:29). The use of stones in the Old Testament served as provisions of God.

One of these provisions of God that illustrates this importance was when Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan River. It was the harvest season (early spring), when the banks had overflowed. The crossing of the Jordan River was a miracle comparable with Moses parting the Red Sea (Exodus 14). As the priest arrived carrying the chest, the water departed as “their feet touched the edge of the water.”38 Joshua then led the whole nation through the Jordan River as the land became dry. He asked twelve men from each of the tribes of Israel to each take a stone from the river that each of them could carry by not even being impressive in size.39 As the Israelites camped that night within their different tribes, they placed these stones where each of them camped. These stones served as reminders to them and to future generations of the provision of God wherever they camped with the next one being Gilgal.40 When the next generation asks what these stones mean, “tell how the flow of the Jordan River was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord”41 and that these stones were taken from the middle of the river and placed as memorials—reminders of what God had done. They carried these stones

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39 F.F. Bruce, New International Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 288.
41 Joshua 4:7 (English Standard Version).
for generations as a provision of God through the Jordan River. This was yet another visual reminder of the provision of the Lord for the people of Israel.

Tabernacle

Another provision of God is found in Chapter 25 of Exodus in which Moses received instructions from God on the dimensions and purpose of the Tabernacle. A Tabernacle could be defined as a portable sanctuary of God. After the fiasco of Aaron leading the people to the Golden calf (Exodus 20-40), God's glory filled the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was another visual reminder of the provision of God. Every time the people saw the Tabernacle, it gave them hope and security that God was present and would fight for them. It was not a permanent sanctuary but was mobile so it could be where the people were located. It was transported by lifting up four poles located on each end. Inside the Tabernacle was the sacred Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was covered by the mercy seat, upon which the blood of the animal was sprinkled, representing Israel’s sin. The contents of the Ark are reminders of Israel’s failures that were atoned for by the blood of the sacrifice. The two tablets represent Israel’s rejection of God’s law, Aaron’s staff the rejection of God’s leadership, and the jar of manna a rejection of God’s provision. The Tabernacle’s presence was a provision of God in the midst of war and everyday life, which provided the people with security.
Another provision of God was the building of the temple. King David “was a man after God’s heart” and desired to build a temple for God. Because of all the blood David shed in his life in battles and sin, God would not allow him to build the temple. God allowed David’s son, Solomon, to build the first temple. David laid out all the plans and did all the legwork to expedite Solomon’s Temple project. This temple was seen as a place where God resided and the people gathered to pray and read the scrolls of the Torah. The New Testament tells how Jesus was always in the temple discussing the law and its interpretation. This became the vehicle for Jesus’ teaching and discussion of the scrolls, along with where he encountered hypocrisy.

The corruption in the temple resided with the religious leaders, who had transformed the temple into a den of thieves instead of “a house of prayer.” In the initial construction of the temple, Solomon offered a prayer of dedication of the temple, in which he asked God to accept the prayers of Gentiles offered in the temple (2 Chronicles 6:32). This was a place designated for the Gentiles to gather and learn from God within the temple courtyard. Jesus was indignant that “they had transformed the only-open point for the Gentiles into a catalogue of comforts and conveniences for the already saved.” The temple morphed into a place where Gentiles were excluded. The vision of the temple was to see the “Court of the Gentiles overflowing with seekers, and scripture promises that a spirit-filled ministry will capture the attention of them for miles around.” When Jesus healed someone, he would tell them to go show themselves to the priest. This was because the priest determined who could enter or not enter the temple. The

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42 1 Samuel 13:14  
43 Matthew 21:13-14  
44 J.D. Greear, *Gaining By Losing* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 2015), 89.  
temple was primarily for the Israelites. This provision of God provided a place where people gathered to pray, hear, and interpret the scriptures in the temple and be restored to God.

The spread of the Christian faith came through the Diaspora when the Jewish people were scattered due to persecution by the Romans. Luke T. Johnson states, “Christian preachers found their first missionary success in the Diaspora.”46 With the Jewish people scattered all over the known world, they had a general understanding of the Torah or “the sacred writings of Israel.”47 During this era, the synagogues stayed true to the Torah while the temples spread with the Jewish people. With the rise of Christianity, the next provision of God became the House Church, which was able to reach both Jews and Gentiles.

**House Church**

As the early church was beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2), the provision of God made the House Church the mode of getting the word out. The simplicity of using one’s home was cost effective. The Gospel is personal but is also corporate; when one family member comes to the Lord, the whole family often comes as well.48 The House Church allowed people to gather in the intimacy of their own home, which often did not draw attention from hostile authorities. This mode of spreading the Gospel has been the predominant mode since the Boxer Rebellion in 1899-1901. Missionaries in China were forced to leave with the unrest in the country.49 House Churches were family units and friends who would gather for fellowship, prayer, and discipleship.

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48 Acts 16:15, 33 (*English Standard Version*).
The House Church is abundant throughout the New Testament (Acts 12:12; 16:40; Romans 16:3, 5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1-2). It was introduced by Paul as the place where people gathered. Paul talked about particular houses like Lydia’s and Priscilla and Aquila’s. These churches were just the ones mentioned; it is likely there were many others. The mentioning of these House Churches is brief in scripture, which leaves questions about the particulars of how they functioned. They served as another provision of God in how believers and unbelievers were drawn to redemption and restoration.

The final provision of God found in churches is a memorial. A memorial is placed in a church to remember a time in the past. Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church has over 50 memorials with stories behind each one. Like altars, stones, tabernacles or temples, church memorials ideally remind and show us the provision of God in our lives. Spiritual amnesia occurs when we forget what God did in the past, but memorials continually give us visual reminders to restore each of us.

Memorials can be experienced with each of the senses. As the modern-day church worships, memorials can be seen in stained glass windows and felt to a touch, or smelled in flowers in the sanctuary. When Holy Communion is served and it touches our lips, we taste the sacred sacrament. The modern-day church is God’s chief vehicle to redeem and restore humanity. Church memorials are ideally used to remind and restore the people of faith in their journey as a provision of God.

Churches are filled with memorials but have lost effectiveness in reaching the next generation of America. The stories of the provisions of God in the past have not been passed down to the next generation. This is a major concern in a vast majority of churches, which have so many traditions and are filled with memorials. Their future looks more like a documentary of
the glory days than the new Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation. Articles have been written about what has been referred to as “the graying of America.” So many of the long-time churches that once were strong and vital and shaped their communities are now struggling to be vital and even survive as their membership ages out. Non-denominational churches, with their catchy music, radical hospitality, and outreach into the community, are now the premier churches in the communities. These emerging churches are not yet filled with memorials of the past but are filled in redeeming and restoring people in the love of God.

Theoretical Foundations

The provision of God initially began with the fall of Adam and Eve; how could they ever experience the love and grace of God without a possible redemption plan in place? If not, then God created humanity with no hope of ever being restored to paradise. That does not sound like something a God of love would do. The best literature for understanding in the provision of God is the Holy Bible. This is shown in how God’s provision began in Genesis and continued throughout the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Even within cultures that to have no identifiable Christian symbols, God is sovereign and draws humanity to be redeemed and restored. This concept is known as “redemptive analogies,” which was first introduced by missiologist Don Richardson in the book Peace Child in 1974. The term “redemptive analogies” is used “to refer to a practice or belief native to any given culture that distinctly parallels or illustrates the gospel.” In the fall of 1993, Dr. Thomas Thangaraj at Candler School of Theology taught a class called “Missions in a Pluralistic World.” During his class, I read the shorter essay called “Peace Child,” which was then followed by a lively class

50 https://hpcmadison.com/2013/10/03/the-power-of-a-redemptive-analogy/.
discussion. Dr. Thangaraj would have conferred with Richardson “that redemptive analogies exist as a result of God’s self-disclosure in general revelation and that pagan people have embedded this disclosure in their native religions and beliefs.” Dr. Steve Lowe “Redemptive Analogies: A Proposed Model of Cultural Analysis”, n.p., 2006.

At the time of the class with Dr. Thangaraj, I was serving a Native American congregation among the Cherokees on the Qualla Boundary, better known as Cherokee Indian Reservation in North Carolina. I encountered a pagan, superstitious native culture. In my many attempts to reach those in the native culture, there was an appeal to embrace the superstitious native culture. Paul encountered the same thing in his mission work. It was Paul in Athens who strategically used a sacred indigenous object to communicate a message of an altar “to the unknown god.”\(^\text{52}\) On the reservation, there were countless examples where an object in the community could be used to draw people into the loving arms of Jesus. I was more familiar with the term “contextualization” than the term “redemptive analogies” in explaining how God redeems and restores humanity. God always provided a provision.

My wife and I homeschooled our children over a decade, and one of the series of books I read to them was *Christian Heroes: Then & Now*, by Janet & Geoff Benge. This series of books was around 200 pages and in story form, following the protagonist from childhood to adulthood. I remember reading about Adoniram Judson in his travels to Burma and how he reached the Buddhists using the zayats. Adoniram identified an object in the Buddhist culture that the people understood. This connected it to the Gospel; and led them into a relationship with the Lord.

\(^\text{52}\) Acts 17:1, 22, 23. *(English Standard Version).*
Dr. Thangaraj and Don Richardson are in alignment in their interpretation of redemptive analogies, but Bruce Demarest takes issue with their interpretation because “general revelation is limited in that it can only reveal something about God, not about God’s redemptive activity, which is reserved for special revelation.”

Dr. Steve Lowe said that “without the accompanying work of the Holy Spirit upon unregenerate hearts and minds, the redemptive analogies will not bear fruit and illuminate redemption.” Demarest’s understanding of redemptive analogies using examples within cultures and then relating to God is the same as the understanding of Abraham and his descendants erecting altars on the Central Ridge Route. “This route is strategic and has been used since antiquity for commerce and trade between Asia and Africa.”

Roland Devaux states that the “patriarchal altar sites mentioned in Genesis were originally Canaanite sanctuaries.” Nothing in the Bible is there by accident; God is able to use anything in any culture to restore or redeem, due to redemptive analogies.

Genesis begins by saying everything that God created “was good.” God speaks truth into existence, which creates a chain reaction of events: “So shall my Word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” The Alpha Omega Institute states, “God follows a well thought out plan…in an orderly, masterful way.” According to the Alpha Omega Institute, creation in an orderly way does not allow for the idea that God would change gears into creating a “series of haphazard trial and error events.” Some may try to argue that after sin was

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53 Bruce Demarest, General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1982), 335.
55 Ibid.
58 https://www.discovercreation.org/blog/2013/12/20/gems-from-genesis-and-it-was-good/.
59 Ibid.
conceived, messy relationships occurred, and the evils of the world appeared, which show that God is haphazard in planning events. God has a master plan, and, as we see in redemptive analogies, God always provides a way to redeem and restore humanity.

Humanity not only needs ways to receive redemption but needs spiritual reminders as well. These reminders serve as redemptive analogies as provisions of God. As mentioned in the previous section, these reminders—such as in the rainbow, altars, stones, tabernacles, temples, house churches, and memorials—trigger a memory. The great Hebrew text of the Great Shema in Deuteronomy 6 was a constant reminder to not forget what God has done.

The inspired Word of God is more than just a collection of sixty books in a somewhat sequential order. It is more than simply someone’s opinion or view of the history during a certain era of time. It is about more than just two thirds law and the last third grace. It is about more than just how everything was created or how everything will come to an end. It is more than a collection of different types of literature and styles. The Bible is a holy book that contains everything we as humans need for salvation. It is not a bunch of random stories; it is a flow of the provisions of God drawing humanity back into the arms of a loving God—from Genesis to the book of Revelation.

Abraham is a central person in the Bible and in the history of the world. Three major religions trace their roots to this nomad follower of God who sojourned in an unknown territory. He did not know the destination of his journey, but he had faith in God to lead him. In the Old Testament Survey, Paul House and Eric Mitchell summarize that after the first 11 Chapters in Genesis, humanity was in a free-fall: “Scripture teaches us that God is never unprepared. He has a plan to meet every problem.”⁶⁰ The first couple was evicted from the Garden of Eden, one

brother kills another brother in jealousy, a flood destroys humanity and leaves only one surviving family, and a tower is built in a vain attempt to reach heaven. House and Mitchell claim that God’s provision came via Abraham to be the light and hope to nations around the world. His influence has survived two thousand years and is still felt world-wide. Genesis 1-11 is a disaster to God’s original plan, and “unless something dramatic happens, the whole plan to reverse Genesis 1-11 cannot succeed.” The authors see Abraham has central to God’s plan. God provides provisions caused by sin/disobedience but still is able to restore humanity, and this plan is woven throughout the Bible in redemptive analogies. Through Abraham’s erection of altars, God was restoring and reminding humanity of the provision of God. This model that began with Abraham in the altars is carried throughout the Bible and used as a plumb line of interpretation in the stones of Joshua, tabernacle, temple, house church, and modern-day memorials.

Umberto Cassuto gave an interesting analysis of the provision for God in the calling of Abraham. Cassuto was a rabbi and Biblical scholar who was born in Italy and passed away in 1951. His research still speaks profoundly today. Cassuto was credited with understanding God as sending Abraham out in a strategic way to give humanity an opportunity to know Yahweh. It was God calling Abraham to an unknown territory that then created opportunities for the world to experience redemption as a way back to God. Cassuto was the researcher to identify that the places Abraham traveled and the locations in which he erected altars were not only meant to claim the land for God but was marking the land like a surveyor—legally marking the land God promised him and his descendants.

61 Ibid, 38.
God gave the dimensions for building the ark, the tabernacle, and the temple. God gave Abraham instructions about where to go, when to stop, and when to worship. It was in this spirit that Abraham erected altars. The places Abraham travelled to cannot be dismissed. Cassuto asks a poignant question, “And why is it that it was at these particular stations—in the vicinity of Shechem and of Bethel—that Abram built these altars unto the Lord?” Of all the possible places to travel and all the places someone could erect altars, why did Abraham build them in these locations? Cassuto’s research indicates that Abraham’s migration into Canaan “was primarily religious, and its aim was the founding of a new faith.” Abraham’s obedience to God was in opposition to “the gods of Canaan.” It is striking that this act of faith continued to be perpetuated beyond his lifetime by his son, Isaac. These original places where the altars were erected are still the source of much of the conflict over territorial rights in the Middle East today.

Abraham’s initial call from God was, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” This call and promise, or covenant, is paramount to God in being established with Israel. This covenant set precedence with a pattern of the provisions of God to reach new lands. It was Frances M. Dubose who noted this precedent throughout the Bible. God by nature is a sender who sends the church out into the world. The Bible has shaped the mission of the church in his examples of Abraham (Genesis 12), Amos (Amos 7), and Jesus, who sent out the seventy (Luke 10). This interpretation of God as a

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64 Ibid, 303.
65 Ibid, 306.
66 *Genesis 12:2 (English Standard Version).*
“sender” has driven the church in the fertile ground of church planting, satelliting, and sending people for mission to reach unreached nations.

One of the fastest growing churches in North Carolina is the Summit Church, led by J.D. Greear. He has taken Frances Dubose’s interpretation of God as a sender and structured his Summit Church to send people out into the world. His book gives another insight into the provision of God in how churches are mandated to send people out into the world. He uses scripture for support: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” He notes that in the Book of John, Jesus is said to have been “sent” out on 44 occasions. Greear points to how when God speaks to someone in scripture, “he is sending them on a mission.”

A certain section of the temple was the “Court of the Gentiles.” Its purpose was to reach the Gentiles. Jesus triumphantly arrived into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The crowds spread clothes and palm branches for the king. The next day he ventured into the temple, and when he witnessed what was happening in the Court of the Gentiles, Jesus was angry. He said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.” Jesus knew the court in the temple was built for the Gentiles, but the Jews had taken over that sacred spot for selfish, economic reasons. Greear notes “that Jesus was angry not only at what they were doing, but also at what they were obscuring.” The purpose of the Court of Gentiles was to create a sacred space set aside to restore and redeem Gentiles as a provision of God.

Greear uses that same analogy in his understanding of the church. He sees the church’s main function is to send people out into the world. He states boldly, “If a church is not pursuing the Great Commission, it really has no point in existing.” This statement would create a great

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68 Ibid, 306.
69 J.D. Greear, Gaining By Losing (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 2015), 33.
70 Matthew 21:13 (English Standard Version).
71 J.D. Greear, Gaining By Losing (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 2015), 89.
72 Ibid, 50.
discussion at any church leader’s meeting. If the church is not sending people out into the world, that is perhaps why “those who attend a church on the weekend in the United States will drop from 17 percent to 14 percent,” according to a survey by Lifeway Research Study. Yearly, J.D. Greear commissions Pastors to start their churches and take with them anybody in the church that feels led to join them. His interpretation of the provision of God is that God is continually sending people out to be a witness to all the nations. Summit Church is a tool in fulfilling the prophecy in Revelation before the Second Coming of the Lord, when all nations must hear the Lord. Romans 10:14-15 says, “But how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” This fresh understanding by Greear is a provision of God; it is a continuation of how the Lord sent people out everywhere to reach those who needed redemption and restoration.

In the Bible, we read the story of Phillip, who heard an angel of the Lord saying, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desert place.” So, Phillip went first to a group in Samaria and has an unbelievable ministry. Then, he is called to go to the desert 165 miles away for no apparent reason. While he is there, Paul is led by God to reach an Ethiopian Eunuch riding in the middle of nowhere in a chariot. For many of us, being able to have faith like Abraham and Phillip and going out from our comfortable surroundings to do God’s work is our stumbling block. Greear says “the question is no longer whether we are called but only where and how.” The scripture is clear, “The righteous shall

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73 David Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 176-180.
74 Romans 10:14-15 (*English Standard Version*).
75 Acts 8:26 (*English Standard Version*).
76 J.D. Greear, *Gaining By Losing* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 2015), 70.
live by faith.”77 Those who are right with God live by faith and are open to God’s leading to go anywhere and do anything.

Michael Harbin gives an explanation in his historical survey of The Old and New Testaments of the two prevalent ways people interpret the Bible. Though the interpretations are seemingly polar opposites, they are helpful in understanding the provision of God throughout the Bible. Harbin describes these two basic understandings of the Bible as the Traditional and the Modern view.

The Traditional, or conservative, view can be best explained by Harbin “as accepting the Biblical documents at face value,” while the Modern, or liberal or critical, view is more “suspect at best.”78 Showing how these two interpretations are such polarized views can explain why believers within churches and denominations can read the same scripture yet derive a completely different understanding. Harbin says the use of archaeology only reinforces the traditional view while repudiating the modern view. This connection between the Bible and archaeological findings is significant because it gives us clarity as to where the altars were located, it places the texts in the time of Abraham and his descendants, and it provides a historically accurate account that gives validity to the argument.

Another scholar, Elmer Martens, says an understanding of the Old Testament is very important to understanding the New Testament. We see the provision of God beginning primarily in the altars that Abraham erected that claim the land for God. This theme progressing throughout the Bible is key to understanding where and how temples and churches originated.79 Martens says, “The Old Testament supplies the fiber for the Christian faith. But unless the

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77 Romans 1:17 (English Standard Version).
message of the Old Testament is clearly articulated, its relevance of the New Testament and to Christians today will remain fuzzy.”80

Meredith Cline understood the altars of Abraham as “a priestly fellowship, a cultic congregation.”81 J.D. Greear saw the church on a mission to be sent out into the world. Cline saw the original signs of marking the land and people for God. Cline notes, “Generation after generation this distinctive altar-centered institution was the manifestation of the spiritual temple, the priestly people-house of God, in the process of redemptive formulation and destined to stand complete at the end of history, filled with the divine glory and filling all in all.”82 Cline, along with several other authors mentioned above, provide a rich theoretical underpinning for how the provision of God is evident in the Holy Bible.

**Provision of God: Memorials**

The crux of the problem is that if nobody knows what an altar is, or the reason for the stones from the Jordan River, or the function or purpose of the Tabernacle or Temple or Church, then it has little power or influence on the church or culture. If Abraham and his descendants simply erected altars, all anyone would see is a pile of rocks. A plain rock is cold, impersonal and unengaging.

**Senses**

There are five senses: touch, sight, sound, smell and taste. Humanity uses each of the senses to interpret the world around us. The provision of God throughout the Bible is enhanced

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82 Ibid, 195.
because these senses are prevalent and are used to draw humanity closer to God. The initial
 provision of God was a majestic rainbow, of which Noah and his family marveled. The altars of
 Abraham dealt with touch, sight, and smell. The stones of Joshua dealt with touch and sight. The
 Tabernacle dealt with sight, sound, smell, and taste. The Temple drew in all five senses, as does
 the modern day church. Church memorials deal directly with our sight, touch, and sound.

To bring this understanding of the use of the five senses in the provision of God through
memorials closer to home, I had an experience with a Cherokee Indian family on the Cherokee
Indian Reservation in North Carolina. During my years as Associate Pastor on the Reservation, I
made many home visits. Once on a visit in the Yellow Hill District, I visited the home of a
husband and wife, who were active in Cherokee United Methodist Church. He knew that I
oversaw the building teams who came to serve at the church. He was dying of lung cancer and
had an unusual request to make of me. He asked me to find his abandoned family graveyard that
was above his house on the side of a mountain. When I asked him for some landmarks, all he
said was to look for several piles of rocks built up in a formation that looked unusual. I was
young and adventuresome and took him up on his request.

For my journey to the top of mountain range on Yellow Hill, I traveled light. I wore steel-
toed boots and took a rake and stick to balance me up the steep mountain and provide protection
from rattlesnakes. The higher I went in elevation, the thinner the air became. After searching for
a couple of hours, I found several rock formations that were, as he said, quite unusual. This was
before the age of cell phones, and all I had to guide me was is description of a rock formation.
Here I was on top of the mountain range in Yellow Hill Mountain, in the middle of a cloud,
among Cherokee ancestors relatively forgotten, and hidden under the overgrowth and the fall
leaves. A graveyard is a sacred place to Native Americans. If a headstone or marker is not
present, you have no idea who is buried in that place. Here, there were no headstones, only rock formations.

All five senses were at play in the graveyard on top of the mountain. I could see the rock formation. I could touch the rock formation. I could feel the wetness of the cloud high on the mountain in the cemetery. I could smell the scent of the woods in the fall. I could taste the pure air of high elevation. All of my senses were in play in this abandoned cemetery going back centuries. I wondered what the trees would tell me if they could talk. I wondered about the descendants buried there. When I read the Bible, I can see all the senses at work in the stories of God’s people, with God continually making a provision for humanity to be restored and redeemed. Memorials like that cemetery are incredible tools to point to provisions of God. The problem with the altars during Abraham’s time was that if no one was present to interpret, then all anyone would see is a bunch of rocks. Without an interpretation, there was no way to be restored or redeemed to God through the altar itself. Therefore, I believe that if this is true for altars, then it must be true for church memorials. In order for church memorials to be effective witnesses to the provisions of God, they have a witness present to interpret.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In Chapter One, the researcher gave a snapshot of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church located in Greensboro, North Carolina. The snapshot illustrated the rich history, staff tenures, and three key movements in the church. It is obvious God has blessed the church in doing some incredible ministries throughout the years. However, with an aging congregation, many of these powerful spiritual moments, if not documented and with no strategic plan in place, are in danger of being forgotten or fading away within the next decade.

In Chapter Two, the researcher illustrated how God always makes a provision to redeem and restore humanity. The initial resource used was the Bible, beginning in the Old Testament in how the provision of God was evident in the four altars of Abraham (Altars of Praise, Prayer, Peace, and Provision) and progressing into the New Testament. These altars, or memorials, are further evidenced in the rainbow, altar, stones, tabernacle, temple, and the house church. The researcher then surveyed scholars who interpreted the provision of God throughout the Bible.

Now in Chapter Three, the researcher will explain the methodology of the research for how people will remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial with an interpreter present. This research was conducted through interviews with two long-term church members, followed by data collection with a sample of eighteen participants—all of whom are members of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church who signed a consent form.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to use our church’s memorials to illustrate memorials found in Scripture and how they can be used as teachable moments to rehearse God’s provision throughout our church’s history. The congregation will remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial with an interpreter present. The research question is “How can
members of the congregation know and appreciate memorials as a provision of God if no interpreter is present?"

**Research Tasks to Accomplish**

Specific research objectives are:

1. **Compilation of a list of memorials located within Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church**: This listing was compiled by two long-term members of Mount Pisgah (35+ years) who independently compiled the list (each had 30 minutes maximum time to compile). This listing was used by the researcher to identify a total of five memorials that were used in the study (one memorial for each of the five sessions; each memorial is a “treatment”).

2. **Development of five sessions (“meetings”) with each session focusing on a different memorial.** Each session is a “treatment” and will consist of four components: When memorial given; Why (Provision of God); Where it is located; Who provided the memorial. The researcher is the interpreter.

3. **Completion of pre-test by participants (prior to beginning of study, Meeting #1) and completion of post-test to measure the impact of church memorials (End of Meeting #6).**

4. **Share results with the two long-term members (who participated in Step #1). Develop plan of assimilation/dissemination for Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.**

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83 Memorial is a physical item that is placed to remember a time in the past.
Research Objectives

Research Objective 1

1. Meet with two long-term members (35+ year church members from Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church) to explain the Old Testament usage of altars and other memorials and to ask their assistance in individually compiling a list of memorials placed throughout the church.

2. Two members compiled and submitted their lists; this was conducted by walking throughout the church (inside and outside).

Research Objective 2

1. Selection of five Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church Memorials. For each Memorial, conducted in-depth research for each memorial (When memorial given; Why - Provision of God; Where it is located; Who provided the memorial), and developed a one-page summary handout for each memorial.

2. The researcher was the interpreter. For each of the five sessions (Meeting #2-6), the researcher provided a brief description and explanation of a memorial (Meetings #1-5 15 minutes maximum; Meeting #6 30 minutes, with Memorial #5 plus post-test).

Research Objective 3

1. Meeting #1: Participants signed a consent document, listened to a brief description of the study (reiteration of description, as on the consent document), and completed a pre-test.

2. Meeting #6: Participants completed a post-test.

Research Objective 4

1. Video recorded interview with each of the two 35+ year members, identifying what memorials impacted them in their journey of faith. On September 13, 2018 the researcher
met with the two long-term members and presented them with three questions, to which they responded, and their responses were documented:

a. As you review the listing of memorials you identified, identify three memorials and share how each memorial impacted you in your journey of faith as a member of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.

b. How can we better engage Mount Pisgah members with our existing memorials?

c. Any specific recommendations you can add to this study, based on your long-term Mount Pisgah membership?

2. Discussion to also identify assimilation/dissemination of study results.

**Research Design**

**Theological Framework**

The framework was based on four altars Abraham erected for specific reasons, which were identified in *Believer’s Magazine* in the February 2014 issue by R. Dawes Lesmahagow. Lesmahagow’s article was titled, “Abraham’s Four Altars: Unforgettable Peaks.” The criteria used in this article was used to select the five memorials chosen to present to the target group.

**An Altar of Praise (Genesis 12:1-17)**

Abraham erected his first altar for all God had done for him. He listened to God and then was sent out to claim the land for God under the oak of Moreh. On January 22, 2019, I presented Memorial #1 to the project group. This memorial was one of the 16 stained glass windows located in the sanctuary of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Trustees decided to put these beautiful windows in the sanctuary. An
announcement was made during a Sunday service, which was the Trustees intent. By the next day (Monday morning), church families made pledges to cover the cost of all the windows. It was a blessing that the congregation responded so favorably in this majestic attraction of the stained glass windows that tell the story of faith. Memorial #1 was one of the stained glass windows given by the Friddle family in their praise of their father and husband. This window was dedicated on April 18, 2004.

**An Altar of Prayer (Genesis 12:8-13)**

Abraham erected his next altar when he encountered Bethel and Ai, which served as a spiritual marker. He was overwhelmed with God’s presence and his altar was erected to consecrate the land to God. On February 6, 2019, I presented Memorial #4, a Bible Holder located on the altar at the front of the church. Dick White’s life was cut short by a massive heart attack on May 15, 2013. He was a strong leader within the church, and his loss left a huge hole in the church. His wife, Kathy, took some money from his memorials and purchased a Bible Holder in the sanctuary because her husband loved God and the church and revered the Word of God.

**An Altar of Peace (Genesis 13:14-18)**

Abraham erected his third altar with his nephew, Lot. God had rescued him in Egypt and now was blessing him and Lot with an abundant herd. I presented Memorial #2 on January 23, 2019. On July 1, 1970 Mount Pisgah doubled its membership in just one Sunday due to a merger with Bethel Church. The union between these two churches went remarkably well. As a sign of this union, the church bell from Bethel was erected near the main office entrance in July 1977 to recall the history of the church.
An Altar of Provision (Genesis 22:9-14)

Abraham erected his fourth altar on Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son, Isaac. He was willing to do anything for God. This was the altar of provision because God provided for Abraham at the last minute to save his son, providing a ram for the sacrifice. Two memorials were chosen in line with an Altar of Provision. On January 30, 2019, I presented Memorial #3, which is a picture of Marie Holman. She was a great servant of God, faithfully serving as the church librarian and was the one who instituted the card catalog. Today, the library is used often by the Church School, members of the church, Sunday school classes, and is a space for meetings. The second Memorial #5 was presented on February 13, 2019, which was a gift given by the Wood family after the tragic death of their daughter, Crystal Dawn Wood. She died in 1999; she had just left the church and was on her way home when she was killed in an automobile accident. The Wood family provided a generous gift to the church kitchen in her memory because many of her family's fond memories occurred at the church.

Research Design Framework

A pre-test and post-test design was used in this study to examine the impact of church memorials on study participants. The same three questions were used for the pre-test and post-test, and these instruments are presented in Appendix 1. The interview questions used with the two long-term members are presented in Appendix 2.

For this qualitative research, Creswell’s phenomenological research approach was used to analyze the data. This study and research methodology component describe the common
meaning of several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon.

“Phenomenology [focuses] on describing what all the participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon.”\footnote{John W. Creswell and Cheryl, \textit{Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches Fourth Edition} (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 82.}

**Types of Data Collected/Protocols/Analysis**

Creswell outlined five different approaches to qualitative data analysis. The phenomenological approach was selected from Creswell’s five analyses for this study. Creswell (2018, Figure 4.3, p. 87) visually depicts the process for data analysis, which the researcher has followed.
Creswell’s Procedure for Conducting Phenomenological Research\textsuperscript{85}

\textbf{Figure 4.3 Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Present the understanding of the essence of the experience in written form.
  \item Generate themes from the analysis of significant statements.
  \item Develop textural and structural descriptions.
  \item Identify a phenomenon of interest to study, and describe it.
  \item Distinguish and specify the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology.
  \item Collect data from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon by using interviews.
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Phenomenological researchers describe the essence of a lived experience}

\textbf{The Tools for Gathering Information}

A data table and written descriptions were used to illustrate results, using the above process: Generate themes from the analysis of significant statements; Develop textural and structural descriptions; Report the “essence” of the phenomenon by using a composite description; Present the understanding of the essence of the experience in written form. Results from this process are presented in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 87.
Research Methodology

The following identifies the six participant meetings:

Research Objective 1

The researcher met individually with each of the two 35+ year members prior to participant meetings. An identical study purpose and instructions were given to each of the two members. Each member was asked to walk around the inside and outside of the church and write down church memorials they saw. All doors of all classrooms were open throughout the building. They were given thirty minutes to walk around and make the memorial listing. Each member felt the given time was adequate.

Research Objective 2

Both long-term members met independently with the researcher to share their listing of church memorials. The researcher then compiled a listing of five memorials in correlation to the four altars of Abraham. After choosing the memorials, which the researcher determined could be authenticated, the five memorials for the larger study were selected. Several memorials were from families that no longer had a presence within Mount Pisgah, so it would be difficult to gather data about the memorial. During the five sessions, the researcher used the same format: A handout was passed out as participants arrived. Then the researcher reviewed the memorial information on the handout. Each handout had a picture of the memorial followed by four questions (and information about each question): When was the memorial given? Why is the memorial a provision of God? Where is it located at the church? Who provided the memorial? After each session, the researcher entertained questions from the participants. Every meeting, somebody either had a question or a comment to share about the memorial. With several long-
term members in the participant group, some participants were present when memorials were given to the church.

**Research Objective 3**

The consent form (Appendix 3) was sent to each of the eighteen participants, asking them to agree to participate in four of the five weekly scheduled times on Wednesday nights from 5:15-5:30pm. The consent form included participating in a pre-test and post-test. All participants signed this consent form. The pre-test and post-test had three identical questions. Analysis of the pre-test vs. post-test results were as follows:

- Pre-test results and post-test results were examined, to identify key themes for the three questions. A key theme emerged for each question: Awareness (Question #1), Engagement (Question #2), Teachable Moments (Question #3). In addition, a textural and structural description (with coding) was then developed for two themes, Awareness and Engagement. For Question #3, sub-themes of Teachable Moments were identified.
- Tables (with participant coding for questions #1 and #2) were generated. Descriptive results (composite description) of the memorial experience was presented for all three questions.
- Individual participant pre-test and post-test comparisons were examined for similarities and differences between the pre-test and the post-test.
- Group results were examined regarding similarities and differences of new members (up to 9 years membership) versus long-term members (10+ year membership).

**Research Objective 4**

The researcher met with the two long-term members, and a video recording (approved by both members) was used to capture the session’s information. The researcher explained to them
the importance of church memorials, and shared brief information about the study’s results. The next step was to ask the two long-term members three questions:

1. Memorials are important for the church to remember the faithfulness of others. As you review the listing of memorials that you have identified, identify three (3) memorials and share how each memorial impacted you in your journey of faith as a member of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.

2. How can we better engage Mount Pisgah members with our existing memorials? The researcher also prompted members for engagement options, such as inclusion in sermons, written/printed/web-based information/results from the study.

3. Any specific recommendations you can add to this study, based on your long-term Mount Pisgah membership? The researcher prompted them to include the impact from memorials as a provision of God.

Sample Selection

Long-term members

The researcher sought two Mount Pisgah Church members who have been active for a combined total of almost one hundred years, which he found by checking the church records. By being active for ninety eight years (as of August 9, 2019), the researcher felt they would know the families and memorials given in the last fifty years. The researcher contacted these two long-term members to ask them to participate; and upon agreement to serve, they signed the consent form (Appendix 3).
Participants

The recruitment letter was printed in the Sunday morning bulletin and emailed to the church membership population via the church’s weekly e-news. The recruitment materials instructed members to email the researcher if they were church members and desired to be in the study on certain Wednesday nights at 5:15pm, beginning on January 23, 2019.

- A weekly church e-news is sent to all church members every Thursday evening.
  The recruitment for the one participant group for this research study was part of the e-news sent to all members for two weeks.
- A weekly church bulletin is printed every Sunday for the three worship services offered at 8:30, 9:45, and 11:00am. The researcher made an announcement on January 2 and 9, 2019 during the three worship services.
- Recruitment materials were used in the research study. Note: On January 1, 2019 Mount Pisgah had 769 church members.

Participant Selection

One participant group of church members of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church were the study participants for this research (n =18). This convenience sample consisted of both new as well as established members. These participants were not only church members but were active in the life of the church.

Sample Criteria

- Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church membership
- Church members at least 18 years of age
- Available on Wednesday evenings to attend sessions (prior to “Wednesday Night Live”)
- Willing to attend 4 of the 5 sessions (Meetings #2-6)
- Complete the study’s pre-test and post-test
- Sign the consent form for study participation

Sample Size

The initial sample target (listed in the approved IRB) was “approximately 20,” so the study reached the target for sample size.

Informed Consent

The Informed Consent form was provided at the time of the interview/survey (Meeting #1), and study participants signed and returned the consent form prior to the interview/survey. No participant compensation was provided. Permission was received from the church (via Church Council) prior to recruiting participants and implementing the research study. While this formal proof of permission was not required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher met with the Chair of the Church Council and shared the entire contents of the IRB document. Approval was then granted.

Places and Timelines of Activities

The interview with each of the two long-term members took place in the researcher’s office at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church. The pre-test and post-test, as well as the five meetings, were held in the Page classroom, Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina.

The timelines and duration of activities are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment e-news</td>
<td>January 3 &amp; 10, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment church bulletin</td>
<td>January 6 &amp; 13, 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Issues Related to Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Data was secured via the researcher’s password-locked computer. The researcher and faculty member have access to the data and the code book. The study is confidential, and the researcher knows which participant gave which response. The researcher collected participant names, assigned each a code/pseudonym, and maintained a codebook. This allowed the researcher to link a participant name to test results. The researcher has stored the codebook in a location separate from the data.

Definition of Terms

Memorials: A memorial is a physical item that is placed to remember a time in the past.

Provision of God: God goes before humanity and provides a way to be redeemed and restored by giving tangible things as a source of remembrance.

Redemptive Analogies: A practice or belief native to any given culture that distinctly parallels or illustrates the gospel.

Stained glass window: A glass fixture located in the sanctuary telling a depiction of the Christian message.

Altar of Praise: The church memorial was the stained glass window.

Altar of Peace: The church memorial was the church bell from Bethel Church.
Altar of Provision: The church memorial was the plaque in memory of Marie Holman (Library) and by the Wood family (kitchen) in memory of Crystal Dawn Wood.

Altar of Prayer: The church memorial was the Bible holder, given in memory of Dick White.
Chapter 4: Results

The results of the thesis project were driven by the research question, “Will people remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial regularly with an interpreter present?” The research shows if an interpreter is not present, then memorials are overlooked. Some exceptions are obvious, such as a huge church bell near a main entrance or eight stained glass windows in the sanctuary, but the majority of memorials are not in plain sight, and unless a person has a long-term membership with the story behind the memorial, they are not known nor personal. The research found that when an interpreter is present, it is possible to raise awareness, engagement, and have teachable moments around memorials in a church space.

Demographic Profile

Members of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church participated in this study. Two groups of members were a) two long-term members and b) eighteen members who participated in the study by completing the pre-test and post-test, plus also completing the five meetings (“treatments”).

The two long-term members in the research study were not selected randomly. The researcher was the Senior Pastor of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church since July 1, 2016 and had knowledge of the long-term members who not only knew the history well but were still active in the life of the church in leadership positions. The profile of the two chosen had a combined church membership of ninety eight years of active participation.

Participant one has been a church member for sixty years. Her parents were active and her mother, who is ninety three years old, is still living and is able to attend church sporadically. Her mother kept the nursery for decades, and her father was chairman of the Cemetery
Committee. The participant is the chairwoman of the Cemetery Committee and is considered the longest standing leader in the church. She and her husband, who is contracted to look after the church lawn and cemetery, have two sons, both of whom do not attend the church. One son attends the largest contemporary church, Daystar, in Greensboro and the other son lives in the suburbs north of Charlotte.

Participant two has been a church member for thirty eight years. She and her now deceased husband joined the church together and raised two now grown children. One son lives outside of Greensboro and one daughter lives in Greensboro and attends church sporadically. She is in her eighties and is a central, well respected leader within the church. She is frequently at the church throughout the week, has a very engaging personality, and is a deeply spiritual woman of God. It is not uncommon to find her at any of the three worship services within any given month.

**Participants (Eighteen Members)**

The eighteen participants responded to either the weekly e-news insert or the church bulletin with instructions for research project participation. Each participant also signed a consent form, which stated they were Mount Pisgah church members, and agreed to take a pre-test and post-test. Also, each participant agreed to attend at least four of five meetings on Wednesday nights from 5:15-5:30pm in the Page Sunday School at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church (MPUMC). The eighteen participants can be grouped into the following categories:

- 11 of the participants had been members from between 1 and 9 years. Note: 3 of the 11 participants had previously been members, and, if all the years of membership were included, they would have all been members 15 years or more.
• 7 of the participants have been members from between 27 and 48 years.

These participants in age categories are:
  • 2 participants in the Builder Generation (1925-1945)
  • 14 participants in the Baby Boomer Generation (1946-1964)
  • 2 participants in the Generation Y (1980-1994)

These participants attend the following services at the church:
  • 5 attend The Mount (Contemporary)
  • 13 attend one of the two Traditional services (8:30 & 11:00am)

Research participants’ Sunday school attendance includes:
  • 16 attend Sunday school (9:45 & 11:00am)
  • 2 do not attend Sunday school

The researcher leads a committed group of laity in the church, called Levites. Levites were one of the tribes of Israel found in the Old Testament. Their assignment was the service of the temple duties. Levites assist the Senior Pastor in casting vision, having strategic plans for ministry, and in the implementation. In 2019, there are twenty two Levites who serve in this capacity. Five of the eighteen participants in the research study are Levites.

**Results: Research Objective #1**

The researcher met individually with the two long-term members, shared the purpose of the study, defined memorials (as defined in this research study), and asked them to create a listing of church memorials (inside and outside the church property). This was completed October 11, 2018. The following is the compiled listing of MPUMC memorials (Table 1):
Table 1. Memorial Listing: Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church Memorials

(Identified by 2 Long-Term Members A. Jones & M. Lewis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mergers Bell (Bethel)</th>
<th>Stained Glass Windows</th>
<th>Cemetery Bench</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hoyle Memorial 1953</td>
<td>Memory Clock in Parlor</td>
<td>Jeff Davis Sheffield Plaque 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Holman Library</td>
<td>John Bennett Class</td>
<td>Memory of Toby &amp; Sylvia Burroughs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Holder</td>
<td>Cross H.S. Roberson Sr.</td>
<td>Table Sanctuary for Marie Holman Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory of Dick White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laws Park Class</td>
<td>Jerry Wall</td>
<td>Jim Wheelock Picture in Children’s Wing Entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Memorial:</td>
<td>Methodist Men of the Year Plaque Life Members</td>
<td>Methodist Women Honor and Special Award Plaques and Honorary Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundtable Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XYZ Memorial Members</td>
<td>Plaque in front of cross in the cemetery Old Pisgah Church</td>
<td>John Wilson Memorial Shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer Garden</td>
<td>Memorial Bricks Columbarium</td>
<td>Cross &amp; Flame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herb Penry Wing</td>
<td>Wedding Unity Candle Holder</td>
<td>Narthex Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornerstone of Mt. Pisgah</td>
<td>Hall Going into Sanctuary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results: Research Objective #2**

**Five Church Memorials**

Five church memorials were selected for this study. The researcher prepared a handout for each session for each participant. Following the memorial discussion, the participants were able to ask questions. The researcher also received additional information and comments (listed
below). The following are the five memorial handouts, with the Altar associated with the memorial.

Memorial #1 Stained Glass Window: Altar of Praise

When was the Memorial given? Dedicated on April 18, 2004

Why (Provision of God)? Louise did not want her husband to be forgotten. The Friddle family were faithful Christians and faithful members of Mount Pisgah UMC together for 39 years. Louise chose the stained glass of the manger scene because it was the birth of Christ and of an innocent baby, and as a mom she was drawn to the baby scene. Clyde served on church committees and delivered Mobile Meals.

Where is it located? Sanctuary of Mount Pisgah UMC to the left of the pulpit—the second stained glass window.

Who provided the Memorial? Louise Friddle—Wife; Susan and Rich Carrera—Daughter and Husband; Gail, Mark, and Dana Hardy—Daughter and family; Emily and Tom Pickard—Granddaughter and husband
Memorial #2 Bethel Bell: Altar of Peace

When was the Memorial given? July 1977 during the ministry of Rev. Herb Penry.

Why (Provision of God)? Remembrance of the Bethel Church founded in 1930.

The official first day of the merger of Mount Pisgah UMC was June 1, 1970. The membership from the previous Sunday had doubled to 785. Rev. Ron Overcash was the Senior Pastor during this season.

Where is it located? Located to the left of the main church office building entrance.

Who provided Memorial? The bell came from the Bethel congregation and was stored for several years at the home John and Annie Wilson (Mount Pisgah UMC) who lived within a few miles of the church. Henry Maiden took the bell and constructed a frame, where it continues to be stored.
Memorial #3: Marie Holman Library: Altar of Provision

When was the Memorial given? November 11, 1990 with a reception that followed. Senior Pastor was Rev. Jim Armstrong.

Why (Provision of God)? Marie was an unbelievable Christian woman who truly loved Mount Pisgah. She was the librarian and was the first to implement the card catalog. She sang in the choir, was an excellent cook, and attended the Monday prayer group. She was an active member from (1969-1994) before she moved to Texas to be with her daughter.

Where is it located? Located in the Penry Wing on the first floor in the Church Library, located just right of the entrance.

Who provided Memorial? The church Trustees
Memorial #4 Bible Holder: Altar of Prayer

When was the Memorial given? There was no formal dedication of the Bible Holder. Kathy was told by Dr. Ted Troutman in the fall of 2013 or winter of 2014 that we needed the Bible stand for the altar. It was ordered and a nameplate was put on it in Dick's memory.

Why (Provision of God)? Dick loved his church and was an active member and Chair on almost all committees. He was a teacher in the Roundtable class. He was president of the United Methodist Men. In 2000, he developed and encouraged many members in joining and becoming very active. He was given the Man of the Year award and the plaque is on the wall in the Gathering Room.

Where is it located? The brass stand is located on the altar and holds one of Mount Pisgah's large Bibles.

Who provided Memorial? His wife of 46 years, Kathy, and his two children, Kathryn and Merritt.
Memorial #5  Kitchen & Stained Glass: Altar of Provision

When was the Memorial given? Trustees Minutes on December 17, 2001 for Kitchen Renovation, Stained glass window dedicated on April 18, 2004.

Why (Provision of God)? "When my daughter, Crystal Dawn Wood, was tragically killed in a car accident in 1999, we gave the gift to remember her life because she loved being at the church. Many of our fondest memories centered on activities in the fellowship hall. The gift of the stained glass window we gave to honor all three of our kids—Melissa, Michael, and Crystal."

–Larry Wood

Where is it located? The stained glass window is located inside the nearest entrance to the sanctuary from the Penry Wing on the right side. The memorial plaque for the kitchen area was once located on the outside of the kitchen where the audio visual booth is now located.

Results: Research Objective #3

The researcher followed Creswell’s Phenomenological Research process, as outlined in Chapter 3, to analyze the data. The first step of data analysis was the identification of three general themes. The themes identified were Awareness (Question #1), Engagement (Question #2), and Teachable moments (Question #3). The second step was to identify textural and structural descriptions for each theme. The third step was to identify composite descriptions with essence of experience, in written descriptions.

Generate Themes

Awareness is identified as “knowledge and understanding that something is happening or exists.” For Question #1, when participants were asked to list memorials, they were able to name some memorials, which meant they had knowledge and knew that Mount Pisgah UMC memorials existed.

Engagement is identified as “the act of engaging: the state of being engaged.” The participants, when asked to identify three memorials and how they remind you of God’s provision (Question #2), revealed engagement. There were different degrees of engagement, which were directly linked to the participant’s length of church membership. The longer the membership, the more likely the engagement was more personal because they knew the person and the reason for the memorial.

Teachable moments occur when participants have a heightened interest and desire to hear and understand the backstory. These moments allow the participant to become part of the shared history of the church. When the participants knew the stories behind the memorials, they were

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87 Ibid.
more likely to share this information with others as well as recognize that every memorial has a backstory, which is a teachable moment to be shared and remembered. The teachable moments are used to rehearse God’s provision in the life of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.

**Textural and Structural Descriptions**

The textural and structural descriptions (coding) were developed by the researcher and used to interpret the participants’ responses. These responses provided the researcher with guidelines to differentiate the 18 participants. The coding system for each of the first two questions (Q #1, Q #2) was a Likert scale: 1, 2, or 3.

Receiving a 1 meant that the participant had a limited knowledge of what a memorial actually was or where they were located at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church. Receiving a 2 meant that the participant had a general knowledge of what a memorial actually was or where they were located at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church. A general knowledge meant the participant could actually name memorials and knew where they were located within the church. Receiving a 3 meant that the participant had a personal attachment between the memorial and how it was a provision of God. Personal attachment is interpreted as knowing the story of when the memorial was given and who the memorial was remembering for their faithfulness to God.

**Composite Description with Essence of Experience: Pre-test and Post-test Results**

The composite description is listed in the tables below, with results from the three questions that were asked to the eighteen participants on both the pre-test and the post-test.
Question #1: *List the memorials within Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church that remind you of the past.* Coding: 1- Limited or no knowledge; 2- General Knowledge and location; 3- Personal Attachment and knowledge of how memorial was provision of God.

**Table 2. Composite Description Question #1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Pre vs. Post Test</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>New Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Long Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>New Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

**Awareness**

With Mount Pisgah being a well-established church since 1845, memorials throughout the years are now abundant in the church. It was obvious from asking the same three questions...
on the pre-test and post-test that the longer you have been a member, the more engaged you are with the memorial’s location and backstory.

The initial question asked participants to name memorials found both within the church and outside on the church property. In the pre-test, there were three participants who were rated with a 1 (two new members, one long term member). With eleven of the eighteen participants having a long-term church membership, the majority of participants (fifteen) had a general knowledge or above of the memorials located at the church. Of the five memorials the researcher identified, over half the participants had personal connections with the memorials. Being personal meant they had an emotional tie because they already knew the backstory of the memorial presented. The remainder of the participants were touched with the expanded stories that were shared with strong emotional ties. When the researcher finished the presentation in the fifteen minutes allotted on Wednesday evenings from 5:15-5:30pm at all five meetings, one or more of the long-term members spoke to the affirmative of what the researcher shared or added a personal memory of the event.

Further analysis of participant awareness from the pre-test to post-test found some interesting results:

A. The longer the church membership, the more memorials become personal. A predetermined mindset of MPUMC memorials was indicated in the same memorials or understanding, as indicated in the pre-test and post-test, though the participants attended four out of the five sessions. There were four participants who were identified as having a predetermined mindset of church memorials, which were all long-term members with history and personal connection.
B. The post-test revealed twelve of the eighteen participants grew from the pre-test in awareness of the recognition and understanding of a memorial that they did not previously see. Incremental growth was indicated in a personal attachment with the memorials they identified. Twelve of the participants had incremental growth when they mentioned at least one new memorial on the survey.

C. Becoming a new member has the potential to heighten awareness in the memorials being a provision of God, which introduces them into the shared history of the church. Awareness impact grew from pre-test to post-test. There were at least two participants who had a growth ranking from the pre-test to post-test (1 to 3) in their understanding of church memorials as a provision of God. Both of these participants are relatively new church members, joining within the last nine years.

Question #2: Select three of the memorials you listed in question #1 and describe how each memorial reminds you of God’s provision for our church or the Church universal. Coding: 1-Limited or no knowledge; 2- General Knowledge and location; 3- Personal Attachment and how memorial was provision of God.
Table 3. Composite Description Question #2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Pre vs. Post</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<td>#2</td>
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<td>Long Term</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>New Member; additional memorials, heightened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>New Member</td>
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<td>New Member; additional memorials, engaged</td>
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<td>#7</td>
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<td>#17</td>
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<td>#18</td>
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</table>

Engagement

All eighteen participants attended four of the five sessions, which resulted in an increase in their knowledge and understanding in the role memorials play in the life of the church and in being a provision of God. After each 15-minute session, the researcher asked if anyone had any
questions or comments. Each class ended with participants asking some questions or had points of clarity because the memorial was personal and had a backstory.

All eighteen participants made the connection from naming three memorials to being a provision of God from the pre-test to the post-test. This revealed the engagement that happens when an interpreter is present. Memorials in and of themselves can produce recognition into being seen as a provision of God, but this is not probable because they are often overlooked if there is not an interpreter present to highlight them. The story of the Cherokee man asking me to find his graveyard by giving me only the description of piles of rocks would have meant nothing to me if I had not been looking for them.

Only nine of the participants had comments after taking the pre-test. When taking the post-test, seventeen of the eighteen participants made comments. The participants’ engagement in the five sessions resulted in their knowledge and understanding of the role memorials play in the life of the church and in being a provision of God. Half of the participants were very knowledgeable of memorials located at the church with the pre-test and remained at the same level in the post-test. The researcher noted that this was perceived bias because the participants, though present at the sessions, already had knowledge of memorials within the church. The long-term members were already familiar, which resulted in personal contact with the five memorials presented. The other half of participants grew incrementally in their knowledge of memorials due to their engagement in the sessions. Three of the participants moved from a limited knowledge (coding of 1) to making a personal connection between a memorial and a provision of God (coding of 3).
Question #3: List any additional questions/thoughts/comments that you have about a church memorial.

It has been noted that seventeen of the participants made comments following the post-test, which is correlated to a teachable moment. They were engaged after all five sessions in asking questions and giving points of clarity. Seven of the participants had a heightened interest, such as listing a memorial they were previously unaware of but was one of the five memorials the researcher used in this research study.

Two of the participants in the post-test brought up valid points of concern in an urgency of the memorials being forgotten over the course of time and in memorials uplifting a person rather than being a provision of God. With eleven of the eighteen participants being long-term church members, it is understood how a participant could feel the burden of memorials being forgotten. Another concern from a long-term member was that memorials need not uplift a person as an idol but rather a Savior in Jesus. It could be that the participant was questioning whether a memorial should have even been given on behalf of a person. Other questions that could be raised in this line of discussion are, “Who determines what qualifies as a memorial?” or “How long should something be memorialized?”

Teachable Moments

The last theme was tied to the third question asked on both the pre-test and post-test in listing further comments. In the pre-test, half of the participants did not even list a comment, but in the post-test only one participant left this question blank. Four sub-themes of teachable moments emerged among the seventeen comments: how memorials help in the assimilation with
other Christians; memorials are a great teaching tool; memorials leave a legacy; and the
emphasis of the memorial should be on God, not on a giver.

First, memorials located around church have the ability to assimilate the congregation
into a shared history. It is hard to celebrate history if it is not shared, understood, or
communicated to the church members. This is essential for new church members to share and
become part of the shared history of the church. Each Christmas, one of our long-term members
does the children’s sermon and explains the Chrismon Tree. Not only is this a teachable moment
in the Chrismon Tree but in the shared history of Mount Pisgah. If these elements are not
present, memorials will fade over time and will soon cease to be linked in memory to being a
provision of God. The Altar of Prayer is linked to how memorials have the power to unite the
congregation in a shared history as a spiritual marker.

Second, memorials are great teaching tools in the life of the church. When church
members understand the memorial of the church bell located at the entrance of the
Administrative Building, they understand how the provision of God brought together Bethel and
Mount Pisgah to form one church in 1970; and we remain one church fifty years later. This
understanding of a teaching tool has the connection to the Altar of Peace between Abraham and
Lot.

Third, when a memorial is given in honor or memory of a loved one, it leaves a legacy.
Memorials within the church are given to remember people in their faithfulness in serving God.
This understanding of why a memorial is given to honor faithfulness has a connection to the
Altar of Praise when Mount Pisgah placed the beautiful stained glass windows in the sanctuary
in 2004 to tell the story of Jesus in depicted scenes.
Fourth, emphasis should be on God and not the giver. Church memorials should never be shrines to people. The purpose of the memorial is a provision of God to remind us that God loves us and seeks to redeem and restore us. It is not to immortalize any person no matter what contributions they made in life. Placing the emphasis on God, not the giver, is connected to the Altar of Provision in how God provided for Abraham when he was willing to do anything in obedience to God. The researcher used the memorial of Marie Holman in her faithfulness to God in serving in the church to remind participants how God provides.

Fifth, when a memorial is adequately explained, a participant is able to be knowledgeable and make a connection between a memorial and a provision of God. This point is also connected to the Altar of Provision in how Abraham was willing to do anything for God even if it meant sacrificing his beloved son, Isaac. Larry Wood and family gave a generous donation to the church, which was the largest of all five memorials presented. At the time of the initial gift to the church in 1999, a plaque was hung in the church kitchen to remind us of his daughter Crystal Dawn. Ten years ago, the plaque was removed when the kitchen was remodeled. When I asked Larry if it bothered him when the memorial came down in the fellowship hall, his response was, “The memorial to my daughter served its time.” Larry understood that memorials were provisions of God given to us for a season. His understanding of his daughter’s memorial revealed to me an Altar of Provision of how God provides.

Results: Research Objective #4 (Meeting with Long-term members)

On September 13, 2018 the researcher met with the long-term members and gave them each an outline for the meeting, which included a brief outline ending with the three questions (See Appendix 2). The meeting was video recorded. It began at 2:30pm and ended at 3:18pm. Meeting notes are included in Appendix 4.
Question #1) Memorials are important to the church to remember the faithfulness of others. As you review the listing of memorials that you have identified, identify three memorials and share how each memorial impacted you in your journey of faith as a member of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.

Both long-term members were in agreement in naming their top two memorials, which were part of the five presentations.

Memorial #2 Bethel Bell

The long-term members have fond memories of the coming together of the two churches in 1970. In just one Sunday, the congregation doubled in size. The Rev. Ron Overcash has memories of that glorious season in the church as he was the Pastor of Mount Pisgah from 1969-1975. When the Bethel merger occurred, the Bethel bell was stored at the home of John Wilson. He felt the bell needed a home, and Henry Maiden, with the church leaders, found a permanent home on the front steps of the Administrative Office entrance in July of 1977 under the leadership of Rev. Herb Penry.

Memorial #1 Stained Glass Window & Memorial #5

The excitement in the voice of the long-term member in the testimony of the stained glass windows was contagious. At the end of 2003, the Trustees made the decision to have stained glass windows put in the sanctuary, in the foyer, and in a side entrance. The announcement was made on Sunday, and within twenty four hours all the regular windows were gone. There was a tremendous spirit due to the money raised and how the membership responded in purchasing the stained glass windows to tell the story of faith.
Third Choice of Memorials (Long-term members)

Both of the long-term members had a different third choice. One chose the Penry Wing, which is used for educational purposes in the church. The rationale for this choice was in how bad the church needed the space and it also remembered a beloved Pastor, Herb Penry, who died suddenly while serving at Mount Pisgah in 1983. Herb was legendary in creating several ministries still in existence today.

The other long-term member chose Memorial #3 in the Marie Holman Library. Their rationale was that they wanted to memorialize the faith and dedication of Marie, a woman of God. Her legacy in living for the Lord lives on today in many dedicated members.

Question #2) How can we better engage Mount Pisgah members with our existing memorials?

The long-term members were enthusiastic in their participation in this research project. The researcher stated the research question, “How can members of the congregation know and appreciate memorials as a provision of God if no interpreter is present?” The long-term members knew the memorials well because they were personal. They were the interpreters who needed little prompting to share the story, but they had not thought beyond being an interpreter of the memorials.

They felt it was necessary to educate the membership on the church memorials. They gave the ideas of sermons focusing on the memorials, scrapbooks, video presentations, and pamphlets for the membership to be part of the shared history of the church.

Question #3) Any specific recommendations that you can add to this study, based on your long-term Mount Pisgah membership?
Both were concerned that the legacy of memorial stories would be forgotten in time. The concept of having memorial interpreters was noted but with no particular parameters on implementation. They discussed having the Trustees enact policies for implementation of new memorials and what actually qualifies as a memorial.

When the interpreter engaged them in some spiritual markers coming up in 2020, it heightened their excitement. 2020 will hold five huge spiritual markers in the life of Mount Pisgah. They are:

a. 50 - year union between Bethel and Mouth Pisgah
b. 45 - year celebration of Whobodies (Youth Group)

   c. 40 - year celebration of Ernestine Penry Scholarship
d. 30 - year celebration of Pumpkin Patch
e. New two million dollar fellowship hall dedication

These five spiritual markers happening in 2020 will be the catalyst to maximize celebration of our rich history in the life of the church. The long-term members said they think these markers should be celebrated, but we should also be strategic in promoting the history and current memorials found at Mount Pisgah as a provision of God.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapter 1 gave the framework for the context of the research at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church where my eighteen participants in the project study were active members. The church is an amazing testimony of the provision of God since its founding in 1845. The researcher is the Senior Pastor and has been blessed to hear of the rich history that fills the halls, sanctuary, and fellowship hall of this historic church on the corner of a major thoroughfare in Greensboro, North Carolina. As the congregation is aging, with over 150 members aged eighty and above and several long-time staff close to retirement, the church history is at risk of being lost. The research question was, “Will people remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial regularly with an interpreter present?”

Chapter Two gave the framework for the research literature in how God provides a provision in our lives with actual memorials, but the researcher came up empty handed. There was extensive research in memorials, such as statues found inside and outside the church. Catholic authors wrote how statues draw people to Saints of the past. The researcher was not writing about statues but concentrated on memorials given in honor or memory of someone as a provision of God. Churches that have a longer history are often filled with a huge assortment of memorials given on behalf of loved ones. Mount Pisgah easily has over fifty memorials that have been given over the years. Some are now forgotten and others are near extinct with the next generation.

The best literature found regarding the provision of God throughout our lives is the Bible. The writings ebb and flow from Genesis through Revelation to remind humanity that we are never alone nor far from returning to God. The key motif the researcher concentrated on throughout the Bible was the altars of Abraham. Author R. Dawes Lesmahagow wrote that
Abraham had four primary altars. These altars marked the call of Abraham to go and be the light in a pagan land for God. The four peaks were the Altars of Praise, Prayer, Peace, and Provision. The researcher saw a clear link between altars and the five memorials interpreted to the participants:

A. Memorial #1 Stained Glass Window: Altar of Praise
B. Memorial #2 Bethel Bell: Altar of Peace
C. Memorial #3 Marie Holman Library: Altar of Provision
D. Memorial #4 Bible Holder: Altar of Prayer
E. Memorial #5 Kitchen & Stained Glass Window: Altar of Provision

In Chapter Three, the researcher used Creswell’s procedure for conducting Phenomenological Research. This provided the researcher a well-thought-out plan to interpret the data collected. The research question, “Will people remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial regularly with an interpreter present?” was the driving principal in the collection and analysis of data. The research began with two long-term members whose combined church membership totaled nearly one hundred years. They were asked to name, within a certain time period (thirty minutes), the church memorials that they were aware of on the church property. The long-term members worked independently making a list, and the researcher comprised a list of five memorials on which to teach during five Wednesday evenings from 5:15-5:30pm beginning in January 2019. This teaching involved answering four key questions: When was the memorial given? Why (Provision of God)? Where is it located? Who provided the memorial?

In Chapter Four, the interpreter analyzed the data from the process of the Creswell Research with all participants taking a pre-test and post-test. This allowed the researcher to
interpret what the participants learned and understood, which resulted in three themes of focus. These themes were Awareness, Engagement, and Teachable Moments. Interpreting the data collected into these key themes solidified answering the research question.

The Awareness component of the data revealed three key findings from the pre-test to the post-test in the eighteen participants who started and completed the treatment.

A. The longer the church membership, the more memorials become personal. Out of the 18 participants, 11 of them were members for more than 10 years.

B. The post-test revealed 12 of the 18 participants grew incrementally (from the pre-test) in awareness of the recognition and understanding of a memorial they did not see previously.

C. Becoming a new member has the potential to heighten awareness in the memorials being a provision of God, which introduces them into the shared history of the church.

The Engagement component of the data revealed three findings from the pre-test to the post-test.

A. All 18 participants attended four of the five sessions, which resulted in an increase in their knowledge and understanding of the role memorials play in the life of the church and in being a provision of God.

B. All 18 participants made the connection between the memorials being a provision of God from pre-test to post-test.

C. Only half of the participants made comments after taking the pre-test. When taking the post-test, 17 of the 18 participants made comments about the memorials.

The Teachable Moments are the culmination of the research. The researcher saw five sub-themes in answering the questions that has driven the researcher to look further and now interpret the data collected.
First, memorials located around the church have the ability to assimilate the congregation into a shared history. History matters to the life of the church. If congregants don’t know or understand the history of the church they attend, it is impossible to be acclimated into the church. It would be equivalent to being an American citizen but having no clue about our democratic process, the history of the American Revolution and Civil Wars, or the founding principles that led to the writing of the Constitution.

Second, memorials are great teaching tools in the life of the church. Memorials must be taught in effective ways that members can understand. One example is the stained glass windows in the sanctuary that depict the story of Jesus, beginning with his birth. A theme in the Old Testament is a call to remember. Memorials allow congregants to learn and remember the stories of the faith—faith that is often lived out in the lives of the people for whom the memorial was given.

Third, a memorial, when given for or in memory of loved ones, leaves a legacy. It is the gift that keeps on giving long after a person is gone to glory. Founder of World Help Vernon Brewer’s mission in life is to “do one thing every day that will outlive him.” Memorials leave legacies when they bless others or illustrate a high standard to follow. One legacy memorial was the life lived by Marie Holman.

Fourth, emphasis should be on God and not the giver of the memorial. Memorials within the life of Mount Pisgah should be given and received as provisions of God. If the memorial does not focus on God, the church should not accept the memorial. There should be clear guidelines for the creation and acceptance of memorials within the church.

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88 https://worldhelp.net/.
Fifth, when a memorial is adequately explained, participants are able to be knowledgeable and see the memorial as a provision of God. The research supports this in the differences between the pre-test and post-test results. Memorials are rarely recognized or seen as a provision of God if no interpreter is present. In Abraham’s altars, the formation of rocks was not random but prayerfully crafted. It was a sacred formation and a provision of God. The altars were significant in Abraham’s time because a witness was present to tell about the provision of God, which made all the difference. This is a direct correlation between the altars of Abraham and the memorials that fill the life of the church.

The meeting with the two long-term members in person (with video recording) gave the researcher pure joy. The love of Mount Pisgah and the accomplishments of the past were felt in their voices. The researcher reviewed the whole process that initially began with the naming of the memorials they identified. The researcher revealed to them the five memorials that were presented on five different Wednesday nights. The long-term members were told that the 18 participants were given a pre-test and post-test. The results were explained to them, and I asked for feedback. When asked about the three memorials that impacted them the most, both agreed on two memorials: stained glass windows and the Bethel Bell. For the third memorial, one long-term member chose the Penry Wing as the third memorial of significance. The other long-term member chose the Marie Holman Library.

The long-term members expressed their desire that the memorials not be forgotten. They knew the sacrifice and love of previous generations should be taught to the next generation in order that the next generation could be part of the shared history of the church. With no current memorial definitions, nor guidelines and standards for memorials for the church, there is an opportunity for the current Trustees of Mount Pisgah to provide memorial clarification to the
church’s members. The long-term members provided helpful suggestions for how to raise up interpreters to explain the memorials. The researcher could hear in the tone of their voices a need to begin passing the baton to the next generation to tell the story of the provision of God among the people of Mount Pisgah.

**Conclusions**

1. Memorials have an impact on an understanding of the provision of God because they are found throughout churches as a way to remember their loved ones. The church is a generational house of God. The church is built on the generation that goes before them. The long-term members give the church continuity, yearly resources, and an abundant supply of volunteers to do ministry. The memorials become the shared history of the church.

2. The role of interpreter is foundational in being able to explain and sustain the purpose and intention of the memorial. If no explanation or interpreter is visible or present, the memorial loses its ability to be understood as a provision of God.

3. The Bible served as the foundation for this research thesis. The related memorial literature was limited. Since no other research studies were found by way of church memorials given as a provision of God, the researcher felt like a pioneer. Contemporary literature deals little with memorials because writers are often pastors of growing non-denominational churches that are well established and have little memorials. However, the vast majority of churches that are long established are filled with memorials.

4. Viewing the Bible through the lens of God’s provision from Genesis through Revelation is foundational to understanding memorials. The purpose of memorials is to point the
participant to the provision of God. The progression that began with the rainbow, then the altars, then the stones, then the tabernacles, then the temple, to the house church, and now the present day church memorial reveals a progression of God seeking to redeem and restore a broken humanity.

5. Opportunities exist for church governance of memorials, including both a clarified definition and basic standards. Part of the basic standards would include a guideline to define a memorial being a provision of God. This framework will keep the memorial focused on God.

**Future Research**

This study’s methodology could benefit other churches in their pursuit and understanding of memorials as a provision of God. It would be a good idea to develop guidelines to govern and interpret existing memorials and train interpreters. It would be beneficial to explore the impact of memorials on new congregants who wish to become part of the shared history of their church. A healthy church should testify to the provision of God in the past among the lives of the people. Church memorials that are already in place are an easy connection point.

**Implications**

The research study results provide next foundational steps for Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church, beginning in January 2020. A strategic plan for 2020-2021 provides an opportunity to include the following: The year 2020 will be referred to the “Year of Jubilee” in Mount Pisgah, which will celebrate seven major spiritual markers interpreting the memorials of the past. This will include putting time, resources, and congregants to effectively devise a
strategic plan. The plan will include to recall and interpret some of the specific memorials that are closely related to this era of the church at each celebration. For example, a focus on church unity with Bethel will include the story of the Bethel Bell.

**What did the researcher learn from implementing the project?**

This project elevated my understanding of memorials in the church. Meeting in the five different sessions, it became obvious that when memorials are personalized, they are effective. This was evident when the long-term members knew the backstory of the memorials. It created a sacred moment of remembrance and recognition when the people recalled a memorial as a provision of God.

This project gave me insight into how new members become a part of the shared history of the church they attend; it is necessary to know the history of the church. Since “a picture tells thousand words,” memorials throughout a church, if strategically placed and interpreted, allow a member to capture the provision of God. A healthy church is generational with all ages at the table.

The project expanded my vision into 2020 being a “Year of Jubilee,” celebrating numerous spiritual markers at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church. During each of these six celebrations, I will use the setting to tell the history and use the memorials found throughout the church to do so.

Finally, this project revealed that God’s timing is best. The researcher began working on the Doctor of Ministry in the year 2000 at Erskine Theological Seminary. Through the prodding of the Holy Spirit and perseverance, in the year 2019, the end is now in sight. Waiting all these
years has given me a hunger to teach that the provision of God is all around us, if only we are willing to look for it.
Appendices

Appendix #1  
Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church  
Research Study: PRE-TEST & POST-TEST  
January 2019

Participant # ______________  
The purpose of this study is to use our church’s memorials to illustrate memorials found in Scripture and how they can be used as teachable moments to rehearse God’s provision throughout our church’s history. This research study is being held at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.

Answer each of the following questions in the space provided.  
1. List the memorials within Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church that remind you of the past.

2. Select 3 of the memorials that you listed in question #1 and describe how each memorial reminds you of God’s provision for our church or the church universal.

3. List any additional questions/thoughts/comments that you have about a church memorial.

Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church  
Research Study: POST-TEST  
March 2019

Participant # ______________  
The purpose of this study is to use our church’s memorials to illustrate memorials found in Scripture and how they can be used as teachable moments to rehearse God’s provision throughout our church’s history. This research study is being held at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.

Answer each of the following questions in the space provided.  
1. List the memorials within Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church that remind you of the past.

2. Select 3 of the memorials that you listed in question #1 and describe how each memorial reminds you of God’s provision for our church or the church universal.

3. List any additional questions/thoughts/comments that you have about a church memorial.
Appendix #2
Interview Review Questions IRB
35+ plus year Members

Memorials are important to the church to remember the faithfulness of others. As you review the listing of memorials that you have identified, identify three (3) memorials and share how each memorial impacted you in your journey of faith as a member of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church. Interpreter (researcher) shares brief results of the study...then prompts for responses to the following questions:

1) How can we better engage Mount Pisgah members with our existing memorials? Prompt for inclusion in sermons, written/printed/web-based information/results from the study; or other.

2) Any specific recommendations that you can add to this study, based on your long-term Mount Pisgah membership (prompt for impact on Provision of God).

3) From what you have learned about this research, are there any policies concerning memorials that Mount Pisgah UMC should enact?
CONSENT FORM
The Provision of God in Our Lives: Examining the Impact of Church Memorials
Jeff Johnsen
Liberty University
Rawlings School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study held at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church on the impact of church memorials. The purpose of this study is to use our church’s memorials to illustrate memorials found in Scripture and how they can be used as teachable moments to rehearse God’s provision throughout our church’s history. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older and you are a church member. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Jeff Johnsen, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to use our church’s memorials to illustrate memorials found in Scripture and how they can be used as teachable moments to rehearse God’s provision throughout our church’s history. The thesis statement is that people will better remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial regularly when an interpreter is present.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Attend a meeting held on a Wednesday evening at 5:15 pm for 15 minutes and take a pre-test.
2. Attend the second-fifth meetings on consecutive Wednesdays at 5:15pm for 15 minutes. At these meetings, you will be shown a memorial on the church property at Mount Pisgah UMC and be given an explanation as to who donated the memorial and whom it was given on behalf of.
3. Attend a sixth meeting on the following Wednesday at 5:15 pm for 15 minutes and then take a post-test.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants may receive a direct benefit of an increase in awareness and knowledge of church memorials.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other
researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym to conceal their identities.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Jeff Johnsen. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at jeff@mtpisgahgso.com. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty chair, Dr. Steve Lowe, at slowe9@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

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<th>Signature of Participant</th>
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Appendix #4
Meeting with Long-Term Members
Research Objective (RO) #4

1) Purpose of Study
This study is to use our church’s memorials to illustrate memorials found in Scripture and how they can be used as teachable moments to rehearse God’s provision throughout Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church’s history. The congregation will remember the provision of God in their lives when engaging a memorial when an interpreter is present. The research question is “How can members of the congregation know and appreciate memorials as a provision of God if no interpreter is present?”

2) Biblical readings: Focus on Altars and importance of topic
   An Altar of Praise: Stained Glass Window
   An Altar of Prayer: Bible Holder
   An Altar of Peace: Bethel Bell
   An Altar of Provision: Marie Holman Library; Kitchen and Stained Glass

3) No empirical research conducted on this topic. Yet there is agreement of the importance of this topic (to the discipline) as well as interest from the participants re: topic (and also sharing results).

4) Results: RO #1. Share table of their collective listing of MPUMC Memorials

5) Results: RO #2 and #3
   a. 18 participants; new members (seven up to nine years) to life-long (11 from 10 years and beyond)
   b. Shared 5 memorials from the long-term member listing (indicate which memorials)
   c. Share results found

Awareness
   a. The longer the church membership, the more memorials become personal.
   b. The post-test revealed 12 of the 18 participants grew from the pre-test in awareness of the recognition and understanding of a memorial, which they previously did not see before.
   c. Becoming a new member has the potential to heighten awareness in the memorials being a provision of God, which introduces them into the shared history of the church.

Engagement
   a. All 18 participants attended four of the five sessions, which resulted in their knowledge and understanding in the role memorials play in the life of the church and in being a provision of God.
   b. All 18 participants made the connection from naming three memorials to being a provision of God from the pre-test to the post-test.
c. Only half (9) of the participants had comments after taking the pre-test. When taking the post-test, 17 of the 18 participants made comments.

Teachable Moments
a. Assimilate the congregation into a shared history
b. Great teaching tool in the life of the church
c. Leaves a legacy
d. Emphasis on God and not on the giver
e. When a memorial is adequately explained, a participant is able to be knowledgeable and make connections to it being a provision of God.

6) Response to results (RO #4) AND assimilation -
a. Memorials are important to the church to remember the faithfulness of others. As you review the listing of memorials you have identified, identify three (3) memorials and share how each memorial impacted you in your journey of faith as a member of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church.

Interpreter (researcher) shares brief results of the study...then prompts for responses to the following questions:
b. How can we better engage Mount Pisgah members with our existing memorials? Prompt for inclusion in sermons, written/printed/web-based information/results from the study; or other.
c. Any specific recommendations you can add to this study, based on your long-term Mount Pisgah membership (prompt for impact on Provision of God).

7) Share timeline to completion of your study (October 15 submission, with defense November 2019; graduation 2020).
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