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"O Man, Remember, and Perish Not" (Mosiah 4:30)

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“O MAN, REMEMBER, AND PERISH NOT” (Mosiah 4:30)

Mosiah 2:41 “O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.”

The Book of Mormon constantly reminds its readers to remember. Nephi concluded his account of Lehi’s prophecies by saying, “Therefore *remember*, O man, for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment” (1 Nephi 10:20). King Benjamin punctuated his covenantal speech with the plea, “O *remember, remember* that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41). Jesus himself placed the Nephites in Bountiful under covenant to “always remember” him and to keep the commandments that he had given them (3 Nephi 18:7, 11; Moroni 4–5).

From numerous statements like these, it is evident that “remembering” is a saving principle of the gospel. Just as faith looks forward in Christ to actualize the present power of his redemption, so remembrance looks back on covenants and gifts from God and keeps the past alive.

Several recent scholarly studies have analyzed the meanings of remembrance in the Bible, and some of this research can help us appreciate the important meanings of remembrance in the Book of Mormon. By placing emphasis on the concept of “remembering,” the Book of Mormon significantly captures one of the most distinctive aspects of Israelite mentality.

Brevard S. Childs has shown that various forms of the Hebrew verb *zakhor* (to remember) occur in the Old Testament well over two hundred times. He shows that what the Old Testament understands by “memory” goes well beyond the mere mental

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recall of information, though of course that is part of its meaning. To remember often means to be attentive, to consider, to keep divine commandments, or to act.¹ The word in Hebrew thus carries a wider range of meaning than is common with the verb *remember* in English. Indeed, to remember involves turning to God, or repenting, or acting in accordance with divine injunctions.²

Not only man, but also God “remembers.” He remembers covenants he has made with Noah (see Genesis 9:15–16), with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Exodus 2:24; Leviticus 26:42), and with all of Israel (see Ezekiel 16:60; Luke 1:72).

Conversely, the antonym of the verb *to remember* in Hebrew – *to forget* – does not merely describe the passing of a thought from the mind, but involves a failure to act, or a failure to do or keep something. Hence, failing to remember God and his commandments is the equivalent of apostasy.

Interestingly, words for memory and remembrance also occur well over two hundred times in the Book of Mormon. This high density is not noticed by casual readers, but it vividly reflects a religious sensitivity on the part of Book of Mormon prophets that is similar to that of other Israelite prophets. Though the range of uses of remembering in the Book of Mormon is perhaps not quite as extensive as that identifiable in the Old Testament, the idiom of remembrance in both books includes warnings, promises, threats, pleas, and complaints, and the same deep connection between memory and action can be found in both. To remember is to hearken (see, e.g., Jacob 3:9–11), to awaken, to see, to hear, to believe, to trust.

One remembers only through a faithful response to the terms of the covenant. But rebellious Israel has always been “quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God; therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him” (Mosiah 13:29–30).

It is therefore common to find remembering linked to the

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demand to “keep his commandments” (see, e.g., 1 Nephi 15:25; Mosiah 2:41; 4:30; Alma 7:16; 9:13–14; 18:10; 36:1–2; 46:23; 58:40; compare Numbers 15:39–40; Psalms 103:18). For example, King Lamoni praised Ammon, “For even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them” (Alma 18:10). Likewise, Alma constructs an elegant parallelism based upon this linkage:

O, remember, my son,
and learn wisdom in thy youth;
yea, learn in thy youth
to keep the commandments of God.
(Alma 37:35)

In such ways the Book of Mormon shows a clear link between the ways of remembrance or forgetfulness and the blessings or cursings associated with the covenant people of God. Since one of the main purposes of the Book of Mormon, as stated on its Title Page, is to show that God remembers the covenants he has made with his people (see also 1 Nephi 19:15–16; 2 Nephi 29:1–2; 3 Nephi 16:11), it is especially appropriate that the renewal of covenants includes a commitment to “always remember him, and keep his commandments,” as the faithful affirm their willingness to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ (Moroni 4:3).

Based on research by Louis C. Midgley, March 1990. A fuller treatment of this topic by Midgley can now be found as “The Ways of Remembrance,” in John Sorenson and Melvin Thorne, eds., Rediscovering the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 168–76.

Notes

1. *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM, 1962), 9–10, 50–54.
2. See also Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).