

Autobiography, Memoir and Memory in the Bible

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[0 : 00] Well, just to put you all at some rest, I have, when Bill has said I'm not too well, I've got a problem in my right leg that occurred after flying back from Ottawa a few weeks ago.

I think it must be part of becoming a senior, but it turned into phlebitis, and it turned into a clot, and so I have to go into the hospital every day and get blood thinners.

Apparently these blood thinners are the same medicine they give, or the same poison they give to rats. To kill them off, the rats love it and it makes them bleed internally, and that's it for the rats.

So they have to watch humans very closely when they give this medicine, and not too much, but enough to dissolve the clot. So that's what it is. But I'm feeling okay this morning.

Now, the title of the address, Autobiography, Memoir, and Memory in the Bible, This comes from a project that I directed back in the 1980s and early 90s.

[1 : 19] I was the director of the Political Memoirs Project, as it was called, at the University of British Columbia. I was chair of the Political Memoirs Conference, as we brought in some 20 academics from all over the world, in Canada, at the end in September of 1989, and then we published a symposium, which I brought here.

We did this in the early 1990s, Political Memoir Essays on the Politics of Memory. That got me going on memory. In this symposium we have those that are studying specific, very prominent memoirists, like for instance, Clarendon, Bismarck, Churchill. I did a study of Lloyd George as a political memoirist from the First World War era.

But I was the one as the editor and director of all these things. By the way, these are all self-appointed positions. They all tolerated me. But we looked at the history of this very specific genre of historical writing.

Autobiography and memoir, very similar. Memoir we usually use to deal with autobiographies that focus on the careers and the political careers of those that have made your political leadership then.

Looking at this strange and problematic genre, and yet very important genre, because one of the key findings, indeed it was the thing that inspired us to go into this study, was that of all the genre of historical writings, memoir and biography are by far and away the most popular. And so people consume, absorb, read their history, and digest and, I guess, generate major lessons of history, their knowledge and memory of politics and political processes, not from the worthy and scholarly and rather abstract, specialized study of professional historians, but rather often and most regularly from those that have exercised major power.

[4 : 08] And so we have virtually every leader of a major country, and many wider countries too, if they live into retirement, they will have contracted with major publishers to produce, I wouldn't say write their memoirs, they have ghosts doing this for them for the most part, but produce their memoirs and they, in many instances, become best sellers, or perhaps more accurately, fast sellers. They don't last long, they hit the markets, and as you know, Mr. Moody and Mr. Kretchen had both hit the markets at the same time, and I'm sure getting very lucrative advances for all of this, but they both run into a lot of problems.

They were hoping they could sell and promote their story, their apologia, vindicate themselves, Greek vengeance on their enemies, the usual stuff in memoirs, tell the story, tell the story, and then of course poor Kretchen had to have bypass surgery and couldn't go on his book promotion tour.

Must have been a better result for him. And then Mulroney has run into the element, let us say, of forgetfulness. So, yeah, in the memoirs, he had some time to talk before he got into the deep doo-doo that he's in now.

Oh, wait for the second book, that's where I'll deal with this, but I'm not sure a second book is going to come out, at least for him, on what the sequel to 1993 was with Mr. Schreiber.

Just to what our interest in this and appetite in this, I'm going to speak briefly about the Political Memoirs Project, then I'm going to get to the series stuff here later on, because there is a transition.

[6 : 11] I guess what I'm saying is that in doing the study on memoir, in reading the Bible, and in particularly reading Old Testament parts of the Bible, I was struck with something that wasn't out in the academic literature in terms of those that have studied the literary history of autobiography.

They almost completely overlook, neglect, ignore the Jewish scriptures. I was struck with reading the Old Testament and how so much of this writing is put forward in the form of a personal narrative.

In, of course, this is the first and so I'll get to that in just a minute, but let me throw out a question to start with. Could anybody tell me who has written the best-sell in Canadian memoir?

My wife knows this so she can't answer. Pierre Burton. Pierre Burton. Pierre Burton, no, close. In terms of authorship, he's certainly right at the top of contemporary nonfiction authors.

He's an England? Sorry? He's an England? No. Nobody's going to get this. It's Margaret Trudeau, Beyond Reason and then Consequences.

[7 : 41] That book sold like wildfire and it was translated into most of the major world languages, German, Italian, Spanish and others.

Poor Margaret didn't get the money that she contracted for because her publisher would belly up before she got it and so she had to write a sequel. Consequences. But that's the case.

It's an interesting case. Believe me, it's worth reading. It's a very interesting insight into the relationship with Trudeau and the, let us say, the ethos of the 1960s and 70s, those years that we try to remember.

Who's the best-selling American presidents all, of course, as they've survived write memoirs. But who has earned more than anybody else in terms of American political memoirs then?

Again, you won't get this, but anybody who has nine years. See, this is Grant, who wrote his memoirs of the Civil War. And these are, are, are classic.

[8 : 55] They are within that very small band of great memoirs. A great surprise because Grant, of course, was a military man, a general not known for literary things, but he honed his skill in narrative as he gave battle reports and wrote with clarity and precision and, and when it came to write the memoirs.

He had to write the memoirs because his family, his son had been involved in a financial scandal, and they lost the family fortune by the 1880s after his presidency and the rest of it.

And he had to recoup this and provide for his widow and everything else. He knew he was dying. He had throat cancer and he went to work with some help, but writing most of it himself.

The help that he got, however, was very good. It was Mark Twain. I had a student who did a study of all of this, and we're still trying to figure out how much Mark Twain contributed to the Ulysses Grant memoirs on the license substantially, but Twain was very careful for cover of his tracks and make sure that it was Grant who was getting the glory of all of this, but Sam Clements then, Mark Clements, Pennington Clements, was very careful in marketing and promoting these memoirs in the mid-1980s, just as modern markets for mass literature were being invented at that time.

That's the great newspapers, you know, mass literacy and everything else. So Twain, if you translate what he got in his advances from the mid-1880s to the 21st century, it's up.

[10 : 42] I think around \$15-\$17 million that keeps expanding as inflation continues. Whereas the poor Clintons only got, well, he got approximately \$10 million in advances for his memoirs.

Let me ask one last question before we get more deeply into all of this. If you could think of cultures memorializing their leaders, what culture in history would have the most impressive and enduring record of, you know, memorializing leaders?

They were British. No, too bad. They were very good. But in terms of memoirs, I'd say the British and the modern period are the most memoirish.

Well, it transfers you out of the realm of text to memorialization and it's the pyramids. You know, here is a memorial to the pharaohs which has endured and will endure as long as there is terrain left on this planet with those grand pyramids saying to everybody, remember me.

And so, nobody's done any better than that. But what I would say, it's one thing to remember, to say remember me because of this monument and of course monumentalization is ubiquitous in cultures.

[12 : 21] But it's another thing to say remember me. Why? Remember me in what ways? For what? For what?

And that is where we get into text. And to write it out, to write out the story. Now the pharaohs did this or had this done for them to some minor degree if you go into the hieroglyphics on the walls inside the tubes and we can learn a fair amount about the great pharaohs then.

But nothing like what we can learn about those in the Bible who have left a textual, a textual legacy which of course becomes canonized over time.

Where the specifics and the dramas, the narratives are extensive and detailed and highly personalized. And this of course is a great transformation in the history between cultures when writing is invented and spread and culturalized then.

And this is what I'm starting with and this is in a sense, this is what I'm going to say today. The thesis I'm putting forward here as we'll go and look at some of the elements relating to this in the Bible.

[13 : 49] The thesis is that memory is central to the individual and collective lives of Jews and Christians. More so I think than any other of the world, our religions.

We are commanded as Christians to remember God and his covenants. Covenantal elements are central to memory in the Jewish faith and the new covenant that Christ has written in our hearts that we learn about in the New Testament and through everything the church has taught us.

So we are commanded to remember God and his covenants. God also constantly assures us that he remembers us. And that is unique in all of our religions.

He remembers us, will never forget us. This mutuality of memory is central to our religion, our worship and our salvation.

Well, okay. Now, I have spelled out some of the principal findings of the Political Memoirs project.

[15 : 07] I don't have too much time today. But before I transition, I think, to the serious stuff, let's have a little bit more fun here. What did we find in the Political Memoirs project?

If you're interested in all of this, it's written up in this book. And I brought another book along here too that I found very, very helpful that my wife, Manya, suggested to me. It's a very moving book.

It is by a writer. I think he's a doctor. No, it's his name. He's his name. He's his name. Okay.

Even better then. It's a study, Forgetting Who's We Are, Alzheimer's Disease and the Love of God.

His mother had Alzheimer's and reflecting on this in scripture and in the context of church teachings and traditions and ways of truth.

[16 : 09] how, when memory is dissolved, we attempt to recreate, restore memory and how, when this is impossible, that we cannot remember, God still remembers us.

And that's the central theme here. But he goes into great and I think very helpful detail on how memory is conveyed, how important it is, how God remembers us, how we must remember God and his covenants, how this is written up through the Old Testament, which says much more about memory really than the New Testament.

New Testament, of course, it's still central there. It's just that Jesus is there, God with us. And it's only the next generation as Paul faces it and the epistles write it up and then as the gospels are put together, that fixing the memory and keeping it truthful becomes absolutely important.

But I do recommend this book by David Keck. I found it very helpful and it seems to be a real old disaster. I had done most of my stinking on this topic and I think we've reached very similar types of conclusions.

But he's obviously spent a lot more time on this than I have. But coming back briefly to the political memoirs project then, what are some of the principal findings? I just got to very briefly sketch out a handful of these and then we'll move on to the memory in the Bible.

[17 : 49] First, ubiquity. All modern cultures, the leadership in modern cultures, wants to write memoirs.

They want to earn the money even more. They want to, as Kutchen and Maumurni want to do, they want to have their legacy fixed by their own hand, as it were, and remembered forever.

They won't get this, but that's what they rather pitifully try to do in memoirs. Memoirs and biography constitute, I thought, the most popular genre of historical sales and reading.

They are always on the, if you look at the New York Times bestseller non-fiction list, there's always one or two or even more autobiographies and political memoirs.

Political memoirs were the principal genre of historical writing through much of history, and particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries, which are the great age of memoir writing.

[19 : 01] This was the most respected and important type of historical writing. The theory was that those who had, and the metaphor they used was, had been able to see, or indeed themselves, were the inner springs of governmental power.

There was a mechanical metaphor for all of this. They were the only ones who could rightfully tell the story about how history and politics unfold.

And so the great age of memoirs, particularly in France, of Richelieu, Sully, Saint-Simon, in England of Clarence, and I just mentioned a handful, and there are others that are very, very important from that time.

But then, in the late 18th century and early 19th century, the rise of Enlightenment, quote, scientific history, and then professional historians, this tends to kill off the age of the political memoirists.

As it is argued, and convincingly, certainly at the time and right through into the modern period, now John just from the postmodernists, it's argued that it is the objective, the historian, using the methodologies of historical research, objective, fair, balanced, professional.

[20 : 39] So this is where the writing of history, the best history, rightfully resides. And so the memoirists have to take second place.

The historians do not like memoirists, and that is very much, and this is one of our findings in the memoirs project there, they don't like personal narratives. You know, how can these old hacks, how can old Rudy tell his story, tell the story of the Canadian government with any kind of objectivity?

I mean, it's a contradiction in terms almost. And so the biases of personal narrative are something, the subjectivities of personal narrative are something that professional historians tend to be very critical of and dismissive.

We certainly found that, as we looked at how professional historians either ignored or very negatively critiqued, reviewed political memoirs.

They distrust it. Another thing might well mean that they envy it, because whereas our books, with very limited academic readership, the politicians, when they write their memoirs, make massive contracts and get everybody to read it.

[22 : 00] So there's some kind of envy in all of this as well. We found also that memoirs are generated in the wake of major happens. You know, the Chinese have lived in interesting times.

So interesting times generate memoirs. Wars, revolution are followed by a wave of political memoirs from the surviving generals and the leadership from that.

I did a study for the memoirs project of the percentage of British cabinet ministers who wrote and published memoirs.

And it's interesting to follow the wave after the First World War, then it subsides for a while, then after the Second World War. But generally, the graph showed a trend up, much higher percentages right to the modern period, where a very high percentage, more than half of the Catholic ministers, sometimes 60%, 70%, in Britain was, in this case, will write and publish memoirs.

Why are memoirs so popular? Well, this impinges on what I'm going to be saying here. Why is it that this genre has such immediate appeal and enduring appeal to readers?

[23 : 22] And here, I don't think the answers are very difficult, although you can make them very theoretical and complex, but it is the personal, personalized identification of reader and writer here, reader and memoirist, that has much more immediate and simple appeal than the much more abstract formulas and forms of professional historiography.

Now, professional historians want to, you know, deal with circumstances as well as events. And events only partly as the result of personal leadership then.

And indeed, historians differ among themselves as to the interaction between, as one of our great Canadian historians, Donald Creighton said, the history of the interaction of character and circumstance.

How much is character? How much is truth? How much is circumstance? How much is the massive sociological and economic changes of the 1960s and 70s in Canada?

But the popularity of memoir is that it offers you a narrative, a personalized narrative line, which is almost organizes itself around the leader.

[24 : 50] And we can understand this as we, in a sense, replicate the thoughts and the motives and the behavior and actions of the leader.

It's simple. And it's a wonderful organizing device. And I think this is at the heart of the popularity of memoirs in replicating the human memory.

Now, when the memoirist happens to be, as it turns out, in very few cases, but happens to be a great writer and a great stylist, when memoir becomes truly a high literature, this is an irresistible combination.

And so we've got a few likeness. Churchill is the memoirist, you know, par excellence in the 20th century.

You've got something absolutely done there. I mean, the impact that Churchill has made in understanding and remembering the Second World War is absolutely massive.

[25 : 58] There's a book that's been written on all of this by Lang Lang. He wasn't in our memoirist project, unfortunately, he's at Cambridge now, but it's a study of how Churchill made history.

And one of the very, just to say this, one of the very first things that Churchill did in the dark days of 1940, when he became prime minister in desperate circumstances, he wasn't thinking about how he would be going to defeat Hitler right away as he came into number 10 down.

He made arrangements for his papers, that they would be organized in such a way that the really important things would not be subject to the Official Secrets Act, and stamped with property of his Britannic Majesty's government.

And that was what it was done. And then the Cabinet Secretary always tried to get these papers back when the politicians left office. Now Churchill wanted to, you could do whatever you wanted in terms of copies, but he wanted to keep his personal papers as under his ownership and control, because whatever came out of this war, and, you know, he didn't know what was going to go to the front of the war in 1940, he wanted to be able to write it up.

Now it all turned out well for him, and for Britain, and the Allies, and everything else. But the identification that with leaders, the replication of human memory, and the style of writing is very, very important in how memoirs go beyond simply being fast sellers to being epics, as it were, classics of history.

[27 : 47] And Churchill's studies of the Second World War, the memoirs of the Second World War are epic. Not that they're the whole story by any means, but they are epics in that sense.

Now the great problem with political memoirs that historians rightly identify is the reductionism.

And I've mentioned this already, the dilemma between character and circumstance. Memoirs are character. It is my leadership.

I'm going to defend it. I'm going to vindicate myself. And so the reductionism of history as, and politics as leadership, entertaining though this may be, important though this may be, it is not, of course, the whole story of history, if any, I'm going to write the whole story of history, but it is reductionist in its focus on the role of leadership.

This has a second very important consequence, and that is the consumption, the mass consumption of memoirs and political biographies, and the conceptualization of politics and history as an exercise in leadership.

[29 : 17] This is very, very conservative in its political consequences. It's interesting that it is the elites, the political elites, of course, who write the big blockbuster memoirs.

Very, very seldom in history is a memoir written by revolutionaries. It does happen. Trotsky, of course, wrote a powerful, powerful memoirs.

But generally, if you look at France and the revolution, if you look at the Chinese revolution, the Bolshevik revolution, number one, the radical leaders of these revolutions, particularly Bolsheviks, despised bourgeois historiography.

They knew it was deeply conservative. And Lenin and Stalin and others rigorously attempted to prevent Bolshevik colleagues from writing memoirs or publishing memoirs.

Now, that didn't stop them because they all wanted to have their stories told one way or another, but they had to do it fervently. And after the fall of the Berlin Wall and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the major surprises is how much autobiographical memoir literature was written, but secreted away or how much oral history was done by Molotov and people like that.

[30 : 48] They wanted to have their stories told. But generally, memoir literature serves a conservative function in reinforcing, legitimating leadership.

If things go wrong, and of course, this is what Mulroney, Critchley, and the others all do, the leaders all do. If things go wrong, well, that was somebody else's fault. You believe it on your enemies.

If they go right, you claim this for your own skill, foresight, intelligence, and all the rest of it. And the lesson that's supposed to be drawn from all of this unconsciously is that if things are going wrong, the only way to change them is to change the leaders and not to change the system.

And so you can see the conservative function that underlies memoirs. Okay. The last thing I'll say about the political memoirs project then is that, and I've suggested this already, great memoirs occur very, very suddenly.

There's a handful, a dozen or so of you looked at those that have produced memoir literature of enduring and classic and epic proportions.

[32 : 05] You have to have, in a sense, a conflation of several of the key elements and functions of the genre of memoir. You have to have someone who can write beautifully and poignantly and movingly.

You have to have someone who's been there and participated or, on the other hand, witnessed some of the greatest memoirs, like Saint-Simon and France, are not by the leaders themselves, but they're by the observers at the court.

You have to have seen, witnessed or participated in major events. There has to be an audience for them. One of the key things in an audience generating great memoirs is generational memory.

The generational memory of the Second World War, or Churchill, was absolutely essential. So those elements, when they do come together, very, very seldom translate them, the bestsellers and bestsellers, into enduring literature that can play a canonical role in cultural memory.

Now, let's finally get to where we're at for our session today. I've mentioned how, after and while I was doing this process, and also doing my Bible readings, I kept coming across things that related and came together in some way with the Political Memoirs project too.

[33 : 41] And I've mentioned how the major histories of autobiography, mostly by German philologists in the late 19th century, early 20th century, they wrote wonderful, massive, highly researched studies on these genres.

autobiography. George Georgians is the leaning expert from that period, early 20th century, on the history of autobiography.

But it's the Greeks and the Romans where things get interesting and where they really start. Nothing is said at all about a much earlier Greek, sorry, Jewish literature.

Now this is, I've been told, and I just don't know much about all this, but I've been told that this is part of the anti-Semitism, as it were, of German literature and European literature back in the 19th century.

It just would not occur that the Jews had an earlier and a much more interesting monopoly on this literature in the very early human history than what is discovered by the Greeks and the Romans then in the first centuries, late centuries BC, in all of this.

[35 : 04] So here we have, let's just look at this. So here, this jumped out at me right away when I was reading the Old Testament. The Genesis, Exodus particularly, you know, narrates the story, tells the story of the great events of Jewish captivity, the rise of the Jewish nation.

But here in Deuteronomy, we have reflection and recapitulation, but really reflection on the meaning of all of this as Moses is writing his memoirs.

Here is a political leader. Here is the text attributed to him. Now how much of the text is his? How it was assembled?

What editorial hands went into it would keep scholars going forever and ever? When Moses describes his own death, of course it can't be him at the end of all of this.

So there has to be some hand in all of this. But what you have through Deuteronomy then, in particular, and this, I'm going to use Deuteronomy, we could use the prophets later on as well.

[36 : 21] But we have Moses remembering and textualizing this so it can be read by the culture, by the Jewish people, by generations to come.

But committed absolutely to the importance of memory, remembering God's mighty acts in history, his covenants, his laws, and also assuring, warning, cautioning, assuring that God remembers them.

And this mutuality of memory is central to the Jewish religion, the Jewish culture, to the Jewish people.

Now of course they don't remember. They only sometimes remember. They have to be recalled again and again by the prophets. They forget God.

God never forgets them. But here, these are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness, east of the Jordan.

[37 : 34] That is in the Arab, opposite, between Paran, etc., etc. In the 40th year, they get very specific in all of this then.

On the first day of the 11th month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him concerning them.

This was after he had defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Hezbo, etc., etc. In the east of the Jordan, in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying, The Lord our God said to us at Horeb, you have stayed long enough at this mountain.

Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites. Go to all the neighboring peoples in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev, and along the coast, etc., etc.

I have given you this land. Go and take possession of the land that the Lord swore He would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their descendants after them.

[38 : 42] Now, I've also just clipped out a series of passages from, in the Old Testament, from Deuteronomy, which I will go through all of these, but again and again and again, there is this emphasis on memory, remembering, and the mutuality of this.

The covenant is the central, in the sense of fixed point, in terms of specifying the content of memory.

Let's see if I can find a couple of, all of these are. Okay, here's one I think that's, yes, this one really impressed me when, for the first time many years ago, I came across this passage.

Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, keep all these commands that I give you today. When you have crossed the Jordan into the land the Lord your God has given you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster.

Write on them all the words of this law. When you have crossed over to enter the land the Lord your God is giving you. The land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

[40 : 07] And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebo, as I commanded you today, and coat them with plaster. Build there an altar, etc., etc.

Now, if you go into other parts of the passage here, it is a commandment to do this, to put the text of the covenants on the plaster. And it also specifies, if I remember correctly, that generations after your children and their children will pass these stones, will look on these stones, and they will remember this.

So, here is a way of fixing the memory before you have text to do it in canonical scripture.

I mean, how do cultures intergenerationally convey their most important teachings, values, beliefs? Before we have writing, it is the elders, the tribes, the cultures, that incorporate these lessons in poetry, in song, and they tell the narrative and tell the story.

So, here we see this taking place in other ways, much better ways, ultimately, in the Old Testament. Passover. Now, liturgy, ceremonies, are another way that memory is sustained and maintained.

[41 : 39] I just briefly mention this, but the Passover is, of course, central to the whole Exodus and God's providence. And this is to be remembered and celebrated on a yearly basis.

Festival of weeks, festival of tabernacles. There is this whole series of religious liturgy that serves as a major teaching and memory function in the experience of the Jews.

And Moses is talking about much of this then. Here we have again our Deuteronomy chapter 32. Verse 32. Remember the days of old. Consider the generations long past.

Ask your father and he will tell you. Your elders and they will explain to you. When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance. When he divided up all the human race. He set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.

For the Lord's portion is his people. Jacob his allotted inheritance. And it goes on as they recapitulate the narrative.

[42 : 51] Okay, more in here. Now the Psalms. I've jotted a few of the Psalms down here.

The Psalms are full of much leader in the history of Israel. But the Psalms under the monarchy. Much of it is an exercise in remembrance.

But it goes much deeper into both individual memory as well as collective memory. It also expresses the very, very movingly in many of the Psalms the deep anguish of the individual, of the people.

Will God remember them? Will he remember me? Let's see if we can find a couple of these passages here. Show me your ways, Lord.

Teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth. And teach me. You are God my Savior. And my hope is in you all day long. Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love.

[44 : 05] For they are from old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways. According to your love, remember me. For you, Lord, are good.

So that captures a lot of it. Here is this wonderful cry from Psalm 42. As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night. While people say to me all day long, where is your God?

These things I remember as I pour out my soul. How I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the mighty one. With shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.

So remembering. My soul is downcast within me. Therefore, I will remember you out of anguish, out of depression. The memory of God, which is mutual as he remembers the one in anguish crying and restores.

[45 : 08] This one struck me for those who suffer from insomnia. On my bed I remember you. I think of you through the watches of the night.

Well, I can't read all of these. But here is another side of things when we are not remembering God.

Remember how fleeting is my life. For what futility you have created all humanity. Who can live and not see death? Or who can escape the power of the grave?

And then the song 105, if we have lots of time to revisit all that we don't. Here is a great affirmation of God's remembrance of us.

And why and how we must remember God. As it recapitulates for Jewish readers the history of Israel.

[46 : 08] Well, just ending the Old Testament, I will say a few things about... How are we going to get time here? We could be able to get time soon.

Ten minutes. Ten minutes? Okay. We have in Deuteronomy then, what I am saying is we have in many ways a paradigm of national history that is told through first person narrative.

The grand story, which is just a paradigm for Israel, but for many people who have read the story of Israel. And seeing in that a paradigm of not just Jewish experience, but human experience.

Of exodus in slavery and bondage and God's redemption as he leads his people, of course into the wilderness for 40 years, but into the promised land.

Whatever they do with all of that. This paradigm of crossing Jordan, it's in so many of our heads. If you look at particularly black, gospel, American experience, nothing is more central to what is expressed than exodus.

[47 : 26] Liberation from slavery into a new life, a new promised land of freedom. That is the very thing. So there is a paradigm of this that is put there, told in first person narrative.

Okay. The rest I have already said I am not going to recapitulate about the importance of covenant and how this is there in so much of the literature of the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms.

Now in the New Testament, again very briefly, there is much less about memory in the New Testament, I have suggested, because Jesus is with us as Emmanuel in the New Testament.

It is the generation after the life of Jesus, death and resurrection of Jesus, that has to remember this. And that's when they get very serious. The epistles and then the putting together of the Gospels, so that the memory is textually fixed in all of this.

But with the failure of the Jews to remember God and his covenants, God sends Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, to teach, to redeem.

[48 : 41] The divine logos, the word made flesh, the personification of God's truth. The church founded at Pentecost then is charged with remembering Christ's teaching and proclaiming his gospel of salvation.

They have to remember the teachings and the meaning that Christ himself has placed on his life, death and resurrection. This to me is very, very important as a historian too.

Because historians want to do three things. They want to describe, they want to narrate, they want to tell us what has happened. Then they want to go beyond that and explain. They want to tell us why things have happened.

But then they get into the trickiest of all things, and that is they want to tell us what it means. The interpretation of events, circumstances, and rest in history.

In postmodernity historians are, for the most part, along with other academics, pretty much in despair of interpretation.

[49 : 49] That doesn't stop them, of course. But in reality, you know, to get true interpretation is an exercise, they would argue, in futility and largely an exercise in power as well.

But what God does, and what Jesus does, and what we have recorded in the New Testament is not just a description and a narration, although that is very, very important, of the mighty acts of God and the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We have the explanation given to us. We don't have the fondness. And that is that God raised Jesus from the dead. That is the cause. It's an inexplicable miracle.

Of course, you can try and explain this away with many things that theologians and other ancient skeptics have tried to do. But that is what we are given, and that is what we appropriate in faith.

And then, when we come to the epistles, in particular, the end, of course, Paul, the interpretation of the atonement, the resurrection, and the atoning sacrifice on Jesus.

[51 : 03] An interpretation that we are given, that we don't have to discover. So those are, for me, very, very important elements that converge with professional history as well, too.

Okay. How is this done? How is the memory fixed and maintained?

Now, I'm going to have to go through this very, very quickly. We're going to have to run out of time. There are a half dozen ways that this has been done in the church and is still being done in greater or lesser degree, lesser degree, if alas, within the name of the Church of Canada, as we're facing this crisis right now.

But we are promised, with the founding of the church at Petit Foss, that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. John 16 spells all of this out.

Well, as distinct from the Old Testament, we have a major advantage beyond the Jews, in that the paraclete is sent and will lead us, as our advocate, will lead us into all truth.

[52 : 22] That is a promise, that is a promise that remains in the church today. I can quote John, but I don't have time to do that. The apostles and the preaching of the gospel.

This clarified, this specified what all of this meant. The texts that are brought together, the epistles, Paul and the guarding of the true gospel.

Again and again, he is setting it out, he is cautioning others, Timothy and others, preach the gospel as I received it from Christ and as I preached it.

No other gospel, the true gospel. Then the gospels themselves, as texts, are put together as a true witness. Luke makes it very clear, they're not making this up, they are historians.

Many have undertaken to draw an account of the things that have been fulfilled amongst us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

[53 : 28] And he goes on to specify, we're not making this up. This is what we have seen. So the gospel, and of course this is central to maintenance of memory for Christians today.

The liturgy. Do this in remembrance of me. The Eucharist given to us by Christ to celebrate, to remember his death and resurrection and what it means for his church and for us as believers.

Decrees that come a couple of centuries later, spelling out, reducing, simplifying in many ways, but making it appropriate to the human capacity to remember.

But ultimately it is the church as a means of grace, communally celebrating, singing, worshipping, learning, studying, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Bible as God's word written, faithful leaders remembering the redemptive covenants and acts of God in history and in Christ.

Living therefore in the hope of eternal life, which Christ has prepared for us. If I had time I would read from Revelation 3 where the church of Sardis is warned about forgetting, the terrible consequences of not remembering the covenants of God and what Christ has taught.

[55 : 08] So my conclusion would be then, and you're going to be welcome, but every time we have to be here now, remembering and forgetting are central to our faith.

Today, as I was hoping to fly to Berlin until later on in the week, I can't let this give you a leg right now, I was hoping to fly there as faithful leaders in the Indian Church of Canada are remembering what has been given to us, whereas other leaders in our sad denomination are forgetting what has been given to us in Christ, in the Bible, in the whole teaching of the Apostolic and Casotic tradition of Christianity.

We, alas, in the Indian Church of Canada have been absolutely overcome by cultural presentism, and have accommodated cultural wisdom of our modernity around us, giving it preeminence over God's covenants and Christ's redemptive message.

And that is a tragic case then of forgetting, a terrible and tragic mistake. So let us pray and let us hope for those leaders who are going to remember, restore, and let us hope they will provide a place for us as a church that will be faithful.

So, there we are. And now we have some discussion, I'm sure. Is Jewish, or Israel's, self-critical remembering at all unique?

[57 : 08] Are the cultures ever deeply self-critical? We have pictures of Israel's nobility and her unfaithfulness is constantly talked about. Yeah. This is certainly not the case of, to the degree I know of, the canonical historical literature of other cultures they tend to emphasize.

The glory and victory over enemies. And, for instance, the, I mean, the pharaohs for one, the monumentalism of the Syrian culture, things like that, it's all about Babel's kings, emperor's victory vanquishing, very little regret, self-criticism, that isn't there.

And that is there massively in prophetic and so on literature, sure. And to Moses himself, I mean, if you go through a junior one of the meetings, the mistakes he made, his forgetting, his sinfulness, David, the same, that's unique, I think, in the grand epic texts of human cultures.

Jeff. I grew up in a church where we had a lot of memorization to do. And we got little gold stars and, you know, stuff like this.

And I have been very grateful for that, because those are words that come back to me when I need them. And I'm not seeing this done in our church in any up-to-date fashion.

[58 : 52] And I think that, could you comment on whether or not that is a good thing? I got stars too. It's a good thing. I did it in the King James Version.

I know, I know. But no, I think modern educational theorists, if not, I can recall from reading about this, I'm not too distant past, so sort of discovered that although rote memory is not the major way to learning in schools, it nevertheless is not a bad thing in exercising the neurons and also in forming character of them as well.

Now, the memorization of scripture, we probably don't do that as much as we did, and it's probably a good thing if we did a little bit more of this.

Given all of these diversions of media and the confusing elements that poor children have, this rich but mesmerizing schmourdesbord of images that they have.

So the coming to text and the fixing of texts in the mind is probably a very good and salutary thing.

[60 : 12] I have no regrets about being able to quote readings of scripture. It is there and it is, if it's in your mind, it's in your memory, and it's this remembrance of God and his remembrance of you dynamically, that is very, very helpful.

Sure, so I think that's good. How you do it though, another... Well, the Muslims have discovered a way of doing this, and you cart the kids off to the madrasa and you make them memorize, all be up and down on their little mats and so on.

And initially, in all likelihood, this was because they did not read, but they are still doing it, and they are still doing it in Arabic, even 700 million Indonesians are Muslim, and Arabic is not their language.

So they are committing their scripture to memory on an ongoing basis. And I think that will work to the propagation of their faith, and I kind of wish that we could do it with ours.

Yeah, well, one could say, and this will get me off in a tangent, the prompts or the prompts to memory in the electronic age are very seductive and interesting.

[61 : 31] I mean, so many priests that I see carry around with them their little palm with their black hair, and they've got the whole Bible there. And so a child could do this, and this is an extension of memory.

You can have it there right beside you, you know, three inches, or an inch away from your cerebral cortex. That doesn't do you any good unless it is appropriating.

Well, it can certainly help you remember, I mean, remembering addresses. Just think of what you're calling out or whatever you can do there. But remembering God's mighty acts of history is a different thing.

It's one thing to be able to have them there at a distance, but to appropriate them. And this is where memory is the highly personalized dynamic here.

That's different. So you can't just have the text. You've got an appropriate text. You have to live the text.

[62 : 36] I have a question. It's from Jim Packer. The resident theologian here. I didn't have time to look this up, but when, in my resources, Jim, but you will probably know this right away.

When Jesus cries out that cry of anguish, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Can that be translated as why hast thou forgotten thee?

My Hebrew isn't good enough for me to comment. Well, I don't want to put you on the spot here, but I would.

The effect of forgetting in the Bible sense, when you talk about God forgetting, is a forsyponence.

God isn't there. God isn't caring for me. God is carrying on without regard for me. And conversely, when they forsake, forget, what?

[63 : 44] Yeah. Yeah. So, syntactically, it's the two are one. Forsaken, forgiven. Forgiven. Well, I must look this up to get a little bit more on that, but it strikes me that that's a great cosmic moment, that God is always remembering us.

This is what is there in assurance in the Old Testament and into the New Testament. And when does God forsake us? And Jesus makes this cry.

And I think only when we have forsaken him so long that we have lost all memory of him. We're all desired for memory of him. Are we? And even then perhaps not forsaken, the consequences are very severe as the church at Sardis is one, to very much outlaw this necessity to remember.

It needs to be said, though, on Psalm 22, and Jesus quoting of it, that the Psalm ends up with strong certainty and praise is that God is remembering you.

I mean, that God is enabling you to triumph, which is the way that he shows he's remembering you. I don't know whether I've got that on my right hand.

[65 : 08] There are some people who reckon that when Jesus quoted the first words of the Psalm, he was intending to bring to people's minds the whole world and to tell them in a right-about way that on the cross he was triumphant in the knowledge that God was with him and sustained him.

I think that that's too paradoxical to be taken seriously, but it's been argued. Yes? Would the nature of God's forgetting not be different than our forgetting would?

Our forgetting is wrapped up in our frailty, but God's forgetting would be a deliberate choice of turning away.

Isaiah 53 says, God, it seems God to... To bruise him. To bruise him. That's a deliberate choice on God's part, not a lapse.

Yes, I can't see God having lapses in these things. But God's remembrance on us seems to be, as he has created this order, to be dependent upon, in his mutuality, us remembering God.

[66 : 38] And so if we break the memory, I mean, what can God do? Well, he sends his son, after the Jews had not remembered.

But it strikes me that this mutuality is part of our deep humanity and our creatureliness, that he has made us to remember him.

And if we do not, we, our humanity deeply suffers, and the relationship is often broken then with God. That's what I would think about, I guess.

But it's about where grace comes in. Because God remembers us, even though we have the God in kind of works from his great deal. Well, that's certainly the key argument in this book here, when we cannot remember, as in Alzheimer's.

But if we choose to do not remember, what can God do other than call us?

[67 : 43] The story of the lost sheep, the prodigal son, all of those are there. But we are given the choices and the freedoms and that we can choose negatively in these things, until we forget utterly and we become spiritual Alzheimer's.

A few weeks from now, we're going to have our yearly ritual of public remembering our Christians. And I'm conflicted about whether Christians are wise, to step into that battle and say, yeah, I want the crash there, in my favorite coffee shop.

Or Christians better say, no, we'll remember in another way. But it is a remembering issue, I take it, that battle. Have you got anything to say about that? Well, like all the High Holy Days, I'm in favor of these as means of grace and means of remembering.

And what others do is that, of course, it's very sad, like the Easter Bunny as well as Santa Claus, although I did read something really interesting about this one. It was when I was young and worrying about all these things so much.

I loved Christmas, I loved Halloween even more, but I loved Christmas. I couldn't figure out why they didn't give us a holiday and Halloween. I mean, they gave one at Easter and Christmas.

[69 : 12] But Halloween did. It was so much fun. But the whole paradigm of the stories of Christmas, the reindeer, the Santa Claus, the mysterious, benign man who comes to rescue the children and give them gifts and make them happy, restore them.

And this is a paradigm of redemption. So I think we take these things positively, try to reduce the consumerism that lies on all of this, but to translate this into the much bigger story that makes Santa Claus possible.

Thank you for introducing us to the Deuteronian story. It seems to me that the modesty of that remembering is remarkable.

And perhaps it is the way which it contrasts most directly with the biblical memoir. Because there is absolutely no attempt to raise Moses' profile until you get to his death, and then somebody else is waiting.

But the sense of the modesty and humility of this great man is amazing. It's an account for the lack of popularity of this record in the secular historians' accounts of the morons.

[70 : 47] Because, I mean, the excitement of the interest of some of these biblical memoirs is when they distort and indeed inflate. There's no other words.

Why the secular record earlier on, in this case that I'm most concerned with, is the history of autobiography, why Jewish literature was completely ignored?

I've given one expression that was good to me, that this is the anti-Semitism of, the late anti-Semitism of German academic culture of the late 19th century. Which is, you know, that's a plausible explanation for all of this.

But your point is very interesting. Are they... I mean, reading this... It dramatizes...

I mean, my sense is that there's no better way of dramatizing the story than personal narration. If it were a series of theological discourses, it would not be as engaging as it is told by Moses.

[72 : 00] And Moses mad, Moses hoping, Moses sinning, Moses leading, Moses teaching, Moses meeting with God, coming down the mountain and seeing what his brother Aaron has done, and they're down before Baal, and then he crashes the tab.

It's a wonderful story. It did actually make it into Sesame the Mill, wasn't it? So that wasn't exactly academic interest, but... But what I'm...

But what I'm... Moses himself was worried about it. Yeah, Moses says, is it Charles Van Heston, is it? Yes. Well, okay. But what I'm saying though, aside from the academic lacuna in all of that, in academics taking this serious as history, as historiography, as autobiography, it doesn't matter about the academics, because this has endured, this has become canonical, this has impressed itself on not just the Jews, but many other cultures who are enslaved men, who are enslaved men, and who quest for liberation, for freedom in a new land.

So, Moses won. God knew he was doing, and telling Moses what to do here. Okay. Yeah. I'm just thinking about the Passover, and how the Jews celebrate the Passover, and the kind of food they eat, and everything they eat, and everything they eat, and that, that they're remembering, they're bringing into their everyday life.

Mm-hmm. Well, that's part of the remembering. I mean, Passover, our people sat through and participated. We once had a Jewish Christian who took us step by step through how Passover was celebrated.

[73 : 48] And it is all about memory, and faithfulness, and memory of what has happened to Jews in the past, and how they were saved by God, and let out of slavery in Egypt, and all that.

So, you have to have celebration, liturgy, ritual, more memory. And along with reading texts, I think probably liturgy, this is what Anglicans always say, goes deeper into the human psyche, into the human memory.

If you go through the yearly cycles, and liturgies, and weekly liturgies, the Eucharist of the Church, this is a better teacher, or at least it's certainly a supplementary teacher to Scripture.

Of course, the two of them together is what you want. But, how to keep the memory fixed? I mean, if you look at the way churches have done this, the way that any culture, regime, has done this.

But, churches, is it the Bible that does this? Is it the magisterium of the Catholics, and that's what they would say, we keep the memory fixed?

[75 : 08] We don't, we guard this, in the College of Cardinals and the Papacy, because those Protestants have tried to do it with disastrous results without a magisterium.

Or, is it Episcopacy, as we have tried to do in the Anglican tradition, if the bishops go wrong, then the whole thing goes belly up, and that's what's happening to us in Anglicanism now.

Of course, the Baptists and conservative Protestants will look at Scripture as the major corrective. Jim, you may want to say something about this too, but how do we keep the memory both truthful and dynamic?

What is, you know, in the context of where we're at today, just this very week, what are your reflections on that? Are you more convinced as you have gone through all of this for so long that the magisterium is more important, or that sola scripture is what we need?

Who interprets Scripture? Who fixes the memory? And when things go so terribly wrong, as it seems to have been with the angels now.

[76 : 39] Now, maybe I'll keep on through here. You've been living on us at the moment. Oh, it is. I've heard that it's speechless before. I've heard that it's speechless before. I'll be not sure we're looking at the work of the Holy Spirit.

Okay. Well, that's what the Pentecostals say. Well, so do some anthropocytions too. Yes. Well, we say that, and I think we believe that, but we're in a mess now.

We're in a mess. Because we haven't been listening. Well, that's what we're running out of time, and people have to go. I will conclude it by saying, because we haven't been working with the problem.

George, so many things occurred to me, but people don't really listen to me. But, is there a change from the old covenant to the new covenant?

It's very interesting that the Bible keeps showing it to me because Jesus said it 13 times in the New Testament. It is written. It is written.

[77 : 40] All right. All right. And then, he says, this is the new covenant. What does it seem to invite taking on board too much of Judaism in the new covenant?

Do you agree with that? Oh, I think everything is taken on board, but modified as Jesus himself is the incarnate logos, the incarnate new covenant which is written on our hearts.

And the Holy Spirit in a triune Godhead helps us to remember all these things. Well, that's a very short answer, but that occurs to me.

In front of all these witnesses, I heard from you say three times, next time I will do this. I will do this. Forgive me.

We'll be keeping around you, how well you are, and things like that. And we'd love to see you come back again. Okay. Thank you. Thank you.

[78 : 53] Thank you.