

## **BIBLE BLETHER – 26 NOVEMBER 2014**

**I want to talk about “remembrance or remembering”.**

### **Why do we remember?**

As humans we are made to remember. It is a faculty that is part and parcel of our being. We are historical beings which mean that we like to look back and reflect on the past. The famous philosopher Descartes once said: Cogito ergo sum! I think therefore I am. The fact that we can think and remember, makes us whom we are.

So most of the times we want to remember the past to make sense of our present lives, in order to shape our future.

### **How do we remember?**

**We remember through repetition**

In biblical times the people had no culture of writing events down. The only way they remembered was through repetition of phrases. We read about this technique in Deuteronomy 6 verses 1-14 where they were reminded not to forget the salvation of GOD:

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, <sup>2</sup>so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.<sup>3</sup>Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.<sup>5</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup>Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. <sup>10</sup>When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build,<sup>11</sup> houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, <sup>12</sup>be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Israel follows this command of God until this day. Every time they go into the synagogue they repeat the words of Deuteronomy 6:4 “Sjemah Jisrael, Jahweh Eloheinu Jahweh egat” or “Hear o Israel The Lord our God is ONE”. IN FACT when you enter any city, you will see these words written on the door or gate posts. And yes in each and every Jewish home on the doorposts these words are a reminder of what God said a long time ago. EACH and every Jewish boy knows these words by heart.

I think this was also the method of learning not so long ago.

Another way was through storytelling or poems whereby one generation would pass on stories of the past to newer generations. Psalm 137 is an example:

<sup>1</sup> By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept  
when we remembered Zion.

<sup>2</sup> There on the poplars we hung our harps,

<sup>3</sup> for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy;  
they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

- <sup>4</sup> How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?
- <sup>5</sup> If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.
- <sup>6</sup> May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.
- <sup>7</sup> Remember, LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. “Tear it down,” they cried, “tear it down to its foundations!”
- <sup>8</sup> Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us.
- <sup>9</sup> Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

The people of God found themselves in quite a bit of bother after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Those who were not killed were captivated and taken to the foreign land of Babylon. Our reading reflects the devastation of their captivity and how they remembered what happened on the day Jerusalem was destroyed to the ground.

We also have this in our society and culture. Think of Robert Burns whose poetry, and songs have survived centuries. Each and every year scores of people commemorate this “people’s poet” and remember something of what life was like for ordinary labourers in his day and time.

IN HIS POEM “Man was made to mourn” he says:

"Yet, let not this too much, my son,  
Disturb thy youthful breast:  
This partial view of human-kind  
Is surely not the last!  
The poor, oppressed, honest man  
Had never, sure, been born,  
Had there not been some recompense  
To comfort those that mourn!

"O Death! the poor man's dearest friend,  
The kindest and the best!  
Welcome the hour my aged limbs  
Are laid with thee at rest!  
The great, the wealthy fear thy blow  
From pomp and pleasure torn;  
But, oh! a blest relief for those  
That weary-laden mourn!"

## **Recording of events through “writing”**

When we record events through writing we call this exercise “history”. It is when we read about our past that we remember. But when we do write it down, our agendas, feelings, judgements becomes apparent too. It happened in the Biblical times as well: 1 Kings 16:

<sup>29</sup> In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. <sup>30</sup> Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. <sup>31</sup> He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. <sup>32</sup> He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. <sup>33</sup> Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.”

We can also see this pattern very clearly in:

### *Moab Revolts*

**3** Joram<sup>a</sup> son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years. <sup>2</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but not as his father and mother had done. He got rid of the sacred stone of Baal that his father had made. <sup>3</sup> Nevertheless he clung to the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit; he did not turn away from them.

We also have it in the recording of our history. But there will be two sides to it which is fine and normal.

I TOTALLY agree with the philosopher Nietzsche who had a different view on history. History can never be objective,

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<sup>a</sup> Hebrew *Jehoram*, a variant of *Joram*; also in verse 6

uncritical and absolute. We only remember the past in the present in order to move towards our future. We do not exercise this in a clinically clean and perfect environment. Each one of us has a history that will be different from others. And to make judgements on people's accounts of their history is wrong. No one can judge how you "remember" your history.

### **Re-enactment of events of the past through symbols, rituals and ceremonies**

As humans we also remember through enactment of certain events of great significance such as Remembrance services, weddings, baptisms, graduation and the enactment of Jesus' last meal. We remember through symbols like the "poppy" which represents the poppy fields of Flanders during the 1st World War. Poppies have become a symbol of remembrance of soldiers who have died during wartime. A scholar of the name of Beattie says that symbols exhibit three characteristics: there is a reason why a symbol is important, it adds value to people's lives and it is meaningful. In Biblical times it was all about show, tell and re-enact.

As an example we have communion which is a very important ceremony. We find it in Marks Gospel 14:22-26

<sup>22</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." <sup>23</sup> Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. <sup>24</sup> "This is my blood of the<sup>a</sup> covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. <sup>25</sup> "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." <sup>26</sup> When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

It is variance on the traditional Easter meal where they slaughtered the Passover lamb in remembrance of the angel of God who passed all the houses with the mark of blood on their doorframes. Then they would eat the whole lamb with unleavened bread. Now Jesus has become the proverbial lamb to be slaughtered who gives life through His blood.

### **Remembering through physical and tangible things**

We also remember though photos, videos, and music. Just last week I was amazed to see how a lady suffering from dementia, and who cannot remember anything, started

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<sup>a</sup> Some manuscripts *the new*



singing with us – not missing one word of the well known hymn “Rock of ages”. It was if the music lifted and cleared the mist away in her mind.

In biblical times we see something similar. Let us read Joshua

4:

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>2</sup>“Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, <sup>3</sup> and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.” <sup>4</sup> So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, <sup>5</sup> and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, <sup>6</sup> to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ <sup>7</sup> tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

## **Conclusion**

You and I are writing history each moment of everyday. And while we are writing our own *history* we also write with others their *history*. To be able to remember is a huge gift from God because through remembrance we can modify and

reshape our present realities. It can also help us to face the future. We know that God changed our past lives through Jesus Christ in order that you and I can live in the present a meaningful life. He also ensured that all those who believe in His resurrection from the dead will have a future with him in His kingdom where there will be no more crying or dying anymore.

Any comments, questions.