

# Memorials of Grace



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Joshua 3, Num. 14:44, Luke 18:18–27, Joshua 4, John 14:26, Heb. 4:8–11.*

**Memory Text:** “‘For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever’” (*Joshua 4:23, 24, ESV*).

The police officer signaled. John had to pull over. The officer asked for his driver's license, and, at that moment, it dawned on John that he had left his wallet, with his driver's license, in the office. John explained what happened, and the officer asked about his job. John responded that he was a professor. As the officer gave John a ticket, he told him not to think of it as a fine.

“It's tuition,” he said. “When people want to learn something, they pay tuition. This is your tuition to learn not to forget your license when driving. Have a good day, professor!”

As human beings, we are prone to forget things that are not constantly in our sight. We forget to return phone calls, respond to emails, water the plants, send birthday wishes, and so forth. The list could go on. Forgetting about our spiritual needs, however, could have more severe consequences than simply receiving a fine, especially because we are dealing with what is, literally, our eternal destiny.

Let's study the crossing of the Jordan by the Hebrews and see what we can learn from their experiences.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 18.

## Crossing the Jordan

**Read** Joshua 3:1–5 and Numbers 14:41–44. Why did God ask the Israelites to specially prepare for what was about to happen?

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This is the first time the ark of the covenant is mentioned in the book of Joshua. Until this point in the Old Testament narrative, the ark has appeared in the context of the sanctuary (*Exod. 40:21*) in Israel's journey from Sinai (*Num. 10:33–36*), and at the unsuccessful attempt to begin the conquest of Canaan (*Num. 14:44*). It was the most sacred object in the Israelite sanctuary, and it held three objects, each expressing Israel's special relationship with God: (1) the tablets containing the Ten Commandments; (2) the rod of Aaron, the high priest; and (3) a jar of manna (*Exod. 16:33, Heb. 9:4*).

The ark and the preparations to cross the Jordan reminded the Israelites that they were not entering Canaan in their own manner and time. The conquest would be successful only if they followed God's way and timing. God—who is described as enthroned above the cherubim that were covering the ark of the covenant (*Exod. 25:22, Num. 7:89*) and whose movements are identified with the ark's movements—enters Canaan in front of the Israelites as the One leading the conquest.

The term translated “sanctify” (*Josh 3:5*) or “consecrate” (*ESV*) refers to a purification process similar to what the priests followed before beginning their service in the sanctuary (*Exod. 28:41, Exod. 29:1*) and what the people of Israel carried out prior to God's revelation at Sinai (*Exod. 19:10, 14*). This consecration involved the laying aside of sin and the removal of all ritual impurities. The same command appears in Numbers 11:18, relating to an impending miracle of God. Such a preparation also was required before battles were fought in a war (*Deut. 23:14*). Before God can fight for Israel in battle, they must show their allegiance to Him and trust in Him as their Commander.

The miracle of crossing the Jordan was going to prove to the Israelites that the Lord's promise to drive out these people in the land could be trusted. He who could secure a dry passage through the Jordan also could grant them the gift of the land.

**God does not always part the Jordan. His interventions are not always so obvious. How do you think we can develop the spiritual preparedness to experience and discern God's interventions on our behalf?**

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## The Living God of Wonders

**Read** Joshua 3:6–17. What does the miraculous crossing of the Jordan tell us about the nature of the God whom we serve?

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The crossing of the Jordan River is described in Joshua 3:5 by the Hebrew word *niphla'ot*, “miracles, wonders,” which usually refers to the mighty, supernatural acts of God that demonstrate His uniqueness (*Ps. 72:18, Ps. 86:10*). Later, the Israelites meditated on these acts and, as a result, praised the Lord (*Ps. 9:1*) and proclaimed Him among the nations (*Ps. 96:3*). The plagues in Egypt (*Exod. 3:20, Mic. 7:15*), the crossing of the Red Sea, and God’s guidance in the wilderness (*Ps. 78:12–16*) were recounted as such wonders.

The authors of the Bible knew and testified to the fact that the God who created the world was never limited or constrained by His creation. Nothing is impossible (Heb. “too wonderful”) for Him to accomplish (*Jer. 32:17*). His name and His nature are wonderful (*Judg. 13:18*), and He is beyond our comprehension.

In contrast with the gods of the other nations, who cannot save (*Ps. 96:5, Isa. 44:8*), the God of the Bible is a “living God,” active and alive, whose followers can trust Him in anticipation of His interventions on their behalf.

The prophet Zechariah used the same term (from the same root as *niphla'ot*) as he envisioned a future for Israel after the Babylonian exile. He saw that Jerusalem would be fully rebuilt with old people sitting in the streets of the city and boys and girls playing there. To the seemingly incredulous inhabitants of the capital still displaying the signs of its destruction, Zechariah declared: “ ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts? Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem’ ” (*Zech. 8:6–8, ESV*).

**Read** Luke 18:18–27. How does Jesus’ answer to His disciples encourage you to trust God with what seems impossible?

## Remember

**Read** Joshua 4. Why did God ask the Israelites to build a memorial?

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The purpose of these stones is to become a “sign.” The Hebrew term *’ot* is often associated with the word “wonder” and can refer to miraculous acts done by God (see yesterday’s study), such as the plagues on Egypt (*Exod. 7:3, Deut. 4:34*). It also can carry the meaning of “symbol” or “token,” as an outward sign of a deeper or transcendent reality. For example, the rainbow is a “sign” of the covenant (*Gen. 9:12, 13*); the blood on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelite houses also is called a “sign” (*Exod. 12:13*); and most significantly, the Sabbath is a “sign” of Creation and of God’s sanctifying presence (*Exod. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12*).

Here, the sign functions as a memorial, reminding each subsequent generation of the miracle of the crossing. The term “memorial” (*zik-karon*) comes from the word *zakar*, “to remember,” which denotes more than a passive act of recalling something. It implies a remembering followed by a proper action (*Deut. 5:15, Deut. 8:2*). The setting up of stone memorials (*Gen. 28:18–22*) and rituals that triggered questions (*Exod. 12:26, 27; Deut. 6:20–25*) was common in the Old Testament. Instead of repeating the miracles again and again, God establishes monuments that evoke the memory of His great acts and prompt meaningful answers. Therefore, the sign is to be there “forever,” implying the need to keep this miracle of the Lord in the collective memory of His people perpetually.

The potential question of future generations is significant because it is formulated in a personal way: “What are these stones to you?” Each new generation must internalize and understand the meaning of these stones for themselves personally. The faith in a miracle-making God can be kept alive only if each generation rediscovers the significance of the mighty acts of Yahweh for themselves. Such a faith will make a major difference between living out faithfully Bible-based *traditions* and *traditionalism*, the dead religion, deprived of its original value and fervor, of the living generation. In the end, we need to make our Bible-based faith our own. No one, especially our ancestors, can believe for us.

**What are some of the memorials, personal memorials, from your own walk with the Lord that help you remember what He has done for you?**

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## Forgetfulness

**Read** Joshua 4:20–24 in the light of the following verses: *Judg.* 3:7; *Judg.* 8:34; *Ps.* 78:11; *Deut.* 8:2, 18; *Ps.* 45:17. Why was it so important to remember the mighty deeds of the Lord?

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Notice the change in person in Joshua 4:23. The waters of the Jordan are referred to as having been dried up before “you,” that is, before all the Israelites who have just crossed the Jordan. In contrast, the Red Sea is said to had been dried up before “us,” those who were still present from the first generation and who experienced the Exodus. The two events experienced by two different generations were similar in significance, which enabled the second generation, through the testimony of their parents, to rediscover the same meaning of the Jordan crossing for themselves.

Generally, we perceive forgetfulness as a normal trait of all human beings. However, forgetfulness in the spiritual sense can lead to serious consequences.

Even today, if we want to maintain our identity as a people with a peculiar calling and mission, we will have to create occasions for refreshing both our individual and corporate spiritual memory in order to keep in focus where we are coming from, who we are, and what we are here for.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25 and John 14:26. Why must we always remember what Christ did for us? What else really matters without it?

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Ellen G. White clearly understood that without constantly guiding ourselves in the light of God’s past acts and revelation, we will surely lose the motivation to carry out our mission in the future: “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 196.

**Though it is important to remember the past and how the Lord has worked in your life, why must you day by day have an experience with Him and the reality of His love and presence now?**

## Beyond the Jordan

**“He turned the sea into dry land;  
They went through the river on foot.  
There we will rejoice in Him” (Ps. 66:6, NKJV).**

Both the crossing of the Red Sea and of the Jordan are markers of a new era in biblical history, and both carry symbolic significance (see Ps. 66:6, Ps. 114:1–7, and 2 Kings 2:6–15). Already in the Old Testament, there are texts that link the two crossing events and recognize a meaning, which points beyond the original settings. In Psalm 66, the psalmist celebrated God’s redemptive act in his life (Ps. 66:16–19) by referring to the historical examples of the crossing of the Red Sea and of the Jordan.

Psalm 114 also ties the two events together, not because the author did not see a chronological difference between them but because of the theological significance that the two crossings share. Thus, both events are seen as contributing to a change in Israel’s status, once from slavery to freedom, then from nomadic landlessness to nationhood. In these psalms, the examples of the two crossings illustrate the change in status of the author from oppression, poverty, helplessness, and humiliation to safety, well-being, salvation, and dignity.

It is also by the Jordan that Elijah’s translation takes place in the context of a similar miracle to the one recorded in Joshua. For Elijah, the crossing brought the most significant status change in his life: he was taken to heaven. For Elisha, the change is also important: the prophet’s assistant (1 Kings 19:21) becomes the prophet of the nation (2 Kings 2:22).

**Read Matthew 3:16, 17 and Mark 1:9. How do these writers of the New Testament imply a symbolic, spiritual meaning of the Jordan River?**

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The earthly ministry of Jesus, as the Representative of Israel, follows the pattern of the history of ancient Israel. Jesus undergoes the “Red Sea” and “Jordan” experiences. He is called out of Egypt after a death decree (Matt. 2:14–16); spends 40 days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2), similar to ancient Israel’s 40 years; and, as a transition from His private life to His public ministry, He is baptized in the Jordan (Matt. 3:16, 17; Mark 1:9).

Later, Hebrews 3–4 recognizes the symbolic significance of the crossing of the Jordan and presents the entrance into Canaan as foreshadowing the “rest of grace” that Christians enter through faith.

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “Crossing the Jordan,” pp. 483, 484, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Study carefully the experiences of Israel in their travels to Canaan. Study the third and fourth chapters of Joshua, recording their preparation for and passage over the Jordan into the promised land. We need to keep the heart and mind in training, by refreshing the memory with the lessons that the Lord taught His ancient people. Then to us, as He designed it should be to them, the teachings of His Word will ever be interesting and impressive.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 994.

“Modern Israel are in greater danger of forgetting God and being led into idolatry than were His ancient people. Many idols are worshiped, even by professed Sabbathkeepers. God especially charged His ancient people to guard against idolatry, for if they should be led away from serving the living God, His curse would rest upon them, while if they would love Him with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might, He would abundantly bless them in basket and in store, and would remove sickness from the midst of them.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 609.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss in your class the miraculous crossing of the Jordan. How would you define miracles? Why does it seem that God is not performing similar miracles today?
- ❷ What practical ways can you suggest in your class for preventing spiritual forgetfulness, both as individuals or as a church? While it is important that we have an ongoing dynamic relationship with God and that we don't build our whole Christian experience on powerful past experiences, how can we still use our past experiences as reminders of how God has worked in our lives?
- ❸ How do you think the Sabbath can, on the one hand, help us remember God's interventions in our lives and, on the other, give us a foretaste of the promised rest in His kingdom? How does the Sabbath point not only to what we are supposed to remember but to what we can hope for in the future?

## Trail of Tears and Sweatshirts

Tsitsi Zondo couldn't believe her eyes. It was a dark night in Zimbabwe, but she could see her precious cargo of sweatshirts strewn across the highway and the dim figures of people scurrying to take them away.

Tears filled her eyes. She had borrowed money to buy the sweatshirts in South Africa and now wouldn't be able to repay the loan. She had nothing. How would she provide for her children?

She prayed, "Lord, You know that I've been struggling to make my business successful, and now this has happened. Out of all the bags, my bag is the only one that opened."

Tsitsi had packed 60 sweatshirts into a large bag and stowed it on the roof of a minibus for the trip from Zimbabwe's border with South Africa to her hometown, Bulawayo. But halfway into the journey, a passenger had gotten off the minibus and, in looking for her bag, the driver had opened and closed several bags on the minibus' roof. Somehow, Tsitsi's bag hadn't been closed.

The minibus had resumed its journey and, after traveling some distance, stopped at the flashing of car lights. The car's driver said the minibus had been dropping sweatshirts ever since the passenger had gotten off.

Tsitsi saw to her horror that only 10 sweatshirts remained in her bag.

The minibus driver knew that he was responsible but raised his hands helplessly. "I'm sorry," he told Tsitsi. "I just don't have the money."

After praying, Tsitsi wiped away her tears. She had always been faithful in returning tithe and giving offerings on the wares that she imported from South Africa, and she was sure that God would care for her.

In Bulawayo, friends heard about Tsitsi's situation and came over to pray. One offered her a loan to return to South Africa and buy more sweatshirts.

Tsitsi accepted the money as an answer to prayer and returned to South Africa. With the new sweatshirts, she was able to deliver on all of the original sweatshirt orders. It took a total of four trips to South Africa to repay the two loans. But during that time, Tsitsi always had enough money for food and family expenses. She also kept returning tithe and giving offerings.



Tsitsi doesn't understand how God works, but she has no doubt that He always provides.

"Even when I lost everything, my family and I never went hungry. We always had food on the table," she said. "If you are faithful and you give to the Lord in tithe and offerings, the Lord always comes through for you."

*Watch a short YouTube video of Tsitsi Zondo at: [bit.ly/Tsitsi](http://bit.ly/Tsitsi).*



## ***Part I: Overview***

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**Key Text:** *Joshua 4:23, 24*

**Study Focus:** *Joshua 3, Num. 14:44, Luke 18:18–27, Joshua 4, John 14:26, Heb. 4:8–11.*

With the return of the spies, Israel is ready to enter the Promised Land. There is still an insurmountable barrier, at least from a human perspective: the Jordan River during the flood season. However, nothing can stop the living God of Israel. Again, He is about to show His sovereignty as the Lord of all the earth (and waters). Since Israel left Egypt, the issue has never been God's power to work wonders; it has been His people's preparedness, which once more will be tested as they are called to sanctify themselves. Like their ancestors walking toward the shores of the Red Sea, the Israelites pack up and leave the camp one last time, before finally entering Canaan.

More than four hundred years after the initial promise to Abraham, they walk again toward the edge of the impossible. From their crossing of the Red Sea to the crossing of the Jordan River, God has summoned His people to face the impossible to prove that with Him nothing is impossible. The ark of the covenant goes in front of them to show that the passage on dry land is not a coincidence or a human-engineered plan but an act of God. The crossing of the Jordan River marks history as a singular day. The passage also is marked geographically with the two groups of 12 stones. The question is whether this event will mark the memory of future generations or not. Unfortunately, as time passes, the spiritual significance of these stones would be forgotten. This tragic forgetfulness led Israel not only to idolatry but also back to Egypt.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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### **Watery Theology**

Several parallels exist between the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River. Among them are the use of three significant Hebrew terms: (1) the Hebrew verb *pl'* ("wonder"), to designate both of the miraculous crossings (*Exod. 15:11, Josh. 3:5*); (2) the word *ned*, to refer to the piling up of the water as a "heap" (*Exod. 15:8, Josh. 3:16*); and (3) the rare word *harabah*, which means "dry land" (*Exod. 14:21, Josh. 3:17*). Additionally, God Himself traces a parallel between Moses and Joshua in Joshua 3:7, explicitly connecting the two episodes. The psalmist sees the two events as only one (*for example, Ps. 114:1, 3, 5*).

But what is the theological meaning of the Jordan crossing? This week, the author already has guided us through the typological meaning of the event in light of Jesus and the church. Thus, we can explore here the theological meaning of the crossing to its original audience.

Today, if you visit the Jordan River, it's hard to imagine the challenge its crossing presented to Israel millennia ago. First, irrigation for agricultural purposes and human consumption, along the riverbed's 223 miles (360 kilometers), has considerably diminished its size and flow rate. Second, the celebration of the Passover, right after the crossing, indicates that the Jordan River crossing took place in springtime, when the river could be up to a mile wide in some areas, a result of the melting snow in the highlands. This data means that crossing this large body of water with strong currents or even debris was not a lesser miracle than crossing the Red Sea.

In the minds of ancient Near Eastern people, such as the Canaanites, the sea had mythological nuances. It was the place their deities came from when the forces of chaos were subdued by more powerful gods.

According to the Canaanite myth, Baal, who was the patron god of land, became the supreme god of the storm when he defeated Yam (the word for "sea" in Hebrew), the god of the sea. Thus, "in ancient polytheistic thinking, nations won battles on the earth because their patron gods won battles in the cosmos. If Yahweh, God of Israel, could defeat and bend so easily to His purposes the power of the river-god in full flood, what would He do to Baal? What, then, would Yahweh's people do to Canaan?"—Joseph Coleson, "Joshua," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), p. 56. With this historical background in mind, the crossing of the Jordan expresses a threefold theological dimension that is not readily apparent to modern readers.

First, God's status as "the Lord of all the earth" (*Josh. 3:11, 13*) highlights an essential difference between the Canaanite deities and Yahweh. His dominion is not restricted to any territory. All the earth belongs to Him and is under His jurisdiction. He is the true Owner and Lord of the world, and, in this sense, Baal, which also means "owner" or "lord," is an impostor. God's power over the water serves as proof of His supremacy.

Second, God is victorious. Both in Babylonian and Canaanite mythologies, Marduk and Baal become chief gods as they crush powerful, watery forces. Both in poetic and prophetic passages, Yahweh is praised for conquering cosmic enemies, described as a sea dragon or a serpent, also called Rahab or Leviathan (*compare with Job 41:1, Ps. 74:13, Isa. 30:7*). As Yahweh overcomes the watery forces of chaos, His victory is supreme. However, the crucial difference between

Yahweh and these gods is that He is a living God (*Josh. 3:10*), acting in real time. Yahweh is not a god of mythology; He is the God of history.

Finally, Yahweh is a holy God. The ark of the covenant appears at least twenty times in Joshua 3 and 4, highlighting its significance in the story as a physical representation of the One who goes literally before them (*Josh. 3:11*). The glory of Yahweh, which rested on the ark inside the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, was a visible manifestation of the Divine presence. However, such a token of His presence was visible only to the high priest once a year, and only under restricted ritualistic conditions. During the crossing of the Jordan, the ark would go about six-tenths of a mile (1 kilometer) ahead of the people, remaining in their sight only during the actual crossing in the middle of the riverbed. Unlike the idols of Canaan, which were created in the image of their human “makers,” God was forming a new nation in His likeness, as expressed in the commandment: “ ‘Be holy, for I am holy’ ” (*1 Pet. 1:16, NKJV*; see also *Lev. 19:2*).

These three theological aspects—God’s dominion, victory, and holiness—should have been in the Israelites’ minds as they entered the idolatrous land of Canaan. The memory of this spectacular day should have served as an antidote against idolatry, an antidote that, unfortunately, Israel did not take.

### The Memory Problem

The concept of memory in the Bible is dynamic because it encompasses more than just the cognitive process of recalling information. This concept is shown when, on several occasions, God “remembers” His people (*for example, Exod. 2:24*). When God remembers, He acts favorably toward His people. Therefore, God’s call to His people to remember is also a call for them to take action.

Memory should be enacted in time and space through various means, such as passing down tradition from parents to children, building monuments like that of Joshua 4, and, most important, through ritual and celebration during the great festivals in the religious calendar. It is meaningful that these festivals had a threefold character. First, they commemorated God’s acts in the present life of Israel, as they passed the seasons of sowing and harvest. Second, these festivals commemorated God’s acts in the past, particularly those related to the Exodus and the conquest. And finally, they also pointed typologically to God’s acts in the future in the eschatological era, inaugurated by Jesus. Thus, the biblical dynamic of memory not only embraces the past but also enables us to live in the present with gratitude and to look toward the future with hope.

Unfortunately, Israel did not heed the divine counsel to remember. The book of Judges starts with a somber note about the spiritual amnesia of the generation after Joshua's death: they "did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel" (*Judg. 2:10, NKJV*). Later, the narrator explicitly states: "Thus the children of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side" (*Judg. 8:34, NKJV*).

The result was apostasy in the form of idolatry, which persisted throughout the history of Israel from Solomon to Zedekiah, the last Judean king before the captivity. Idolatry is the natural outcome of spiritual forgetfulness. This outcome is pointedly evident in the story of Gomer, who, as a representation of Israel, forgot that it had been God, not Baal, who had given " 'her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold—which they prepared for Baal' " (*Hos. 2:8, NKJV*). In this sense, idolatry is ingratitude, based on a catastrophic spiritual amnesia. Israel's radical forgetfulness led to an almost complete loss of its identity before the Babylonian exile, except for a remnant. Many who remained in the land during the exile chose to return to Egypt. The history of the kings of Israel and Judah ends with the Exodus in reverse—with all the people left alive in Jerusalem having returned to Egypt (*Jer. 43:7*). This exile is the appalling result of spiritual forgetfulness.

## ***Part III: Life Application***

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### **Evangelistic Opportunities**

In the original context of the Old Testament, the miracles of the Red Sea and the Jordan River emphasize God's divine power to overcome the forces of evil and His superiority over all other deities. These public displays aimed to be not only demonstrations of divine strength per se but also evangelistic opportunities, so that other nations could know the truth about the God of Israel.

**How can you use every experience with God in your life as an opportunity to show others the true nature of the God you worship?**

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### Remembering the Past

One of the most pleasant moments we have as a family is the moment we sit down to look through old photos. These pictures are frozen moments in time, filled with emotions. In a way, remembering is like reliving those memories.

**Consider your life as a large photo album and try to identify the moments in which you can see God's powerful presence in your own life.**

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In one sermon entitled "When God Remembers," Hans K. LaRondelle said that remembering "the past means to renew our hope for the future." In the same vein, speaking about how God was conducting the Seventh-day Adventist movement, Ellen G. White memorably says: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us."—*Life Sketches*, p. 196.

**Share with your class how the memory of God's past acts in your life has encouraged you in difficult times.**

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