

The Memorial Day That Isn't

By PAUL J. SCHARF

I have always loved Memorial Day.

It takes me back to the end of the school year when I was a kid. (I always considered it a real victory if we did not have to go back to class after the holiday!)

I can remember those Memorial Days back then as clearly as if they were happening right now. Every year we went to the cemetery and watched the American Legion firing squad perform its rituals of remembrance—commanded by my uncle, a Korean War veteran, who led the group for 50 years.

Sometimes we would follow the Legion to two or even three cemeteries, looking at the headstones of relatives and making sure we were still clear on knowing which graves all of our ancestors were buried in.

Then, after the solemn portion of the day was over, it was time to celebrate! That meant brats and burgers on the grill, volleyballs and softballs in the air, and sporting events on the television.

Later on, I remember how Memorial Day marked the real beginning of summer when I was training for football season in high school and college. Once it was over, it was time to get serious, because time would soon be ticking away—and the weeks would fly by until August came. Memorial Day seemed even more important to me then.

After I got married and we moved out of state to two different pastorates, we continued to make the most of Memorial Day and acclimate ourselves to the local customs, and some of those days were memorable as well.

Technically, Memorial Day is a day to remember the sacrifices made by the fallen heroes who served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America. More popularly, it has also become a day to honor all veterans—something that is always appropriate—and to reminisce about all loved ones and relatives who have passed away—something also worthy of our remembrance. Regrettably, for some the day has become little more than time to take off of work and enjoy a party.

But, sadly, this Memorial Day will be different than any in the 150-year history of the holiday. All across the country, Memorial Day events have been canceled due to the coronavirus crisis.

That means that there will be big cities and small villages, rural towns and busy cemeteries, that will experience no parades or ceremonies this year—perhaps no organized time of remembrance at all. That to me is incredibly sad, not only because our veterans, especially, deserve such honor, but also because of what it will rob us of as a people.

The Bible teaches a great deal about the importance of *remembering*.

Forms of “remember” are used 15 times alone in the book of Deuteronomy, the great book of remembrance in the early history of Israel, which Moses delivered near the end of his life to the generation that would finally conquer the Promised Land.

Then Moses’ successor Joshua, after charging the people, “Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you” (Josh. 1:13), led the nation in one of the greatest projects of remembrance in all of history. It involved setting up 12 stones, taken from the Jordan River, to serve “for a memorial to the children of Israel forever” (Josh. 4:7).

This elaborate ceremony was intended to have a profound effect not only on the children of that time, but upon generations to come, throughout the world:

. . . that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it *is* mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever. (Josh. 4:24)

The greatest act of remembrance ever fathomed was, of course, instituted by our Lord Himself (see Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25).

As we approach another Memorial Day, it seems ironic that, out of concern for our own safety, we would willingly give up a day to remember those who sacrificed life itself, for our freedom.

Our culture needs a greater—not lesser—connection to the past, and more—not fewer—opportunities to remember things that are of enduring, even eternal, value. And perhaps we need that this year more than ever.

Do not let this be the Memorial Day that isn’t! Do something creative, something fascinating, something valuable, with your family, your friends—or just by yourself—to make this a day of real remembrance of things of surpassing consequence.

“How?” you ask. The answer is simple. Read a thought-provoking book, find a constructive video to watch or begin a new Bible study—praying and thanking God for your “good inheritance” (Ps. 16:6). Make it a day of spiritual reflection, as well as one of contemplation on the heroes of the past. Focus your heart on thinking about all the good things that the Lord has given and done for you (see James 1:17).

“Stir up your pure minds by way of reminder” (2 Pet. 3:1).

Make this the Memorial Day that . . . is.

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf

or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.