Symbols of the Harvest:
Old Testament Holy Days and the Lord’s Ministry

By Lenet H. Read


*Editor's Note: This is an interesting approach to Old Testament scholarship which the editors thought Latter-day Saints might want to read.*

"Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him." (*2 Ne.* 11:4)

Although we tend to study the Old and New Testaments separately, doing so deprives us of much of their richest meaning. To what extent the New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old Testament is not completely known. But there are students of the Bible from all periods who have seen fascinating parallels in Old and New Testament events.

Among the most interesting parallels are those found in the holy days of ancient Israel and the dramatic events pertinent to Christianity. So strong are the parallels, there is good evidence that the ancient holy days were prophetic of events fulfilled by Christ.

It is important to remember that the ancient holy days were specifically established by God (see *Lev.* 23), and their observance was part of the Mosaic Law. In addition to the Sabbath, ancient Israelites were to consider holy the periods later known as Passover, the Omer, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

These holy days appear to have meaning on three levels. First, each commemorated special events in God’s dealings with ancient Israel. Second, and very significantly, each falls at a major period of harvest and is closely related to the harvest. Third, each teaches of events in the ministry of the Savior. In fact, the Jews themselves believed these holy periods had prophetic implications of the Messiah. (See Robert W. Fraser, *Moriah: or Sketches of the Sacred Rites of Ancient Israel*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board...
The observance of Passover was instituted to commemorate the time when destruction passed by those Israelites whose door was marked with the blood of a lamb and Israel was freed from bondage. Prophetically, each Passover lamb had to be a young male, firstborn, without blemish, slain at a specified time of day and month, unbroken in bone, roasted with fire, eaten with bitter herbs, and ultimately consumed so that nothing remained. There are those who see every detail fulfilled, believing these commandments were not whimsical, but purposeful.

Christ was the Son, Firstborn, spotless above all. He was slain at the prophesied time, possibly the same hours when the traditional Passover lambs were being slain at the temple in Jerusalem. Bitterness surrounded every aspect of his death—the crown of thorns, the mocking, the vinegar given when he thirsted. His bones were not broken, though those of the thieves who hung with him were. As in the Passover, through the shedding of blood, death was overcome and men were freed from bondage. Even the command, "And ye shall let nothing of it remain …" (Ex. 12:10) seems to have meaning. Christ's body was placed within the tomb. Those who loved him fully expected that it would remain there. Yet a great and marvelous miracle occurred, and when the tomb was opened, "nothing remained."

There is good reason to believe that the commandments regarding unleavened bread also foreshadowed Christ. Israelites were commanded to eat unleavened bread for seven days at Passover time. Indeed, they were to remove from their houses every bit of leavening. When so many other aspects attached to Passover had prophetic implications, was this one without significance?

Our only clue may be Christ's use of pure leaven as a symbol. He likened the kingdom of God to leaven hid by a woman in three measures of meal, which then leavened the whole. In this parable Christ taught of himself, as he did in most parables. He is the true leavening agent who was "hid" in the world, and through his power to lift himself, or be resurrected, he "lifted" up or "leavened" the whole.

This understanding gives beautiful meaning to the puzzling aspects of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The imagery of Israel casting out and destroying all leaven from their houses at the time the Passover lamb is slain seems to be subtle witness that the majority of Judah would cast out the one who had the power to "lift them up."

The need to eat unleavened bread, "the bread of affliction," for seven days, coincides with fulfilled prophecy that the Jews would know a long period of affliction after Christ's death until Christ would make a second effort to redeem them. "... And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." (Luke 21:24.) Christ himself used the image of a house made void of that which is essential to its well-being when he said so poignantly before his death: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

"For, I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Matt. 23:38–39.) Israel's affliction and desolation were now a surety, for it was the eve of the time they would cast from them their true leaven.

As the lamb of the Passover and unleavened bread witnessed of the death of Christ, the offering of the Omer, or the firstfruits of barley, taught of his resurrection. Its beginnings were again by command of God:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,"

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:

"And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it." (Lev. 23:9–11.)
Through the centuries, in obedience to that commandment, a firstfruits offering was symbolically "lifted up" to the Lord at the time of the harvest of the first winter grains, which was also at the time of Passover. The appointed time was not on the usual holy day of the Sabbath, however, but on "the morrow after the sabbath," a day which seemingly would have little significance to the Israelites.

But perhaps the Lord knew it would someday have meaning. After Christ’s death, his body was taken down from the cross and laid to rest in the tomb. At sunset shortly thereafter, the first sheaf of the standing barley was ceremoniously “cut down” and laid to rest in the temple. On the “morrow after the sabbath,” the firstfruits sheaf that had prophesied so long of Christ was once again lifted up, in beautiful harmony now with its fulfillment. For it was that same morning that Christ arose in the resurrection, “the firstfruits of them that slept.” (1 Cor. 15:20.)

How completely Christ fulfilled all elements in this period of Jewish worship can be best illustrated by the accompanying chart, even though there is disagreement as to the exact timing of some events.

There is some scriptural evidence that Christ was slain at the same time the Passover lambs were prepared and slain. But other scriptures indicate the Last Supper was the Passover meal when the slain lambs were eaten. Various theories reconciling these discrepancies exist. One belief is that the increasingly large number of lambs to be slain necessitated that the sacrifices be performed on two consecutive days. All these uncertainties should not obscure the greater truth that Christ did fulfill the prophecies inherent in the Passover season. (For a broader review of theories reconciling the discrepancies, see James E. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, pp. 617–19.)

Following the commandments to observe Passover and the Omer, the Lord commands the observance of the Feast of Weeks. Israel is commanded to count seven full weeks of seven days from the time of the offering of the Omer. The morning after that (the 50th day) was to be considered holy with many offerings made. In contrast with the unleavened bread so attached to the Passover, two loaves of leavened bread are to be offered. “… They are the firstfruits unto the Lord.” (Lev. 23:17. Italics added.

Leavened bread would be appropriate now. Christ was resurrected and the way to eternal life was opened to all who would accept him.)

Was this holy day also prophetic?

After Christ’s resurrection, he spent 40 days teaching the apostles and preparing them for their ministry. By that time he considered them nearly ready for the great work that lay before them. But there was one very important step remaining.

“And, being assembled together with them, [Jesus] commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:4–5, 8.)

When was this special promise of baptism by the Holy Ghost fulfilled? It occurred on the day of Pentecost, the Greek name for the “50th day” or the Jewish holy day of the Feast of Weeks.

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. …” (Acts 2:1–4.)

The first sheaf of barley offered 50 days earlier was symbolic of Christ as the very first fruit of the harvest.
from the dead. But on this day, the time of the wheat harvest, the firstfruits obtained through the witness of the Spirit began to be gathered in.

"Then they that gladly received his [Peter's] word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41.)

This was the beginning of the harvesting of souls in the meridian of time—the first harvest of the church of Jesus Christ. It was also the beginning of the harvest of all nations. For the conversions were made of Jews from many lands who had gathered to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Weeks.

If the first three holy days commanded by God taught of Christ's first coming and were subsequently fulfilled by that coming, what of the remaining three holy days? The nature of these days and the time of their observance, the seventh month and the time of the final harvest, suggest that they point to Christ's second coming and the completion of his harvest. (The frequent repetition of periods of seven—seven days forming a week, seven weeks preceding the Feast of Weeks, seven times seven years preceding the hallowed year of Jubilee, seven dispensations—suggests that the period of seven represents a completed cycle.)

The Lord commands Israel:

"… In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation." (Lev. 23:24.)

Eventually this holy day came to be known as the Feast of the Trumpets, or Rosh Hashannah, the Jewish New Year of today, usually occurring around the latter part of September. (Jewish tradition uses the lunar calendar, which is variable because a 13th month is sometimes added to make the year come out even with the earth's journey around the sun.)

On this holy day, many important things in Old Testament history have occurred. The Feast of Trumpets commemorated the time of the first stop after fleeing Egyptian bondage, a time when Israel was at last free and was gathered so they could renew true worship. Later, when Cyrus, king of Persia, felt directed by God to help rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and to begin to return the scattered Judeans that they might do so, this holy day became the scene of another important renewal after exile.

"And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man in Jerusalem.

"[And they] … built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

"From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord. …" (Ezra 3:1–2, 6.)

The book of Nehemiah records the further revival of Israel with the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and a reawakening to God's words:

"And all the people gathered themselves together as one man. …

"And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation … upon the first day of the seventh month.

"So they [Ezra and other priests] read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. …

"And all the people went their way … to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them." (Neh. 8:1–2, 8, 12. Italics added.)

This holy day symbolizes, then, with its imagery of the blowing of trumpets, a call to regather and reawaken Israel. It is a time of renewal of true worship with new understanding.

Christ and his prophets teach of a latter-day awakening and gathering of Israel—the beginning of their...
second and final harvest. And there are those who see Rosh Hashannah as prophetic of this event, though most of them see it only as prophecy of the gathering and renewal of Judah. Latter-day Saints believe in a larger gathering: the Jews to Israel and all of Israel to the gospel. Both gatherings have already begun. Coincidence or not, the gold plates, which in their translated form (the Book of Mormon) have spread throughout the world to begin to awaken and gather Israel, were delivered into the hands of Joseph Smith in the latter part of September, a time closely approximate to the beginning of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Coincidence or not, a statue of Moroni, their keeper and deliverer, now stands on temple spires, trumpet to his mouth, proclaiming to all Israel that it is time to awaken and gather.

Christ also taught that at the time of his coming in power and glory, “[God] … shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt. 24:31.)

This great and final gathering to full worship will also be ushered in with the blowing of trumpets.

The fifth and holiest of all Israelite holy days is the Day of Atonement, known today as Yom Kippur, which is full of witnesses of the Savior. It was also given by commandment.

“Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement … and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.” (Lev. 23:27.)

Anciently, it was on this day that the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and there give an offering of blood that would atone for the sins of Israel, reuniting Israel with God. It was on this day that the ritual of the scapegoat was performed, where Aaron symbolically transferred all the sins of Israel upon the head of a goat.

Christ performed the act of atonement in the meridian of time. But the majority of Judah rejected the atonement. We know that in the last days there will be a refining by affliction of all mankind, with the nation of Israel a central figure in that refinement preparatory to their acceptance of Christ’s atoning work. Christ gives this description of those days:

“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

“And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.” (Matt. 24:21–22.)

It has been suggested that the apex of this affliction may be the “affliction of soul,” which will come when Judah beholds the Savior and comprehends the meaning of his wounded hands and feet.

As a simple matter of interest, the most recent Arab-Israeli war began on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. If nothing else, this demonstrates how strikingly easy it would be for the time of Israel’s final redemption to be directly connected with the Day of Atonement, a day set aside for affliction, sacrifice, and the reuniting of God with estranged man.

The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths is the final feast and with joy proclaims that the harvest is complete. It, too, has much significance:

“Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruits of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days. …

“And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees … and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.” (Lev. 23:39–40.)

This feast commemorates the fact that as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness they dwelt under booths covered over with boughs of trees. But it also relates to the harvest. Even to this day, at the appointed time, Jews set up booths at home or near synagogues with roofs of boughs and decorate them with the fruits gleaned from the harvest. There are many who have come to believe this feast symbolizes the millennium.
Zechariah may have been the first to make such a connection. He proclaims that after the Lord has come to reign as King upon the earth, “… every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.” (Zech. 14:16)

Since the Feast of Tabernacles is rejoicing in the completed harvest, would not the completion of Christ’s harvest be the cause for rejoicing at this time? Since the Feast of Tabernacles is “dwelling under boughs of goodly trees,” would not our “goodly dwelling” be Christ’s presence at such a time? The Psalms use the images of “shelter,” “dwelling place,” and “shade” all as descriptive of the Lord’s role unto his people. Nor can we ignore the former use of palm boughs to herald Christ’s entry into Jerusalem, acknowledging his kingship, or the reference in Revelation that describes heavenly worship and acknowledgment of Christ’s kingship with palm boughs. (See Rev. 7:9–10.)

So the time may come when we will all keep the Feast of Tabernacles. But our rejoicing will be in the spiritual harvest, and our dwelling will be in the presence of the Savior, not under the boughs that have so long symbolized him.

The Lord commanded Israel to observe six holy periods of time. They are part of the Law of Moses, the law that the Lord testified he came not to destroy but to fulfill. To this day many Jews continue to observe the holy days commanded by God centuries ago. What a great and marvelous revelation it will be when all that they have done so patiently and obediently through the years is shown to be a witness over and over of Jesus the Christ!

Paul explains:

“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.” (2 Cor. 3:12–14.)

Behind the veil put over the Old Testament may be many beautiful and touching witnesses of the Savior and his works.

It is little wonder prophets say that when all things are revealed men shall sing of him: “… great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways.” (Rev. 15:3.)

[illustration] The Paschal lamb was male, firstborn, and without blemish.

[illustration] Harvest—symbol of the Pentecost.

[illustration] Sunrise signifies resurrection, “firstfruits of the dead.”

Notes

Lenet Hadley Read, homemaker and mother of five children has recently moved with her husband and family from North Carolina to Tulsa, Oklahoma.
The Old Testament is absolutely essential to having a true understanding of the Bible and God™s unfolding of the greatest love story of all time. It is filled with many wonderful stories and characters. The Old Testament is chalk full of prophecies that were either fulfilled in the Old or the New Testament. So you can see how God had a plan from the beginning to unfold His Holy love for us. He told us what would happen in the Old Testament and He did, indeed, see His work finished and fulfilled in the New Testament. Conclusion. When you pair up Old Testament prophecies with the character traits of Godly men, you have an excellent resource to understand the New Testament and to become more Christ-like every day. Search the scriptures and see what God is trying to teach you. I. Origin of Jewish Holy Days from Moses in the Old testament: A. Jewish, Hebrew calendar of feast days & holy days: (Adapted from New Bible Dictionary, p 158). Mth #. The Lord's thoughts and ways are far different from ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). We remember our great presidents by celebrating their birthdays and erecting seemingly imperishable monuments of stone. But the Son of God directed us to remember His death, not his birthday, not by erecting a monument, statue or cathedral of stone but by eating and drinking perishable elements - unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (Luke 22:14-20). Symbols of the Harvest: Old Testament Holy Days and the Lord™s Ministry. Lenet H. Read. â€œWant to Be Somebodyâ€Â. Sadducees originated when the wealthier elements of the population united during the Hellenistic period, a period of Greek cultural revival around 200 B.C. A conservative priestly group, they held to older doctrines and always opposed the Pharisees, both politically and religiously. Although both groups believed in the Pentateuch (Torah), the Pharisees accepted the oral law while the Sadducees refused to accept anything not written in the Torah. Was this holy day also prophetic? After Christ™s resurrection, he spent 40 days teaching the apostles and preparing them for their ministry. By that time he considered them nearly ready for the great work that lay before them. But there was one very important step remaining. The first sheaf of barley offered 50 days earlier was symbolic of Christ as the very first fruit of the harvest from the dead. But on this day, the time of the wheat harvest, the firstfruits obtained through the witness of the Spirit began to be gathered in. â€œThen they that gladly received his [Peter™s] word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.â€ (Acts 2:41.)