



The Jewish Roots of the Resurrection—and the High Sabbath Christianity Forgot

By Gale Boyd

HOLIDAYS

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Did Christ fulfill ancient Jewish holy days? His Atonement aligned with sacred dates and prophesied events.

The Jewish holy days were structured to witness of Christ. God's most important events were and are fulfilled on these designated days. Author Gale Boyd shares excerpts of her ideas from her book *Days of Awe: Jewish Holy Days, Symbols, and Prophecies for Latter-day Saints* to help us learn how we can celebrate the message of the Resurrection this Easter season. Passover week contains 3 holy observances through which we can see Christ's last week on Earth as a planned set of events prophesied in detail through those holiday traditions and rituals.

The culminating event of the last week of Jesus' life was His resurrection. Jesus went to great lengths after He rose to make sure His disciples understood what He had done and that the resurrection would be His gift to all mankind. In fact, we know that God the Father has a resurrected body (JSH 1:17)—a glorified body of flesh and bone. We also know that Christ retains His resurrected body and will through eternity and that resurrection is provided by them for all living things regardless of worthiness. We believe that resurrection is the “end all be all” of our physical existence and that no form of life exceeds it—with perfect, incorruptible bodies, resurrected people who overcome the world through Christ can literally become co-heirs with Christ.

Over time, orthodox Christian churches have focused on the importance of Christ's resurrection over the good news of His birth, making Easter a more important and festive holiday than Christmas in countries where most people follow orthodox Christian traditions. In the United States, helped along by a creative, money-driven marketplace, the religious and irreligious trappings of Christmas have ballooned with no sign of letting up. Easter is not only eclipsed by Christmas but even by Halloween.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is trying to reclaim Easter as our most important celebration of the year, and rightly so. The immediate thought is to look to our orthodox Christian brethren and adopt some of their gorgeous traditions for the lead-up to and day of Easter observance. But perhaps there is another way.

God established with ancient Israel a yearly procession of High Holy Days that prophesied the Savior's first and second comings. He ordained these Holy Days to be centered on the temple and commanded them to be observed forever (Exodus 12:14; Leviticus 23). In fact, [according to Ezekiel](#), these will be our holidays during the millennium. At that future time, we will see and understand both the symbolic prophecies and their fulfillment as we celebrate. (An example is giving the gold plates to Joseph Smith on Jewish New Year—Rosh HaShanah—whose symbolism is of the separation of the wicked and gathering of the righteous.)

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God ordained seven High Holy Days to be commemorated by Israel. The first three, in the spring (Sacrifice of the Lamb, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits), are symbolic of the Savior's birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. The last three, in the fall (Religious New Year, Days of Awe, and Day of Atonement), focus on the separation of the wicked from the righteous, final repentance, and the coming of the millennial Messiah. The one in the middle is the Feast of Weeks, signifying the gifts of the Spirit and the Scriptures during our wilderness walk. Three pilgrimages to the temple to honor these holy days were required for those who were able.

The Shape of the Week of Christ's Death

The spring pilgrimage to the temple included three holy convocations, with the Passover sacrifice (a high holy sabbath) being observed on the 14th day of the month of Nisan. (The Jewish month of Nisan always occurs in the spring—March/April—according to the Jewish lunar/solar calendar, and Passover begins on the first full moon after the spring equinox.) The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the next day on the 15th of Nisan (another high holy sabbath day), and the First Fruits festival takes place on the day after the sabbath occurring during the week. The message of the entire holiday is deliverance.

Passover was the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb, a perfect, first-born male under one year of age with no broken bones. This innocent lamb typifies Christ, and at the first Passover, it was sacrificed between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m., as Christ would be. In Hebrews, Paul said this about Jesus:

For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself (7:26, 27).

When Jesus officiated at the Passover for His apostles, He was both the offerer and the offering.

Remember that Christ was crucified as lambs were offered in the temple. He was hurriedly taken down from the cross because the Sabbath was nigh. But John said this was not a normal Saturday sabbath but a High Holy Day: "The Jews therefore, because it

was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (**for that sabbath day was an high day,**) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31, emphasis added). The “preparation” was for the Passover. Still, Christians over the centuries have celebrated Good Friday, picturing the crucifixion on that day. [Scholars](#) of the Center for Nazarene Judaism have determined that there were no Friday-night-to-Saturday Passovers during the 20 years surrounding Christ’s crucifixion, while John says Jesus was taken down for the Passover high holy sabbath. Jesus was crucified on Thursday.

Remember that when Christ ministered in Israel, He was forced to withhold much information because of the wickedness of that generation. He said,

... An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39, 40).

The Book of Mormon prophets prophesied the signs of Christ’s death. After the wicked were destroyed by storms and earthquakes, there were three full days of utter darkness. Again, the Sign of Jonas was fulfilled. We know from Doctrine and Covenants, Section 138, that during these full three days, Christ visited the righteous in the Spirit World and established a way for those in Spirit Prison to learn the gospel and repent. We begin to see another of the fruits of the atonement. Jesus made a way for all to hear His message and to choose or reject Him in the Spirit World if they had no opportunity or refused the opportunity during mortality.

The Promise of First Fruits

First Fruits during Passover week was a wave offering in the temple by the high priest. The observance of “First Fruits” during Passover week is called *Bikkurim* in Hebrew, a word whose root is “honored son.” God commanded that it should be observed on “the day after the Sabbath that falls during Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread.” This would result in thousands of years of arguing among Jewish scholars. Did the Lord mean the day after the normal Saturday Sabbath or the day after the High Holy Day Sabbath? Jews still don’t agree, so they schedule this observance for the 16th of Nisan.

If the Lord meant the day after the normal Saturday Sabbath, then Bikkurim would always fall on a Sunday. Preparations for Bikkurim began weeks before it occurred. The priests would plant a small field of barley close to the temple. They were not allowed by the Lord to water, weed, or care for this barley at all—it had to “grow up unto itself.”

As the Jews gathered in Jerusalem to sacrifice their Paschal lambs, they brought barley with them, but it was from the previous year’s harvest. Although there had been a new barley harvest in the spring, they couldn’t eat from it until the Bikkurim offering was performed.

The high priest would go down into the field surrounded by interested onlookers, who would give their common consent when the priest found the most perfect sheaf of grain. He would set this sheaf apart by tying it with a flaxen cord. Then, he would harvest it and take it to the temple to offer as a wave offering. After that wave offering, the Jews could partake of their new barley harvest. The wave offering guaranteed a perfect harvest until Passover the following year.

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This wave offering was offered as Christ rose from the dead on Sunday, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, after three full days and nights. Jesus’ resurrection initiated a perfect harvest of souls—the perfected unity of spirit and body for all. So we have the resurrection as a fruit of Christ’s atonement; we also see that through the atonement, all mankind will hear the gospel and choose or reject it before the resurrection. But there is more...

The Importance of Elijah

Elijah has always been an important part of Judaism. A seat is reserved for him in the synagogue, and a seat is reserved for him at the Passover feast. At a certain point in the Passover recitation, the door is opened to receive him. The Jews expect Elijah to return just before the Millennial Messiah arrives.

When Moroni visited Joseph Smith ([JSH-1](#)) over and over throughout the night, and again the next day (during the fall Jewish holidays), he recited the promise of Elijah every time: “... And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.”

The curse, the wasting, means to be left “without root or branch”—to have no family, to be alone. The perfect harvest of the resurrection was always meant to include the sealing of families together and the sealing of souls into God’s eternal family. Thus, Elijah visited Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple to bestow the sealing power. And he did it on Bikkurim, the 16th of Nisan, a Sunday, the day Christ rose from the dead. The resurrection, the preaching of the gospel in the Spirit World, the eternal uniting of families together and into God’s own family—the atonement of Jesus is the most glorious of all blessings to mankind.

Our Holy Days

God’s most important events were and are fulfilled on these designated days. The fact that the visitations and restoration of keys in the Kirtland Temple occurred on the First Fruits holiday shows that God continues to fulfill the prophetic symbolism of the Jewish holidays in our time. The Jewish holy days were structured to witness of Christ, so the Jews would recognize Him at His coming. As Latter-day Saints continue to develop the richness of our Easter celebrations, may we consider the precedence observed by our ancient brethren and sisters and seek to develop rituals and traditions that point our hearts to recognizing the reality of Christ’s Resurrection and His 2nd Coming.

About the author

Gale Boyd

Gale Boyd has been a teacher, poet, author, and editor and is currently the copy editor for Public Square Magazine. Born in D.C. and raised in L.A., she joined the Church at age 16, converting from Science, which was the religion in her home. She discovered her true heritage a few years later and began her deep dive into Judaism at that point. Fifteen years into her temple marriage, her then

family of seven began their 14-year adventure in international living by moving to Israel, where they lived for 8 years, adding one more child and changing the trajectory of eight lives.