MY FATHER'S HOUSE
TEMPLE WORSHIP
AND SYMBOLISM
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

RICHARD NEITZEL HOLZAPFEL
DAVID ROLPH SEELY

BOOKCRAFT
Salt Lake City, Utah
THREE

Temple Worship at the Time of Christ

Sing unto the Lord, bless his name;
shepherd his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the heathen,
his wonders among all people.
Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name:
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness:
fear before him, all the earth.
—Psalm 96:2, 3, 8, 9

Nephi rejoiced in the coming of Christ, which was typified by the law of Moses: “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” (2 Ne. 11:4). The temple at the time of Jesus was the focal point of worship under the Mosaic law, and all of the statutes and ordinances pointed towards the
Savior's advent. The children of Israel came into the presence of the Lord to worship him, through blood sacrifice and a host of other offerings in similitude of the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ; to make covenants with the Lord; to repent; and to call upon the Lord in prayer. Worship at the temple was conducted under the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood, and was largely directed towards the numerous sacrifices and offerings. The making and renewing of covenants and repentance were also connected with the sacrificial system. The Levites, the priests, and the people also worshipped the Lord at the temple through group and individual prayer and the singing of hymns, many of which have been collected in the book of Psalms.

Throughout the calendar year, the Lord had instituted, under the law of Moses, a series of festivals, some of which required all Jewish males to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem and all of which entailed special rituals and ceremonies at the temple. While the forms of temple worship were being meticulously carried out at the temple, for various reasons the Jews at the time of Jesus were largely apostate. In spite of the dramatic symbolism of the Atonement present in the sacrifices performed on a daily basis at the temple, they rejected the Messiah who had come to fulfill these symbols. Nevertheless, Jesus constantly referred to the temple and its symbolism in proclaiming to his people that he was the Messiah and in explaining the nature of the mission he had come to perform.

The Temple as Sacred Space

One of the most graphic lessons taught by the temple was that in order to enter into the presence of God one must become holy. The closer one got to the Holy of Holies, the more holy or purified one had to be. All peoples were invited to come to worship the Lord God of Israel at the Temple, both those who were members of the covenant, who were considered to be Israel, and those who were not members, who were considered as Gentiles. Biblical law specifically permits acceptance of sacrifices from Gentiles (see Lev. 22:25), and the Gospel of John records that Gentiles “came up to worship at the feast” (John 12:20). As described earlier, surrounding the temple was a marble screen called the Soreg, which divided the Court of the Gentiles from the courts of the women, the Israelites, and the priests and warned Gentiles not to pass on pain of death.

Many of the people going to worship at the temple would enter the mount through the so-called Huldah gates set in the southern wall. The Talmud tells us that those who entered the Temple Mount, like Moses on Mount Sinai, removed their shoes, and Josephus tells us that many people dressed in a white garment. In addition, all of the Israelites had to present themselves before the Lord in a state of ethical and ritual purity. There was a bathhouse positioned just outside the southern gates at which Israelite men and women symbolically purified themselves by immersing themselves in a ritual bath before ascending to the Temple Mount.

Once on the Temple Mount, Israelites passed through the Court of the Gentiles and, entering through the east gate, went into the Court of the Women. Women coming to worship could look through the gate on the west and view the sacrifices at the altar and receive the priestly benediction pronounced from stairs at the doorway of the temple. In this court the Israelites, both men and women, could pray and sing hymns. The men could enter the court of the temple itself and could stand just inside the gate to witness the sacred ordinances being performed. A line in the pavement marked the end of the Court of the Israelites and the beginning of the Court of the Priests, which surrounded the temple.

Only those holding the priesthood, priests and Levites, could enter the Court of the Priests and the temple building. And only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, which he did exclusively on the Day of Atonement. It must be remembered that under the law of Moses the priests represented all of Israel, and thus symbolically Israel did indeed enter into the presence of the Lord. Under the higher law, with the restored Melchizedek Priesthood, both men and women can enter the temple and present themselves before the Lord.
Through the concept of sacred space, the Lord taught in the law of Moses the same principles presented in the higher law in Doctrine and Covenants 76, where we learn that the final rewards following the probationary state are different degrees of glory: celestial, terrestrial, and telestial. These degrees of glory are various degrees of enjoying the presence of God—the telestial, the presence of the Holy Ghost only; the terrestrial, the presence of the Son; and only the celestial, the presence and the fulness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Attainment of these various rewards are based on the degree of holiness attained by an individual during the time of his or her probation.

Priests and Priesthood

The intention of the covenant, whether under the higher or the lower law, was stated by the Lord at Sinai: “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Under the lower law the priesthood was confined to the descendants of one tribe, Levi. The sacrifice of the firstborn lamb symbolically represented that Jesus Christ as the Only Begotten would offer an infinite sacrifice on behalf of all mortals. Through the Atonement, all mankind can become sons and daughters of Jesus Christ, since he ransomed all from sin and death. Symbolically, the Lord required of his covenant people the firstborn of their flocks in similitude of this infinite sacrifice. This included their firstborn sons as well. Under the law of Moses the symbolism of offering the firstborn was fulfilled when the Lord chose from the twelve tribes one of the tribes, Levi, who would represent before the Lord the firstborn (see Num. 3:12–13; 8:5–22). For the rest of Israel the typifying of the sacrifice of Christ was continued in an offering at the temple signifying the redemption or substitute sacrifice of the firstborn (see Ex. 13:13) both through the atonement of Christ and through the selection of the Levites who would serve the Lord exclusively. It is important to remember that while each family did not have access to priesthood through the patriarchal order, under the lower law the people were not deprived of the blessings of priesthood in their midst; they were dependent upon the Levites for such blessings.

In ancient Israel the Aaronic Priesthood was held exclusively by the descendants of the tribe of Levi. There were three levels of the Aaronic Priesthood: Levites, priests, and the office of high priest. The Aaronic Priesthood was given to all eligible males from the tribe of Levi. The direct descendants of Aaron were ordained as priests, and the eldest son of the eldest son all the way back to Aaron presided over the Aaronic Priesthood in the office of high priest. The priesthood was responsible for fulfilling all of the rituals and ceremonies of the Mosaic law. In short, those who held the priesthood were responsible for maintaining the holiness of the people. Those holding the Aaronic Priesthood had varying functions, depending on the offices they held.

The Levites served in various capacities surrounding the tabernacle and later the temple. They assisted the priests in many of their duties and took care of the courts and chambers of the temple, as well as the furnishings and vessels. Some were gatekeepers, porters, treasurers, choristers, and musicians.

The priests were mainly in charge of supervising and carrying out at the temple the many rituals, sacrifices, and festivals prescribed by the law of Moses. The descendants of Aaron were divided into twenty-four priestly families called “courses,” each of which took a turn lasting a week officiating at the temple. They all officiated together at the important annual festivals. There is also evidence that the priests were responsible to teach the people the law (see Mal. 2:6–7; Jer. 18:18) and to regularly bless the people in the name of the Lord (see Num. 6:22–27).

The office of high priest was a hereditary one and was normally held for life. The high priest held the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the children of Israel, and presided at many of the daily and annual ceremonies of the temple. Of particular significance was his participation on the Day of Atonement, as described in Leviticus 16. On that occasion the high priest went into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice
on the mercy seat, symbolizing the power of the Atonement to cleanse all of repentant Israel from their sins and to render them worthy to be in the presence of the Lord.

The Levites were set apart by the laying on of hands (see Num. 8:10). The model for the consecration and setting apart of the priests was revealed by the Lord as recorded in Leviticus 8. Here it is stated that Moses took Aaron and his sons and "washed them with water" (Lev. 8:6). He then "poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron's head, and anointed him, to sanctify him" (Lev. 8:12). Moses took blood from the sacrifices and "put it upon the tip of Aaron's right ear, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot" (Lev. 8:23). Finally Moses "took of the anointing oil, and of the blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon his sons' garments with him; and sanctified Aaron, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him" (Lev. 8:30).

As has been discussed previously, the washing, anointing with oil, and sprinkling with blood were all symbols of holiness. The priests were washed, symbolic of the need for moral and ritual purity when serving in the presence of the Lord. They were anointed with the sacred oil, symbolic of the setting apart to the service of the Lord. They were anointed with blood, symbolic of the responsibility of officiating in the priesthood and of the power of the blood to cleanse from sin. Finally, the oil and the blood were sprinkled on their garments, symbolic of the solemn responsibility of representing all of Israel before the Lord. The English word consecrated is a translation of a Hebrew word meaning "to make holy."

There is no scriptural evidence for the clothing of the Levites, but Josephus records that at the time of Jesus the Levites had gained the privilege of wearing priestly linen robes.

The Lord revealed to Israel, as recorded in the book of Exodus, the nature of the sacred clothing which the priests and the high priest were to wear when they officiated at the temple or participated in any of the sacred ordinances of the priesthood (see Ex. 28, 39). Their clothing reminded them, as well as all other Israelites who observed them, of the sacred nature of their calling. All of the priests wore four articles of clothing: (1) white linen breeches for modesty (see Ex. 28:42); (2) a white linen coat, or robe, which, according to Jewish tradition, reached to the ankles, with sleeves to the palms of the hands; (3) a linen girdle, or belt, around the waist; and (4) a white head covering called in the King James Version a “mitre.” Most scholars believe this headdress was some kind of a turban.

In addition to the four garments of the priests, the high priest, when he officiated at the temple, wore four additional garments: (5) a blue woolen robe bearing a fringe at the bottom
point them towards the power of the Atonement—that Christ, the creator of the world, would sacrifice his life on behalf of the world. They were able to repent and receive forgiveness only through their faith in Jesus Christ and his atonement. The Atonement was already in effect, even though the event itself had not yet taken place. The dramatic symbols of blood sacrifice were a constant reminder of the reality of that event to come.

The complex system of sacrifices and offerings are outlined in Leviticus 1–7. These sacrifices were all offered daily, at appointed times, at the temple. Various details concerning these sacrifices and offerings are found throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. For example, Numbers 28–29 gives a catalog of the additional sacrifices to be offered on the Sabbath, on the new moons, and for the various festivals. It is sufficient here to review the basics of the most important of these sacrifices and offerings in order to understand what was going on in the temple at the time of Jesus. Jewish traditions, collected in the third century A.D. in the Mishnah, offer us many additional details as to the service at the temple of Herod at the time of Jesus.

Five specific sacrifices are described in Leviticus 1–7: the burnt offering (see Lev. 1; 6:8–13); the “meat” offering, probably better translated as “meal” offering (see Lev. 2; 6:14–18); the peace offering (see Lev. 3; 7:11–21); the sin offering (see Lev. 4:1 to 5:13; 6:24–30); and the trespass offering (see Lev. 5:14 to 6:7; 7:1–10).

The burnt offering was probably a continuation of the sacrifice revealed to Adam and the patriarchs. It consisted of the offering of a male of the flocks, without blemish, and symbolized the sacrifice of the Savior. An interesting ritual accompanied this sacrifice. The offerer brought the animal voluntarily to the north side of the altar, where he himself laid his hand upon the head of the beast, probably signifying that in some way the animal represented the offerer. The animal was killed by the offerer himself and then given to the priests, who sprinkled the blood upon the altar. The carcass was skinned and cut into pieces. The priests put the pieces on the altar. The priests washed the entrails and
the legs with water, and then everything was burned on the altar "to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord" (Lev. 1:9). While the entire ceremony offers many possible symbolic interpretations of this sacrifice, one should note the prominence of the death of the animal, the water and blood, and the totality of the sacrifice. The burnt offering was made twice daily on the altar at the temple for the entire congregation of Israel—a male lamb in the morning and another in the evening.

The meal offering was an offering of thanksgiving and regularly accompanied the burnt offering. It took the form of a baked loaf made from fine flour and oil. Part of the offering was given to the Lord and burned on the altar, and part was given to the priest to eat. It was offered twice a day along with the burnt offering.

The peace offering was a communal meal consisting of any unblemished domesticated animal along with unleavened cakes. The animal was killed at the door of the temple. Certain portions were given to the Lord, to the priests, and to the offerer, who took his portion home and ate it with his family. Perhaps this meal symbolized that the Lord, the priesthood, and the people, having eaten together, were at "peace."

Two sacrifices, the sin and the trespass offerings, were connected with the laws of clean and unclean, and helped individuals to overcome ritual impurity caused by sin or the transgression of the laws of clean and unclean. Under the law of Moses, a host of human functions, some volitional and others not, rendered a person unclean—unable to enter into the precincts of the temple and to participate in religious rites performed there. In particular, sexual intercourse, seminal emissions, menstrual periods, childbirth, leprosy, and other actions or conditions were considered as defilements. Presumably these strict commandments of purity represented spiritual lessons—that the things of mortality must be overcome. Also included were "sins of ignorance," and of course willful disobedience rendered a person unworthy to participate in religious ritual. Sin of any kind involved three or four parties: the transgressor himself; the Lord; the covenant community, or the church; and often another party which was damaged in some way by the sin—for example, moral transgression often involves another party, as do dishonesty, theft, and violence.

The process of repentance has always been the same. Under the law of Moses, sacrifice was a ritual which accompanied the repentance process and provided a concrete symbol of the power of the Atonement to cleanse repentant people from sin and free them from its consequences. The Psalms explain that sacrifice without repentance is meaningless:

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:
    thou delightest not in burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
    a broken and a contrite heart, O God,
    thou wilt not despise. . . .
Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
    with burnt offering and whole burnt offering:
    then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.
   (Ps. 51:16–17, 19.)

The animal sacrificed for a sin offering depended on the rank of the person bringing the sacrifice. A high priest, or the congregation, brought a bull, a ruler a male goat, and a common person a female goat or a lamb. Poor people could bring pigeons or even a small offering of flour. The offerer, like at the burnt offering, laid his hand on the head of the animal. The blood was collected and sprinkled on the altar. Choice parts of the animal were burned to the Lord; the rest was eaten by the priests. This sacrifice was to remove from a person ritual impurity or any other "sin through ignorance" (Lev. 4:2). On certain occasions this sacrifice was offered on behalf of the congregation, but it was largely a sacrifice offered by individuals.

The animal offered for the trespass offering was usually a ram but sometimes a lamb. The animal was killed, blood sprinkled on the altar, and some of the carcass burned to the Lord, the rest being given to the priests to eat. Like the sin offering, it
symbolically cleansed a person after some infraction of the law. Transgressions of the law mentioned were the breaking of oaths and covenants, and infringing on other people's property rights, including fraud. The person guilty of such infractions could only be cleansed from such sins through repentance, restitution (which included full compensation, plus a twenty-percent penalty), and finally the transgression offering, symbolizing the completion of the repentance process.

The Daily Sacrifices and Offerings at the Temple

Jewish tradition preserved in the Mishnah contains many descriptions of the various rituals from the time of Herod's temple and much information detailing how these sacrifices were actually done at the time of Jesus. The sacrificial ceremonies were systematically performed throughout the day, and the priests followed a well-organized routine. Let us review a typical day at Herod's temple.

As has been noted, the descendants of Aaron, or priests, were divided into twenty-four divisions. From the division chosen to officiate in the temple for the week, the individual priests were chosen by lot to attend to the various functions for the day. All of the priests ritually washed and purified themselves each day before participating in any of the ordinances. First, some of the priests removed the ashes from the altar in front of the temple from the day before and prepared wood for the sacrifice. Then they awaited the call from a priest assigned to watch the horizon and determine when the dawn had come. The morning sacrifice, the burnt offering, was to be offered at the first light of dawn, and then again as evening fell.

When the assigned priest announced that the eastern horizon was light "all the way to Hebron," the sacrificial ceremony began. The trumpets sounded, the gates of the temple itself were opened, and priests went into the temple to clean the ashes from the incense altar and prepare and light the seven lamps on the branches of the lampstand, or menorah. (The westernmost branch of the menorah closest to the temple was left burning day and night, but the other branches often burned out during the night.) Then the burnt offering was sacrificed. The priests gathered in one of the chambers and, with the people, read the Ten Commandments and other scriptural passages reminding them of their covenantal obligations to the Lord. At that point another priest entered the temple again to offer the incense on the golden incense altar. During the offering of the incense, symbolic of the offering of prayer (see Ps. 141:2), the people gathered both inside the temple—in the Court of the Women and the Court of the Israelites—and outside of the temple to join in prayer (see Luke 1:10).

The priests then stood on the stairs and blessed the people with the priestly blessing (see Num. 6:23–25). As representatives of the Lord, the priests officiating at the temple, after the two daily sacrifices, would stand together on the stairs and bless the people, reciting the Priestly Benediction in Numbers:

The Lord bless thee,
and keep thee:
The Lord make his face shine upon thee,
and be gracious unto thee:
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee,
and give thee peace (Num. 6:24–26).

Originally, at this point in the service the priests would recite the name of God, Jehovah, to the people, for the name of the Lord was to be found at the temple (see 1 Kgs. 8:29). At some point in time, in order to avoid speaking the name of the Lord too frequently, the priests said "Lord" (in Hebrew "Adonai") instead of Jehovah.

To conclude the burnt sacrifice, the limbs of the sacrifice were lifted on the outer altar to be burned, the "meal" offering (in the King James Version "meat") was made, and an offering of wine was presented on the altar. The trumpets sounded again, and the Levites sang a hymn.

In much the same way the evening sacrificial rite was conducted. In between the two daily burnt offerings, the priests were busy offering all of the rest of the individual sacrifices
The architects for Herod's temple kept the same floor plan as that of Solomon's temple but doubled the cubes and then doubled them again for the attic story. The scale of the priests depicted here indicates the immense size of Herod's temple, whose one-hundred-cubit-square facade was covered in gold. The daily services at the temple reminded the Jews of their covenantal relationship with God. Each day the priests sacrificed many animals, whose blood was
which were brought that day for people's purification from the various impurities defined by the Mosaic law. These included the various thank and meal offerings; sin offerings which accompanied the purification from childbirth, the cleansing of lepers, and the fulfillment of the Nazarite vow; trespass offerings; and peace offerings.

In addition to the above five sacrifices, there was a series of other offerings of thanksgiving, financial obligations towards the redemption of the firstborn, and the maintenance of the temple which could be offered there. Around the Court of the Women was a series of chests with trumpet-shaped funnels into which these offerings could be made. It was here that the Savior witnessed the widow offering her mites.

The Sabbath was celebrated by a doubling of the daily burnt offering—four lambs instead of two—but the host of individual sacrifices in between was not permitted. In addition to the two double burnt offerings, the priests removed the old shewbread, which was then reverently eaten, and offered twelve fresh loaves along with an incense offering on the table of shewbread.

Each of the temple festivals was celebrated with variants of the five major sacrifices which added to the symbolism of the festivals. For example, the burnt offering was often doubled like the Sabbath sacrifice. At Passover all of the lambs to be eaten by the congregation were slaughtered at the temple. At Pentecost a series of “first fruit” offerings was made from the harvest of the winter’s grain. The Feast of Tabernacles incorporated offerings of water and wine. And the Day of Atonement consisted of a ceremony of burnt and sin offerings, first offered by the priests and then for the congregation. At the pilgrimage festivals, each of the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem would have numerous individual offerings to be made on his or her own behalf. The temple altar was a busy place during these festivals.

Sacred Time: Feasts and Festivals

From the beginning the Lord consecrated and set apart sacred time which was to be observed by his children. The observance of sacred time was a demonstration of faith and served to establish and reinforce the relationship between God and his children. It was a time for the members of the covenant to remember their obligations to the Lord and to teach their children their sacred history. In the law of Moses the Lord revealed a whole series of sacred days which would serve in various ways to help the people remember the bounteous hand of the Lord on their behalf, to direct their hearts to him, to help them teach their children about their sacred heritage and their relationship with God, and, most important, to direct their attention to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. As part of the process of creation the Lord set apart the seventh day and set the example for its correct observance when he rested “from all his work” (Gen. 2:2). The observance of this sacred day was legislated by the Ten Commandments where the Lord commanded, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8), and where the Lord reminded Israel that the seventh day was to commemorate the Lord’s bounty in the Creation (see Ex. 20:11) and to remember the Lord’s intervention in delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt (see Deut. 5:15).

The Lord reaffirmed in the Mosaic law the importance of this sacred day (see Lev. 23:3). In short, the Sabbath was a day to rest from the labors of the world and to remember the hand of the Lord in the creation of the world and in the Exodus delivering Israel from bondage and death in Egypt. As part of the Mosaic law the Lord revealed to Israel a series of feast days, or festivals—special times to remember and reflect upon God’s intervention on their behalf and to help them teach their children, occasions that also served as symbols of the atonement of Christ. These days became days of covenant making and renewal.

Following the scriptural account, they are as follows: Sabbath, Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread, Weeks/Pentecost, Day of Atonement, Tabernacles (see Lev. 23). These sacred times were celebrated with sacred ordinances: fasting, rituals, sacrifices, and specific readings from the scriptures. Each of the sacred days and festivals was celebrated in some way, especially through sacrifices, at the temple. The Lord commanded that three of these
festivals were to be occasions on which all of the males in Israel were to present themselves “before the Lord,” that is, make a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem and present themselves at the temple, presumably in a state of ethical worthiness and ritual purity. Thus, in the New Testament, Jesus, as a law-abiding Jew, went to Jerusalem to fulfill this commandment and to celebrate the festivals.

The law of Moses contains only a brief discussion of what was to be done at these celebrations. Through the years there was undoubtedly development in the ways these festivals were celebrated. By New Testament times, as preserved in the Mishnah, Jewish practice and observation of these festivals had developed distinctive characteristics in addition to the biblical injunctions. A version of these festivals continues to be celebrated by Jews today, in spite of the fact that they do not have a temple where the prescribed sacrifices can be offered. In addition, several important religious festivals were added to the Mosaic festivals, such as the Feast of Purim and the Feast of Dedication. Following is a calendar of the major festivals:

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<th>Season/Month/Month</th>
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<td>Apr.</td>
<td>14th: Passover</td>
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<td>2 Iyyar</td>
<td>15–21: Unleavened Bread</td>
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<td>Summer</td>
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<td>May</td>
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<td>3 Sivan</td>
<td>Weeks/Pentecost: 50th day after Passover</td>
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These festivals can be discussed on three different levels: first, most of the festivals commemorate an important historical event; second, the festivals coincide with important agricultural and sometimes astronomical events which lend significance to their celebration; and third, each of them becomes a type of future events. For example, Passover commemorated the Exodus from Egypt when the Lord miraculously delivered the children of Israel from bondage and death; it coincided with the time of the spring planting, which focused on the need for light and fertility; and it was a type for the future deliverance offered by the Atonement.

Sabbath. One of the most important of the sacred festivals, since it occurred so frequently, was the Sabbath. The Sabbath was observed by Israel as a time to remember the Lord as the creator of the universe and as the Redeemer of Israel who delivered them from the bondage of slavery and from death. Following the example of the Lord at the Creation, the covenant people were to rest from their daily labors on the seventh day of the week. On that day they were to remember the Lord's work in the Creation and his power in delivering them from bondage in Egypt. The beginning and ending of the Sabbath, from dusk to dusk, was indicated at the temple by the sounding of trumpets. At the temple the daily sacrifices for the community were doubled, but there
were no individual sacrifices offered. In addition, the shewbread was changed, the priests eating the week-old bread and replacing it with fresh.

Passover. The Passover feast originated with a sacred meal eaten by the children in Israel. It commemorated the Lord's deliverance of Israel from the angel of death which killed all of the first-born in Egypt and which led to the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt. The details of the meal were revealed to Israel as recorded in Exodus 12. On the tenth day of the first month (Nisan) an unblemished male lamb was chosen. On the fourteenth day the lamb was to be killed and the blood of the lamb was to be daubed on the doorpost of the houses where the people would eat it. The flesh of the lamb was to be roasted and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Care was to be taken that no bones were broken in the lamb, and any of the flesh that remained was to be completely burnt as an offering to the Lord. The lamb is clearly a symbol of the Savior: the unblemished lamb whose blood was to deliver the firstborn from death. The blood on the door witnessed to the Lord and the angel of death faith and obedience exercised by those within, who would then eat the flesh of the symbol which had died to preserve them from bondage and death. That all of the flesh would be eaten and the remainder and the bones would all be burnt symbolized the totality of the sacrifice of the lamb.

The unleavened bread represented the haste with which the children of Israel would flee Egypt, since they would not even have time to allow yeast to rise. In addition, leaven was a symbol of corruption, and unleavened bread was symbolic of the purity of the sacrifice which Christ would make. The bitter herbs represented the bitter slavery which was imposed upon Israel. The Lord indicated one of the functions of this festival when he said: "And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses" (Ex. 12:26-27). From the 15th to the 21st day, the people were to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, in which time the people were to abstain from leavened bread as well as remove all leaven from their homes, rest from their labors, remember the Lord, who provides us with what we eat, and thus be reminded of the purity expected of the covenant people.

This festival was celebrated in the spring and became enriched through time with its natural connections with the planting of the crops and the supplications to the Lord for abundance in crops and flocks. Spring begins with the vernal equinox and the astronomical phenomenon of the lengthening of the day. Thus the celebration incorporates light and life. This was the season of the death and the resurrection of Christ, who was described in the agricultural terms of this season, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24).
The symbols pointing to Christ are clear: the lamb, the blood, the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs. Through time the Jews added wine to the Passover meal, and it is likely that at the time of Christ wine was also part of the Passover meal. At the Last Supper, Jesus took the unleavened bread and the wine, two of the symbols of the Passover, which he with his disciples had just celebrated in remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt, and blessed them and directed his disciples to eat them in remembrance of the new covenant and thus commemorate the historical intervention of the Atonement which delivered humankind from sin, death, and hell.

This festival was one of the greatest celebrated in Jerusalem at the time of Christ. Jews flocked into Jerusalem from all over the world. In terms of the temple, each of the lambs eaten at the Passover meal had to be sacrificed in the temple. In addition, extra sacrifices were offered at the temple during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Weeks/Pentecost. For seven weeks, 49 days, the children of Israel continued the harvest of the firstfruits. On the 50th day, they celebrated the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost, which is the Greek word for fifty. This was a joyous time, and people brought sacrifices of gratitude from the firstfruits to the Lord. Just as Passover commemorated the Exodus, Pentecost, in Jewish tradition, came to represent the giving of the law on Sinai, because it was believed that the law was given on the fiftieth day after Israel left Egypt.

This festival took place in the early spring as well, when in Israel the people gathered together the firstfruits of the winter grains. It was a time of thanksgiving and reminded the people of their dependence on the Lord. For the followers of the risen Christ, the symbolism of Pentecost culminated in the book of Acts when the Lord poured forth the Holy Ghost upon all (see Acts 2:1-13). It represented the giving of the law to the Gentiles and at the same time was a sort of celebration of firstfruits, with all those present receiving the Holy Ghost. As at all the festivals, special offerings were made on Pentecost at the temple.

Day of Atonement. Israel celebrated two new years. Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the first month, but a new year called Rosh Hashanah was also celebrated on the first day of the seventh month. On the tenth day of the seventh month was the most holy of days in ancient Israel—the Day of Atonement. The Lord stated the purpose of this festival: “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord” (Lev. 16:30). The Lord gave specific directions for the celebration of this solemn day. The people were to prepare themselves through fasting, prayer, and repentance. They were then to present themselves before the Lord, and the priests would offer a series of sacrifices representing the purification of the priests and all of Israel.

The high priest brought a bullock as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering for himself and his house, and two male goats and a ram for the congregation of Israel. He cast lots over the two goats, designating one as a sin offering to the Lord and the other as the “scapegoat,” or the goat which would “escape” being slaughtered and which would be “for Azazel.” The term Azazel either represented a name of the evil one residing in the wilderness or was a name for the wilderness itself. The priest killed the bullock, and the goat for the sin offering, and entered the Holy of Holies, representing the presence of the Lord. There he offered incense before the Lord and sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, signifying the power of the Lord to cover over, or forgive, the sins of the high priest, his family, and all of Israel. The goat for Azazel was then brought forth, and upon its head the high priest confessed all of the sins of Israel, symbolizing for Israel that through repentance and the blood of the Atonement their sins could be removed. The high priest then offered the two rams as burnt offerings for his house and for the congregation of Israel.

This most sacred of sacrifices represented Christ, and the blood in the Holy of Holies his blood, which would allow Israel to purify themselves and become worthy to enter into his presence. In some ways the scapegoat also represented Christ, taking
upon himself the sins of the people. The symbolism of this specific day was in many ways fulfilled with the literal rending of the veil of the temple, indicating that through the atonement of Christ, all men and women would be able to enter into his presence.

This festival is specifically mentioned in the Gospels, though the symbolism of the Day of Atonement pervades the life and death of the Savior. It was literally fulfilled with the death and resurrection of the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice offered for all mankind the possibility of the redemption from sin and of atonement with God through the Son.

Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated from the 14th to the 21st of the month of Chislev. This festival occurs in the fall (September or October of our solar calendar) and is primarily a joyous celebration of the harvest. It came to be associated with the forty years of wandering in the wilderness when the children of Israel lived in tents (booths) and were miraculously cared for by the Lord at various times through water from the rock, manna, and quail. The children of Israel were commanded to live in temporary booths for seven days, in commemoration of the wandering in the wilderness (see Lev. 23:42-43) and to take the boughs of “goodly trees, palm trees, thick trees, and willows,” and rejoice (see Lev. 23:40). Through time the interpretation of these became citron (ethorg), myrtle, palm (lulav), and willow. It was a time of great joy and festivity.

The children of Israel were specifically commanded to read the law every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles, symbolic of the renewal of their covenants with the Lord both as a nation and individually. The temple of Solomon was dedicated on this day as well as the altar of the rebuilt temple in the days of Zerubbabel.

The book of Zechariah identifies the Feast of Tabernacles as the festival to which all will be gathered to celebrate in the Millennium and identifies much of the symbolism associated with this festival with the first and second comings of the Messiah (see Zech. 14:16).

Prayer

The temple was a house of prayer. In his dedicatory prayer Solomon expressed this profound understanding: “And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive” (1 Kgs. 8:30). Prayer at the temple occurred on at least three levels. The priests offered specific prayers on behalf of the people on a daily basis and at the times of the festivals. The people joined together with the priests throughout daily service and on special occasions. In addition, prayer is an individual matter, and those who came to worship the Lord brought their own individual petitions which they offered to the Lord at the sacred place. The temple, as the symbol of the presence of the Lord, was a powerful reminder to those who sought the Lord in prayer. Daniel, the prophet in exile, faced Jerusalem three times a day, even though the temple had been destroyed (see Dan. 6:10).

The temple was a sacred place where men and women could go into the presence of God to worship him through sacrifices and offerings. There, all could be instructed in matters of holiness and could commune with the Lord God of Israel. The repentant could be cleansed from their sins. Those who worshipped at the temple did so with thanksgiving and joy in their hearts:

I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth:

for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

In the day when I cried thou answerest me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.

(Ps. 138: 2–3.)