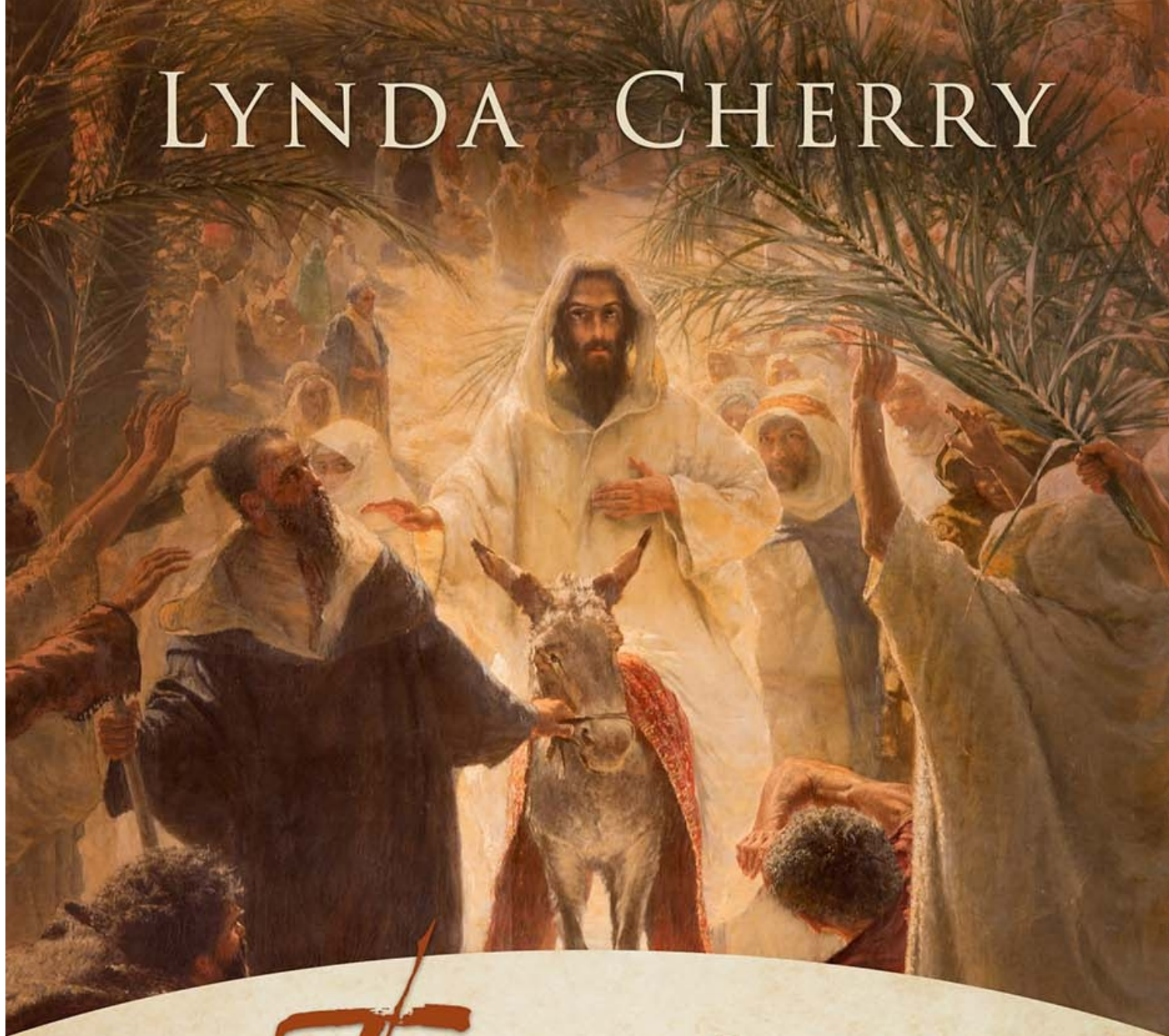


LYNDA CHERRY



THE *Feasts and*
FESTIVALS
OF THE
Messiah

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Temple-Centered Holy Days

*Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord God
in the place which he shall choose;
in the feast of unleavened bread,
and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles:
and they shall not appear before the Lord empty.¹*

With the exception of the first Passover, or *Pesach*, in Egypt, the seven feast days ordained by the Lord were to take place at the temple (or the tabernacle while in the wilderness). The Lord commanded that all males were to present themselves before the Lord “in the place which he shall choose”—or in other words, the temple. It was a serious and sacred appointment, where one was to consider his standing before God, receive more of His word, and to renew his covenants with Jehovah.

Sarah E. Fisher explained that the Hebrew word *moed* refers to an “appointed time” and “reflects the times that God has specifically appointed to honour and remember moments in history when God rescued his people. . . . These appointed times are holy, or set aside, because they are also times when God meets with us. He connects with us, on our level, during these feasts and festivals.”²

The “three times in a year” referenced in the verse quoted at the beginning of this chapter encompassed all seven feasts, as three were celebrated in the spring (Passover or *Pesach*, Feast of Unleavened Bread or *Hag Ha-Matzot*, and Feast of Firstfruits or *Bikkurim*), one fifty days following Passover (Feast of Weeks or Pentecost or *Shavuot*), and three were celebrated in the fall (Feast of Trumpets or *Rosh Hashanah*, Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur*, and Feast of Tabernacles or *Sukkot*).

The temple was the center of Israelite social life as well as its spiritual center. In addition to the daily sacrifices and the daily hour of prayer, the seven holy festivals kept the community focused on God, as they sang the psalms before Him, and participated in the sacred rituals.

The book of John focuses on the temple-centered feasts as a background to the ministry of Jesus. Almost all of the events recorded by John took place in Jerusalem in or near the temple, and during the feast day celebrations. The only chapters in John that do *not* reference a feast day are chapters 1 and 4. Jesus’s greatest public declarations: “I am the living water,”³ and “I am the light of the world”⁴ took place at the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. His statement “I am the bread of life” occurred in Galilee, but John places the Passover feast in context, by noting that Jesus and His disciples were shortly to

make their way to the temple in Jerusalem as the Passover was near at hand.⁵

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were celebrated together in the same week.⁶ The bread held a central symbolic role in the Passover meal, and it was with the bread of the Passover meal that Jesus instituted the first sacrament, when He said: “Take, eat; this is my body,”⁷ or as recorded in Luke, “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.”⁸ John is a deliberate witness of the fact that the rituals of the feasts and festivals testified of Jesus as the Messiah.

The book of Leviticus contains specific instructions regarding the seven feast or festival days, but it also records specifics for temple services and sacrifices. The *Old Testament Seminary Teacher Manual* queries: “Why study this book?” And then explains:

The word *Leviticus* is a Latin word that has reference to the Levites—one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Levites held the lesser priesthood and were given the responsibility to officiate in the tabernacle and later at the temple in Jerusalem.⁹ The book of Leviticus contains instructions on performing priesthood duties, such as animal sacrifice and other rituals that would help teach the children of Israel about Jesus Christ and His Atonement.¹⁰ The Lord revealed a primary purpose for the instructions He gave in the book of Leviticus: “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.”¹¹ As students study this book, they can deepen their understanding and appreciation of the Savior’s Atonement. Students can also learn important truths that will help them to be holy, meaning spiritually clean and set apart for sacred purposes. Living these truths will prepare students to serve Heavenly Father and His children.¹²

If Israel were to become a “kingdom of priests” as promised in the Mt. Sinai covenant,¹³ the place to begin their instruction was with the book of Leviticus.

The book of Leviticus is one of the most overlooked in the Bible. Yet, the training of Jewish children *began* with the book of Leviticus.¹⁴

Alfred Edersheim explained that:

As soon as the child had any knowledge, the private and the united prayers of the family, and the domestic rites, whether of the weekly Sabbath or of festive seasons, would indelibly impress themselves upon his mind. It would be difficult to say which of those feasts would have the most vivid effect upon a child’s imagination . . . From the moment a child was at all capable of being instructed—still more, of his taking any part in the services—the impression would deepen day by day. Surely no one who had ever worshipped within the courts of Jehovah’s house at Jerusalem could ever have forgotten the scenes he had witnessed, or the words he had heard. Standing in that gorgeous, glorious building, and looking up its terraced vista, the child would watch with solemn awe, not unmingled with wonderment, as the great throng of white-robed priests busily moved about, while the smoke of the sacrifice rose from the altar of burnt-offering. Then, amid the hushed silence of that vast multitude, they had all fallen down to worship at the time of incense. Again, on those steps that led up to the innermost sanctuary the priests had lifted their hands and spoken over the people the words of blessing; and then, while the drink-offering was poured out, the Levites’ chant of Psalms had risen and swelled into a mighty volume . . . The Jewish child knew many of these words. They had been the earliest songs he had heard . . . But now, in those white-marbled, gold-adorned halls, under heaven’s blue canopy, and with such surroundings, they would fall upon his ear like sounds from another world, to which the prolonged threefold blasts from the silver trumpets of the priests would seem to waken him. And *they were* sounds from another world; for, as his father would tell him,

all that he saw was after the exact pattern of heavenly things which God had shown to Moses on Mount Sinai; all that he heard was God-uttered, spoken by Jehovah Himself through the mouth of His servant David, and of the other sweet singers of Israel . . . Verily this Temple with its services was heaven upon earth!¹⁵

The city of Jerusalem has been called “the navel of the earth” for thousands of years. It is the holy city for Israelites, Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Within that holy city, lies its heart, the temple mount. An article in *The Jerusalem Post* asserted: “Jerusalem has but one center of gravity, known as axis mundi or ‘the navel of the world.’ This place is called ‘the Temple Mount’—with the definite article.”¹⁶

The Jerusalem temple was destroyed twice, first by the Babylonian conquest in 587/586 BC and the second temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

Following the Babylonian conquest, more Jews lived outside of Israel than within it. This situation is referred to as the *Diaspora*, or the dispersion. After the second temple was built, these dispersed Jewish people made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast days. Josephus, an ancient historian contemporary with the Gospel authors, stated that at Passover, the population of Jerusalem swelled to over two million, and necessitated the sacrifice of 256,500 lambs.¹⁷ Although some have disputed Josephus’s numbers, they give us an idea as to how seriously the Jewish pilgrims took the command to present themselves on these holy days before the Lord in Jerusalem.

Once the temple was destroyed again in 70 AD the sacrifices at the temple ceased, but the Jewish people (mostly) continued to celebrate the non-sacrificial rituals of the feast days in their homes and communities. For many, the feast days are still a time of sacred remembrance and renewal.

Maimonides stated: “Even though, the Temple is now in ruin because of our sins, a person must hold its [site] in awe, as one would regard it when it was standing.”¹⁸

¹ Deuteronomy 16:16.

² Fisher, “Moed: The Creator’s Appointed Times,” *Hebrew Word Lessons*.

³ John 7:37.

⁴ John 8:12.

⁵ See John 6:4, 35.

⁶ See Luke 7:7.

⁷ Matthew 26:26.

⁸ Luke 22:19.

⁹ See Numbers 3:5–10.

¹⁰ See Alma 34:13–14.

¹¹ Leviticus 19:2; see also Leviticus 11:44–45; 20:25; 21:6.

¹² “Introduction to Leviticus,” *Old Testament Seminary Teacher Manual*.

¹³ See Exodus 19:5–6.

¹⁴ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 161.

¹⁵ Edersheim, *Sketches of a Jewish Social Life*, 103–4.

¹⁶ Shana, “A glimpse into the ‘navel of the world,’” *The Jerusalem Post*.

¹⁷ Josephus, *War* 6.9.3, 422–27.

¹⁸ *Beit Haberchirah*, 6:7.



Messiah-Centered Holy Days

*And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law,
every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice;
and that great and last sacrifice
will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.¹*

As we glance through the chapters of Leviticus, we see that Jehovah Himself gave instructions as to how He was to be worshipped. We see detailed information about how sacrifices were to be prepared and offered. We note that sacrifices varied on the different festival days, and that the mood could change from serious reflection during the Day of Atonement, to rejoicing and celebration at the Feast of Tabernacles. There was the golden pitcher of water at the Feast of Tabernacles, and the solemn assembly and the presentation of the family lamb at Passover. Throngs joined together to sing the Hallel, and the Levites blew their trumpets in joyful praise. It was a communal family bonded by covenant in the name of their God, Jehovah.

In all of these sacrifices and rituals, we see symbols that point to the mission and Atonement of the Savior. Amulek testified:

*Therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice,
and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be,
a stop to the shedding of blood;
then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled;
yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle,
and none shall have passed away.
And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law,
every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice;
and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God,
yea, infinite and eternal.²*

One writer notes:

The first point, then, which requires our notice is this: In each offering there are at least *three distinct objects* presented to us. There is the *offering*, the *priest*, the *offerer*. A definite knowledge of the precise import of each of these is absolutely requisite if we would understand the offerings. What, then, is the *offering*? What the *priest*? What the *offerer*? Christ is the offering; Christ is the priest; Christ is the offerer. Such and so manifold are

the relations in which Christ has stood for man and to man, that no one type or set of types can adequately represent the fulness of them . . . As man under the law, our substitute, Christ stood for us towards God as offerer . . . Thus His body was His offering: he willingly offered it; and then as priest He took the blood into the holiest. As *offerer*, we see Him *man under the law*, standing our substitute, for us to fulfill all righteousness. As *priest*, we have Him presented as the *mediator*, God's messenger between Himself and Israel. While as the *offering* He is seen *the innocent victim*, a sweet savor to God, yet bearing the sin and dying for it.³

Jesus and His apostles kept and honored the feasts more than a thousand years after Moses. It was during Passover that Jesus, at twelve years old, left his parents' side, to return to the temple.⁴ It was at Passover that Jesus first overturned the moneychangers' tables at the temple and declared that it was His "Father's house,"⁵ and Passover again, when He overthrew the tables a second time, declaring this time that the temple was *His* house.⁶ It was at Passover that Jesus performed the Atonement, gave up His life, and was placed in the tomb. He arose from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits, or *Bikkurim*.

Jesus Christ, Jehovah, Yahweh, Yeshua, is at the heart of the temple, its services, and its feast days.

Paul explained that the holy feast days were "a shadow of things to come," and that they testified of Jesus as the Christ and the long-awaited Messiah.⁷

Edward Chumney states, "Although God gave us festivals to observe, God never gave the festivals so we would obtain salvation from Him by observing them because salvation only comes by faith (*emunah*); however God did give the festivals for the purpose of teaching and instructing His people concerning His plan of redemption and our personal relationship to Him."⁸

The timing of the spring and fall feasts fall into natural order for an agriculturally-based people, who planted in the spring and brought in the harvest in the fall. Even as the animal sacrifices testified of Him, these high holy days typify the first and second comings of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In the spring Passover of His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection, He planted the seed of His gospel, watered that seed with His blood, and promised to return again for the fall harvest, culminating in the Feast of Tabernacles, often referred to as the Feast of the Bridegroom.

*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord:
his going forth is prepared as the morning;
and he shall come unto us as the rain,
as the latter and former rain unto the earth.⁹*

In the above verse in Hosea 6:3, some believe they see prophetic evidence of *two* visits by the Messiah.¹⁰ The rains came to Israel in the spring and the fall, as did the festival days. His first visit did take place in the spring. Will His second coming take place in the fall? In either case, it is a beautiful image to think of the coming of the Savior as rain to a desert!

Gale T. Boyd writes:

Rabbi Eliezer, seeing Messianic imagery in the holidays, came to the conclusion that the Messiah would come to redeem Israel during the month of *Nisan* in the spring. Rabbi Joshua disagreed with him. Surely, he said, the Messiah would come in *Tishri*—the imagery of the fall holidays proves it. We know that both Rabbis were correct. These months are the meridians of the civil and religious Jewish year. The Passover in the month

of *Nisan* testifies of the birth, life, mission, crucifixion and resurrection of the Savior. The fall holidays in the month of *Tishri* testify of his second coming. One might ask, then, can't we expect the Second Coming to occur in the fall? Not exactly. We know that Christ will make several appearances which will all be a part of the Second Coming. The event where he again partakes of the bread and wine, together with his Chosen, is a Passover fulfillment, yet it will be a Second Coming event. The imagery is what is important, and not so much the exact timing. Rest assured, the pieces will fit together tightly and exactly; every type will be fulfilled as promised. However, the entire puzzle will not be clear to us until it is finished.^{[11](#)}

^{[1](#)} Alma 34:14.

^{[2](#)} Alma 34:13–14.

^{[3](#)} Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings*, 44–45, emphasis added.

^{[4](#)} Luke 2:46; see Joseph Smith Translation.

^{[5](#)} John 2:16.

^{[6](#)} Matthew 21:13.

^{[7](#)} Colossians 2:16–17.

^{[8](#)} Chumney, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah*, 5.

^{[9](#)} Hosea 6:3.

^{[10](#)} See Chumney, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah*, 9.

^{[11](#)} Boyd, *Days of Awe*, 120.

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