

Hard Questions in Church History

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Easter: Jesus' Triumphal Entry to Resurrection

This Easter week, we step out of the New Testament order sequence to study the main events recorded in the last week of Jesus' life in connection with our Easter celebration. The message of Easter is critical to the message of the Book of Mormon. There we find an enhanced understanding of the Atonement, sacrament, and resurrection (I will touch on these at the end of this commentary). First, we will walk through events from each day during the last week of Jesus' life, as described in the Gospels (and in D&C 138).

1. Sunday: Jesus' Triumphal Entry
2. Monday: Jesus' Cleansing the Temple, according to the Synoptics (John has it at the beginning)
3. Tuesday: Jesus' Teaching in the Temple
4. Wednesday: Jesus' Olivet Sermon on the Second Coming
5. Thursday: Preparing for Passover, Jesus' Last Supper, and Gethsemane
6. Friday: Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial before Passover begins
7. Saturday: While Jesus' body in the tomb, He organizes missionary work in the Spirit World
8. Sunday: Jesus' Resurrection

Sunday: Jesus' Arrival in Jerusalem

The Triumphal Entry (Zechariah 9:9–13; Matthew 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–40; John 12:12–19)

Setting

Jesus' long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem was nearly over.¹ Just five days before Passover, on Sunday morning, He traveled the familiar road from Bethany up the back side of the Mount of Olives to the crest at Bethphage (Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29; **John 12:1 and 12**).² As He stood at the top of the Mount of Olives, He had an amazing view of what lay before him in the week ahead—physically and spiritually.

Directly in front of Him, to the west, He saw Mount Moriah, topped by Herod's massive temple and courtyards. It was Herod's goal to create the most beautiful building in the world. He expanded the temple lot to cover 35 acres and the Holy Sanctuary to soar 150 feet (46 meters) high. As Jesus gazed at Herod's temple that Sunday morning, it would have still been under construction.³ He had watched its progress since childhood when He came to Jerusalem for the annual Passover and other pilgrimage feasts (Luke 2:41). Now, the whole landscape of Jerusalem came into view.

To the left of the Temple Mount, Jesus could see the despised valley of Hinnom (2 Chronicles 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31). At the time of the Lord, the south side of the mountain was a burial ground filled with tombs.⁴ To His right, Jesus saw a portion of the busy Roman road, known as Calvary/Golgotha/“place of the skull”, which was lined with crucifixion poles. Near the crucifixion sight was a beautiful garden where His followers would soon bury His body.

At the base of the mount where He stood, Jesus could also see the beautiful olive orchards that grew near the winter flowing Kidron River. If it were dry that spring, the creek bed would make a path along the lowest point between the Mount of Olives and Mount Moriah. After Jesus’ last supper, He and His apostles would cross the Kidron and spend the night amongst the olive trees in Gethsemane. That night, as the apostles slept on spring grasses, Jesus would “descend below all things” and suffer the pains and sicknesses of the world (D&C 88:6)

Jesus would come back to stand again on the Mount of Olives as a resurrected being, and after His forty-day ministry would leave from the same spot (Acts 1:3–12). And, at a future date, He will return as King of Kings to open the millennium (Matthew 24:3–31). But at that moment, on that Sunday, from His vantage point on top of the Mount of Olives, He saw a glimpse of His upcoming week—and the eternal history of the universe.

The Triumphal Entry Text

(all biblical translation is from Berean Study Bible)

Matt 21:1–11	Mark 11:1–11
<p>1 And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey having been tied, and a colt with her. Having united them, bring them to Me, 3 and if anyone says anything to you, you will say that the Lord has need of them, and he will send them immediately.” 4 And this came to pass, that it might be fulfilled that having been spoken by the prophet, saying, 5 “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King comes to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, even upon a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” 6 And the disciples having gone and having done as Jesus commanded them, 7 brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks upon them, and He sat on them. 8 And the very great crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others were cutting down branches from the trees and were spreading them on the road. 9 And the crowds going before Him and those following were crying out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!” 10 And of Him having entered into Jerusalem all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” 11 And the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet, Jesus, the One from Nazareth of Galilee.”</p>	<p>1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent out two of His disciples 2 and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as soon as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks, ‘Why are you doing this?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it shortly.’” 4 So they went and found the colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. They untied it, 5 and some who were standing there asked, “Why are you untying the colt?” 6 The disciples answered as Jesus had instructed them, and the people gave them permission. 7 Then they led the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, and He sat on it. 8 Many in the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut from the fields. 9 The ones who went ahead and those who followed were shouting: “Hosanna!” “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” 10 “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!” 11 Then Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.</p>

Luke 19:28–40	John 12:12–19
<p>28 After Jesus had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As He approached Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, He sent out two of His disciples, 30 saying “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks, ‘Why you are untying it?’ tell him ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32 So those who were sent went out and found it just as Jesus had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 “The Lord needs it,” they answered. 35 Then they led the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks over it, and put Jesus on it. 36 As He rode along, the people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 And as He approached the descent from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of disciples began to praise God joyfully in a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen: 38 “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” 39 But some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!” 40 “I tell you,” He answered, “if they remain silent, the very stones will cry out.”</p>	<p>12 The next day the great crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting: “Hosanna!” “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the King of Israel!” 14 Finding a young donkey, Jesus sat on it, as it is written: 15 “Do not be afraid, O daughter of Zion. See, your King is coming, seated on the colt of a donkey.” 16 At first His disciples did not understand these things, but after Jesus was glorified they remembered what had been done to Him, and they realized that these very things had also been written about Him. 17 Meanwhile, many people continued to testify that they had been with Jesus when He called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead. 18 That is also why the crowd went out to meet Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. 19 Then the Pharisees said to one another, “You can see that this is doing you no good. Look how the whole world has gone after Him.”</p>

Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:2–7; Mark 11:2–7; Luke 19:29–35; John 12:14 “Jesus . . . sent two of his disciples and got a young ass” (JST, John 12:14) As the Lord’s group prepared to enter Jerusalem, the prophecies found in Zechariah chapters 9 to 14 were about to be fulfilled. Zechariah described the “day of the Lord,” when the Messianic King would come to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, having a spirit of grace and prayer, to cleanse Jerusalem, and be the source of Living Water (Zech. 9:9; 12:10; 13:1; 14:8). “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zech. 9:9, NIV). Jesus like Solomon, would ride on a donkey (Matthew 24:3–36; 1 Kings 1:33). Accordingly, Jesus fulfilled this prophesy as He sent two disciples to get the young colt to ride into the city.⁵ It is good to note that Jesus did not ride on a horse. In the Roman world, horses were used as war animals. He knew that He was not coming to conquer Jerusalem at this time.

Matthew 21:18; Mark 11:8; Luke 19:36; John 12:12–13 “many spread their garments in the way and others cut down branches” The crowds that gathered from different directions (John 12), joined Jesus’ descent from the Mount of Olives by either walking through the olive groves near Gethsemane, or crossing the bridge built to connect the two mountains. They ended at the Court of the Gentiles on the Temple Mount.

The news that Jesus was coming spread quickly and many people gathered to join those traveling with Him into the city (John described crowds from different areas converging to greet Him, John 12:9; 12, 17–18, 20). They picked branches of the new spring growth along the hillsides to wave in celebration of Jesus’ arrival for Passover. John 12:13 records they waved palm fronds as well.⁶ They draped their cloaks on the young donkey and on Jesus’ path in an honorary fashion. And yet, little did they know that this arrival was essential to their eternal salvation.

Jesus' triumphal entry echoed the traditions associated with the Jewish feast of the Tabernacles. At that feast, a procession of priests carried water to the temple altar (Leviticus 23:34–43). They were accompanied by a procession of people waving branches of willow, myrtle or palm leaves in their right hands and singing Psalm 118:25—the very psalm repeated at Jesus' triumphal entry in the next verse.

Matthew 21:9–10; Mark 11:9–10; Luke 19:37–39; John 12:13b “Hosanna” The crowds praised the Lord, by quoting (or singing) Psalm 118:26, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD.” They also called “Hosanna/Save,” which was asking for something more. Originally “hosanna” was a call for help, but, over time, it became a call of rejoicing. I assume that the heavenly hosts also joined in the throng praising the Lord that morning (applying 2 Kings 6:16).

John 12:19 “. . . the world is gone after him” Jesus' arrival created quite a commotion in Jerusalem. The news of His signs and miracles, especially His most recent and shocking, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, had spread far and wide. The crowd had great expectations of Jesus' abilities and all wanted to see for themselves. The commotion that Jesus received raised enough concern amongst the Jewish leaders as to hasten their plans to kill Him (Matthew 12:14; Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47; and John 12:10).

The day after Jesus' acclaimed entrance into Jerusalem coincided with the day the priests selected their Passover lambs (Exodus 12:3, four days before they were to be slaughtered). At the end of the week, Jesus would become *the* Passover Lamb.

Monday: Jesus' First Day in Jerusalem

Cleansing the Temple (Matthew 21:12–16; Mark 11:15–18; Luke 12:45–48; John 2:13–25)

All four Gospels include Jesus cleansing the temple. As the Synoptic Gospels put everything that happened in Jesus' Jerusalem ministry into the last week of His life, they include Jesus cleansing the temple here too. However, John places the timing of the cleansing at the beginning of the Lord's ministry (John 2:13–17). We find consensus everywhere in the scriptures that it happened *only once*.⁷ With the amount of biblical information we now have, it is more likely that the temple cleansing happened once at the beginning of Jesus' ministry as John describes. In part, because, it would have been too dangerous at this point in Jesus' life to do something so radical to disturb the peace.

With the Jewish leaders actively seeking to kill Him, it is likely the temple police would have taken Him. Furthermore, all the Gospels say Jesus taught at the Temple the next day. I doubt the police would have let Him back on the temple grounds after causing such a raucous the day before. The timing is less significant though. The point is—it happened.

Matt 12:12–17	Mark 11:15–19
<p>Then Jesus entered the <i>temple courts</i> and drove out all who were buying and <i>selling there</i>. He overturned the tables of the <i>money changers</i> and the seats of those <i>selling doves</i>. 13 And He declared to them, “<i>It is written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer.’ But you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’</i>” 14 The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them. 15 But the chief priests and scribes were indignant when they saw the wonders He performed and the children</p>	<p>When they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the <i>temple courts</i> and began to drive out those who were buying and <i>selling there</i>. He overturned the tables of the <i>money changers</i> and the seats of those <i>selling doves</i>. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 Then He began to teach them and declare, “<i>Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of</i></p>

<p>shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” 16 “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked. “Yes,” Jesus answered, “have you never read: ‘From the mouths of children and infants You have ordained praise?’” 17 Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where He spent the night.</p>	<p><i>prayer for all the nations? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”</i> 18 When the chief priests and scribes heard this, they looked for a way to kill Him. For they were afraid of Him, because the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. 19 And when evening came, Jesus and His disciples went out of the city.</p>
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<p>Luke 19:45–47</p>	<p>John 2:13–21</p>
<p>Then Jesus entered <i>the temple courts</i> and began to drive out those who were <i>selling there</i>. 46 He declared to them, “<i>It is written: ‘My house will be a house of prayer.’ But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’</i>” 47 Jesus was teaching at the temple every day, but the chief priests, scribes, and leaders of the people were intent on killing Him. 48 Yet they could not find a way to do so, because all the people hung on His words.</p>	<p>13When the Jewish Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the <i>temple courts</i> He found men <i>selling</i> cattle, sheep, and doves, and <i>money changers</i> seated at their tables. 15 So He made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To <i>those selling doves</i> He said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn My Father’s house into a marketplace!” 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for Your house will consume Me.”</p>

Setting of the Cleansing of the Temple

The Temple Courtyard of the Gentiles made up the majority of the 35 acres of the Temple Mount where all were allowed to visit (similar to Salt Lake City’s Temple Square). Israelite celebrants could purchase animals necessary for their sacrifices and change their money for the temple coin, which was a Tyrian half-shekel. All financial transactions in the temple had to be in the “Tyrian” currency—including the annual temple tax, sin offerings, vows, purification, etc.

Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15–16; Luke 19:45; John 2:15–16 “He drove them all out” The Gospel of John explains that Jesus made a scourge or whip out of cords. Jesus must have been extremely strong and powerfully determined to clear the crowd of irreligious people and their furniture, containers and money covering acres of area. We assume Jesus’ strength came in part from his profession as a builder. The KJV says Joseph and Jesus were “carpenters” (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). The Greek, word is “builder,” and often meaning a stone mason. We are not told if Jesus’ disciples helped or if He single-handedly purged the profanity that defiled His Father’s House.

Several scriptural prophecies or signs of the Messianic time are associated with a temple cleansing, including: Jeremiah 7:10–12; Zechariah 14:20–21; Isaiah 56:7; Daniel 8:12–14; and Malachi 3:1–2. Each scripture is associated with God cleansing His temple or sacred spaces.

The fact that Jesus was not stopped, but was allowed to cleanse the whole area, suggests the chief priests and multitude knew the prophecies, or understood combining merchandising with the temple was out of line. Allowing Jesus to cleanse the temple lot required some level of submission to Him by the Jewish and Roman leadership. We know the temple police were quick to stop a far less disruptive offense a few years later by Paul (Acts 21:30). This suggests they knew the greedy nature of money changing should not be used in conjunction with the temple. When materialism is mingled with God’s work in the Book of Mormon, it is called priestcraft. God attacked priestcraft in Alma 1:12, 16, etc.

Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46; John 2:17 “den of robbers . . . house of prayer” All four Gospels correlate prophetic warnings relating to Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. The Synoptic Gospels all cite Jeremiah 7:11 about robbers infiltrating the temple, as well as the charge from Isaiah 56:7, “mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” John 2:17 remembers Psalms 69:9, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” The temple was the very center of Jewish worship. But Jews were in an apostate condition, and the once sacred space had lost its meaning.

John 2:18–22 “What sign can You show us to prove Your authority to do these things?” (BSB) We have no record that Jewish authorities condemned Jesus for destroying an entire business associated with the temple. Instead, they questioned if this was a *sign* of the Messiah? Jesus answered them by equating His body to the temple, but they missed the meaning and lost the chance to hear His witness. This same question is included in a conversation at the temple by the Synoptic Gospels on Jesus’ second day in Jerusalem.

Tuesday: Jesus’ Second Day in Jerusalem

Teaching at the Temple (Matthew 21–23)

Return from Bethany and Learn the Power of Faith (Matt 21:17; Mark 11:19; Luke 21:37)

Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:19; *Luke 21:37 **“at night he went out and abode . . .”* The Gospel of Mark says Jesus left the city, Luke states that Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives, but Matthew’s account remembers Jesus went to Bethany for the night. Bethany was 1½ miles outside of Jerusalem to the east on the back side of the Mount of Olives. In Bethany, He could have lodged with dear friends, Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

Matthew 21:18; *Mark 11:20–21 **“In the morning . . . they saw the fig tree”* Two Gospels record the cursed fig tree with slight differences. Mark spreads the cursing and withering incident over two days, Matthew all at once.

The withered tree may symbolize the Jewish nation, or any hypocrisy. The fig tree also represents a sign of the last days (see Jeremiah 8:13; Isaiah 34:4; and JS-Matthew 1:38). It’s usage as an eschatological sign continues into this dispensation as D&C 35:16 reads, “And they shall learn the parable of the fig-tree, for even now already summer is nigh.”⁸

Matthew 21:21–22; Mark 11:22–26 “ask in prayer, in faith” Jesus encouraged His disciples, saying that they can do more than curse a fig tree with faith, they can move mountains (and many of those mountains are emotional and spiritual). The apostles learned faith is more powerful than natural laws. Jesus taught a similar message to the Nephites. To that audience He added a qualifier: “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be done unto you” (Moroni 7:26). It must be “good” from the Lord’s perspective. There are many scriptures with the same promise.⁹ God will give if we ask what is best and listen in faith.

Jesus’ Authority Challenged (Matt 21:23; Mark 11:27; Luke 20:1)

Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:27–28; Luke 21:38; 20:1–2; “. . . who gave thee this authority?” On the morning of the second day in Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples walked up to the temple lot again. Hostile questioners greeted Him. The chief priests and elders devised a scheme to discredit Him. They asked Jesus a two-fold question:

What authority do you have?

Who gave it to you?

They are specifically asking who gave Him authority to cleanse the temple, possibly perform healings, and teach new doctrines. *Authoritative* teaching was firmly established among the Jews. All teaching was traditional, so it must be approved by, and handed down from, an authoritative teacher to a disciple. The ultimate appeal in cases of discussion was always to some great teacher or Sanhedrin decree. To become a rabbi, elder, or judge, a man needed an ordination. Jewish hierarchy included offices of *authority*, complete with “letters of orders.”¹⁰

Matthew 21:24–26; Mark 11:29–32; Luke 20:2–7 “I will ask you one thing . . .” The tables were completely turned on the chief priests and elders. Instead of answering their questions, Jesus questioned them. Jesus asked them about John the Baptist’s authority and then, according to Matthew, answered their question with three parables. His examiners will learn in the future He is the ultimate Judge with authority from His Father. He will be our Judge too.

Matthew 21:27; Mark 11:33; Luke 20:8 “neither I tell you . . .” Jesus would not answer their question because, just like now, God rarely answers questioners with doubting and prideful hearts. As the great teacher, He knew learners need faith and softened hearts. God continues to teach those who are ready with inspiration of the Spirit. But if we mortals are not meek, we must learn to distinguish right from wrong by our own experiences (Moroni 7:16).

Parable of The Two Sons (Matthew 21:28–32)

Matthew 21:28–30 “to work today in my vineyard” This parable is usually understood by acknowledging that lip service alone is insufficient, we must do what God asks. In fact, lip service is probably worse than not committing yourself at all. We often see this as Jesus looking for action, as He has said before: “come follow me,” or “sell all that thou hast.”

There is another way to read this parable, dealing more specifically with the question asked. John W. Welch has taught the Greek text can be read as the pre-mortal life when Jesus received authority from God. The alternative translation of Matthew 21:29–30 can be read:

The first son says, “Not my will,” or “Not as I will, and reconciled himself,” rather than the KJV, “I will not.”

In the second son’s response, the word “*go*” is not in the actual Greek text—it is just simply: “I/*ego*,” as in, “my way” (not “I *go*” as in the KJV, Matthew 21:30).

From Moses 4:1–2, we learn that pre-mortally, the Father asked Jehovah and Lucifer to help him, but only one son submitted to his Father’s will. This understanding answers the question of Jesus’ authority.

Matthew 21:32 “ye believed him not” Jesus returned to His question about their acceptance of John the Baptist and his heaven-sent authority. The JST adds that John the Baptist prepared the way of righteousness, “*and bore record of me.*” Jesus challenged them by suggesting that when they rejected John the Baptist and his authority, they also rejected their Messiah. By so doing, they rejected the message and authority of salvation. The Book of Mormon taught the same message about rejecting

the prophet —the “words” of the prophets represent authority to speak for God (1 Nephi 3:18; 7:14; Jacob 6:8; etc.). 2 Nephi 25:18–19, also prophesied that the Jews would reject their Messiah.

Parable of The Wicked Husbandmen (Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19¹¹)

Matthew 21:33; Mark 12:1; Luke 20:9 “A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it” (JST Mark). Jesus began with a familiar story from Isaiah 5:2–7 about a good farmer who carefully planted a vineyard (it also sounds like Jacob 5:3). We see evidence that Zenos’ allegory of the olive tree was known in the Jewish world.¹² Isaiah 5:2–7 and Jacob 5 helps us understand the symbolism of “digged” and “hedged it round about,” as a demonstration of divine nurturing. The vineyard of the Lord, becomes the House of Israel.

Matthew 21:34–39; Mark 12:2–8; Luke 20:10–15; “He sent His servants” God’s servants include His prophets. The husbandmen or workhands abuse the owner’s servants. Their cruel and exaggerated measures sound extreme, but Jesus filled His parables with shocking details and hyperbole. It kept his audience engaged, which opened new ways to learn. In this parable, Jesus answered the question about His authority by introducing the “heir.” In the parable, the murdering of the heir, foreshadowed Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane and death in Golgotha.

Matthew 21:41; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16 “destroy those wicked men” When the Jewish leaders condemned the wicked husbandmen, they passed judgment on themselves.

Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17 “Did you never read in the scriptures . . .” Jesus quoted a very well-known passage from Psalm 118. It was part of the “Hallel,” which Jews regularly recite in their ceremonies.¹³ Jews had a tradition that a stone first rejected by the builders later becomes the chief cornerstone. The “Head of the Corner” meant the stone used at the building corner to bear the weight or stress of two walls. It functioned like a capstone. It was a crucial stone to the whole structure. Other Old Testament scriptures also describe important stones, typologically referring to Jesus (who was most likely a stone mason): Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45; and Isaiah 8:14–15.

Matthew 21:44; Luke 20:18, “ground to powder” This description is the definition of the word “contrite.” We must become broken hearted and contrite to follow in Christ’s footsteps.

Matthew 21:46 “I am the stone:” (JST) The JST addition gives a long dialogue between Jesus and his disciples explaining the parable.

Parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son (Matthew 22:1–14)

The third parable, answering the question about Jesus’ authority, describes a king’s wedding feast that no one attends. The banquet represents the joys of God’s kingdom. But the parable describes some listeners as rejecting God’s kingdom. When all are invited, some do not understand they must “dress” or go through the required rite and decorum to be with the king. Some appear to accept Jesus in part, but are not willing to completely follow His teachings, and thus become like Him. The king’s dress or robes are described in scripture as the robes of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; 2 Nephi 9:14; D&C 29:12; 109:76; etc.). The parable warns those who reject Jesus’ invitation to come unto Him, and those who come, but do not come His way.

Wednesday: Jesus’ Third day in Jerusalem

Olivet Sermon: Judgement & Second Coming (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21)

Jesus and His disciples left the temple and again walked from Mount Moriah to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3, Mark 13:3). To Jesus' disciples, the revelation in the Olivet Sermon must have been a total shock. They anticipated Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of both His first and Second Coming. His audience was either the Twelve or the Twelve plus a few other disciples (including the women who traveled with the group from Galilee).

The Olivet Sermon is re-arranged in Joseph Smith-Matthew (as found in the Pearl of Great Price), which moves around the verses to separate the destruction that occurred in Jerusalem between AD 68–70, from the future destruction that is prophesied for Jesus' Second Coming. Much of this sermon is repeated in D&C 45:16–45 (approximately 13 verses). The Second Coming or Millennium was a favorite topic in early nineteenth century America. The Saints were part of this culture, and their questions led to many revelations on the subject, including: D&C sections 1, 29, 38, 43, 101, 116, and 133. (For a nice layout with all the changes in a parallel fashion see The New Testament with JST, compiled by Steven and Julie Hite.¹⁴)

The JST changes to Matthew 24, increase its length by 50%. There is only one verse (Matthew 24:33) that had no corrections made). The Gospel of Mark also includes many JST changes. Matthew's JST reordering of the verses are diagramed below:

PAST (Jerusalem's Destruction in AD 70)		FUTURE (Jesus' Second Coming)	
JST or JS—Matthew	KJV Matthew 24	JST or JS—Matthew	KJV Matthew 24
1	23:39	21b–22	23–24
2–6	1–5	23, 28	6
7–11	9–13	24–27	25–28
12–18	15–21	29	7
19	8	30	12
20–21a	22	31–32	14–15
		33	29
		34–35	34–35
		36–39	30–33
		40–54	36–51
		55	36–51

Matthew 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6 “Master, show us concerning the buildings of the temple . . .” (JST). A discussion began with the disciples trying to understand what Jesus meant when He said, “not one stone” would be left on the temple. It would have seemed impossible as some of the stones were over 500 tons! Jesus warned they will all be thrown down, and then moved up the Mount of Olives to sit down overlooking the temple courtyards and sanctuary.

Matthew 24:3–5; Mark 13:4–5 “. . . sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?” They asked for more information about Jesus' Second Coming. Again, the JST adds much to both accounts. They were warned to not be deceived by the many false prophets and leaders who will come and try to convince people to follow their plans.

Matthew 24:9–13; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:17 “. . . they deliver you up . . . and shall kill you” Jesus' warned them that some will suffer martyrdom. Cathedrals often depict the Twelve carrying the

sign of their martyrdom (i.e. Paul with a sword, Peter with a cross, etc.). Stephen, a member of the “Seven” (Acts 7:58–59), was known as the first Christian martyr, although I think John the Baptist should have that title.

Matthew 24:14 “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world” We read this verse as coming in the future, and our call to spread God’s word. Yet the early Christians expected the end in their lives and felt instructed by Jesus to watch until then (Matthew 28:19–20; Luke 21:32; Acts 2:16). Some felt the apostles would not die until the gospel was witnessed to the world. Paul spoke of the saints falling away in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3; Hebrews 9:26–28; Acts 20:29, as did Peter in 2 Peter 3:3–9. Following their martyrdom, we read of the anti-Christ in 1 John 2:18.

Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22 “there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets . . .” It was not the Second Coming that was imminent, but the apostasy. The apostles restrained the false prophets, but iniquity was already at work when the first Twelve were alive. In fact, the apostasy was already under way by the time of Paul’s ministry. It was neither passive nor gradual. Jesus foretold this. The JST changes this verse to say it started during Jesus’ life: “*and he it is who now worketh, and Christ suffereth him to work, until the time is fulfilled that he shall be taken out of the way.*”

Matthew 24:29–30; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; John 26 “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light” Jesus gave His disciples several signs of the last days (as well as Isaiah 13:9; John 11; Revelation 6:12, 18), but we have been given even more as recorded in D&C 29:14; 88:87; etc.

Thursday: Jesus’ Fourth day in Jerusalem

Preparing for Passover, Last Supper, Gethsemane (Matthew 26)

Preparing for the Passover (Matthew 26:17–20; Mark 14:12–17; Luke 12:7–14; John 13:1)

Passover is arguably the most important feast for the Israelites. The preparations start a month in advance and the feast of unleavened bread lasts a week. Passover commemorates God’s redemption from slavery in Egypt. The last night in Egypt, the Lord sent a scourge and killed all the first-born children in every home whose doorway was not covered with blood from their Passover lambs. The feast night remembers back to many symbols from the story in Exodus 12—unleavened bread, a roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and wine. It prefigured the great and last sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God who redeems the world from sin (1 Corinthians 5:7). This feast looked forward symbolically to Jesus as the unblemished lamb whose blood will cover and save.

John placed the last supper the night before the traditional feast (John 13:1).¹⁵ This seems appropriate as Jesus was crucified when the lambs are being slaughtered on the temple alter (Mark 15:25). You can see below that John, in his usual careful dating, is unique to record the feast occurring the night before the Passover.¹⁶

Timing of the Passover

Aland Translation

Matt 26:17–18	Mark 14:12–13	Luke 22:7–14	John 13:1
Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the	And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacri-	Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which	Now before the feast of the Passover, when

disciples came to Jesus saying, "Where will you have us Prepare for you to eat the passover?" 18. He said, "Go."	ficed the passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the passover?" 13 And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them "Go."	the passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying "Go and prepare the passover for us, that we may eat it."	Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having Loved his own
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Preparing the Passover meal was an involved process. Kent Brown assumes that the women who had traveled with Jesus from Galilee and were with him at the cross and tomb also helped prepare Jesus' last supper.¹⁷ The meal shares many symbols of the Passover Seder. Especially as Jesus introduces the Sacrament.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Last Supper (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:15–20)

The Lord introduced the symbols of the sacrament during His meal according to the Synoptic Gospels (John's Gospel introduces the symbols earlier in Jesus' Bread of Life sermon in John 6). The meal included breaking the unleavened bread. At some point the Jews began hiding a portion. One custom claims that it represented the hidden Messiah.¹⁸ But Jesus did not hide the bread. He held it up and said, "This is my body" (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19). Jesus chose to use the cup after the meal as the symbol for His blood (Luke 22:20). The cup at the end of the meal is called the "cup of redemption." Jesus' blood became the source of our redemption. The symbols from the Passover point us to what is about to happen.

Washing the Disciples Feet (John 13:1–20)

With dusty roads, social etiquette included supplying the means to wash people's feet upon entering a house. Often the host assigned a servant or child to do this menial task. (Disciples could do many of the tasks of a servant for their master, but washing their feet was forbidden as it was demeaning.¹⁹) On this special night, Jesus took on the role of a slave child and washed His apostles' feet. He turned the social ladder upside down, and Peter could not bear to see His beloved master acting as His slave (John 13:8). Throughout Jesus' ministry He tried to teach masters how to serve. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11; Luke 12:43; etc.). Jesus corrected Peter, and Peter submitted. Thus, washing feet became an ordinance in the Restored Church.²⁰

Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46; John 18:1)

Jesus spent the night before His death, "as he was wont, to the Mount of Olives" (Luke 22:39), across the Kidron brook, in an olive orchard or "garden" (John 18:1), named Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36). "Gethsemane" came from two Hebrew roots: *gath*, meaning "press," and *shemen*, meaning "oil." As extreme pressure is required to extract oil from an olive, so too, the Son of God was crushed under the weight of the sins of the world, which caused Him to bleed from every pore. "These tiny drops of golden liquid can be seen as symbolizing the At-one-ment and its power to heal."²¹ As His apostles slept, He suffered alone, and drank the bitter cup enabling mercy and justice to eternally meet.

Friday: Jesus' Fifth Day in Jerusalem

Trial, Crucifixion and Burial (Matthew 27:1–6; Mark 14–15; Luke 22–23; John 18–19)

Arrest

Matthew 26:48, Mark 14:43–45; Luke 22:47–48; John 18:2–9 “The one who I kiss . . . take him” Jesus’ betrayal is especially painful as it is carried out by one of His chosen apostles, Judas Iscariot. With Satan’s coaxing, Judas devised a plan to arrest the Lord by using a counterfeit allegiance. Satan has used counterfeits to usurp Jehovah’s/Jesus’ position since the time in the Garden of Eden.²² In the middle of the night, Judas led the chief priests and elders to an olive orchard where Jesus often went.

In that culture, a disciple waited for his master teacher or rabbi to greet him first. If the disciple greeted the rabbi first, it wrongly implied equality, so they avoided it.²³ When Judas feigned friendship, he actually insulted the Lord by treacherously greeting Him first, and using the name “master,” followed by a kiss (Matthew 26:49; Mark 14:45).

The only time Jesus is called “master/rabbi,” in Matthew, is when Judas uses the title that night. Ironically, Judas has run away from his Good Master, and sold himself as a slave to Satan, his new master. Judas’ hypocrisy is contrasted with Jesus’ sincere response, “friend you are here” (Matthew 26:50, AB). Even with the pain of exquisite suffering throughout the night and the treachery of Judas’ rejection, Jesus maintained charity for his enemy.

Matthew 26:51–53; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:49–51; John 18:10–11 “cut off his ear” Just a few hours before Jesus’ arrest, in Luke 22:36 and John 38, the Lord encouraged his eleven apostles to take a sword with them as they leave the upper room. They responded, “Look, Lord, here are two swords,” and Jesus replied, “That is enough” (BSB). I presume this is, in part, why Peter defended Jesus by attacking Malchus, the servant of the high priest, with his sword (John 18:10). As the Lord healed the bleeding wound, He taught, “All that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” (Matthew 26:53; Mark 14:47 JST). Jesus added an aside, that He could ask for 24,000 angels if He wanted. I believe the healed man became a Christian, otherwise, how would the author know his name? (John 18:10).

Trial

Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53–15:15; Luke 22:54–23:22; John 18:13–40; “I find in him no fault” Following the arrest Jesus was taken to the high priest’s palace for a mock trial before Annas (who had served as a previous high priest), Caiaphas the current high priest, the Sanhedrin (or Jewish ruling council), then to Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again. During all these illegal proceedings, while false witnesses testified against Jesus for blasphemy and insurrection, Jesus meekly submitted to the harassment as a lamb before the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7; Acts 8:32). Tragically ironic, Jesus was crucified for blasphemy in His claiming to be the Son of man who will sit beside God (Mark 14:62–64).

Soldiers Scourged Jesus

Matthew 27:27–30; Mark 15:16; John 19:1–3 “Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him” Scourging or flogging was an ancient practice for discipline. In the law of Moses, it was limited to “not . . . more than forty lashes” (Deuteronomy 25:3). The Romans used leather cords of different lengths with bones, rocks, and metal tied along the leather to cut into the skin and muscle. The victim was tied to a pole, then one or two soldiers whipped the bare back, buttocks and legs of their victim. It was often used to discipline slaves. In fact, “the trademark of slaves, was a back scarred from whippings.”²⁴ Jesus took the role of a slave throughout his ministry: at the last supper while washing feet, and now He bore the sign of a slave on His back.²⁵

Crucifixion (Matthew 27:31–56; Mark 15:20–41 Luke 23:26–49; John 19:16–37)

Luke 23:33 (NIV) “When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him” Jesus carried His own cross beam through the city, but in His weakened state, He collapsed. A foreigner from Cyrene, Simon, was forced to carry the heavy cross beam for Jesus. I believe Simon and his family also became Christians, as Mark 15:21 describes them as “friends”.

Once outside the city, they came to a section of the main road where the crucifixion poles stood permanently in the ground. They called it “Place of the Skull” or Calvary (in Greek), or Golgotha, (in Hebrew). We are told it was 9:00 in the morning (Mark 15:25). Three hours later at noon, the sun is darkened and a blackness joined by a storm covered the sky until Jesus died at 3:00 pm, the traditional hour of prayer at the temple (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33–34; Luke 23:44).

The soldiers again stripped Jesus. They tore his outer garment into four equal parts so they could share in the booty, but they realized that Jesus’ under tunic was very well made and woven as one piece (the two separate garments is clearer in the Greek). We know that “*Joanna . . . and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance,*” traveled with Jesus, so I presume the nice tunic was a gift from one of the women (Luke 8:3). They were the same women who stood beside Jesus as He was crucified.

After Jesus’s hands were nailed to the cross beam and his feet to the main beam, He was lifted up to be tortured to death. As He hung in excruciating pain, Jesus saw the need of Mary, His mother, and comforted her by asking the only apostle there, and possibly his first cousin, John the beloved, to take care of her.²⁶

Each Gospel author recorded Jesus’ experience on the cross showing different angles of the experience. Jesus’ final words demonstrate the spectrum of their perspectives. Starting with the very human cry from Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, “My God, why has thou forsaken me?” to Luke 23:46, a more divine focus, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” and John 19:30, the most controlled, “It is finished.”

Opening the Veil

Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45 “the veil of the temple was rent” The temple veil tore, symbolically opening the way into the presence of God. It opened the Holy of Holies to all. Rather than just one high priest being allowed to enter once a year, all may now come through Jesus, the Great High Priest, to the throne of God. Since the time of Adam and Eve’s fall, the door was closed. But Jesus made it possible for humanity to eat of the tree of life and return to the presence of God free of sin if they repent and embrace His gospel.

A Soldier Pierced Jesus’ Side

John 19:31 “a spear pierced his side” Jesus’ body received one more opening as a soldier confirmed that Jesus has died without needing his legs broken to speed up the suffocation process. The opening in Jesus’ side parallels the opening of Adam’s side for Eve, and in turn, for all humanity to arrive on earth. Jesus as the last Adam (as the only other man created by God, 1 Corinthians 15:45), will open the way for the descendants of Adam and Eve to have Eternal life.

Jesus’ Burial (Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:50; John 19:38)

Matthew 27:57–59; Mark 15:42–46; Luke 23:50–53; John 19:39 “went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus” Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have both been secret disciples of Jesus while still maintaining their membership in the Jewish leadership of Jerusalem, putting them in a position to ask Pilate for permission to take the body of Jesus. While Joseph arranged for his servants to move the body to his own tomb, Nicodemus bought oils, linens, and spices to wrap the body.

Matthew 27:60–61; Mark 15:46b–47; Luke 23:53b–56; John 19:40–41 “In the place where he was crucified there was a garden” Joseph’s property was not far from Calvary, and they are able to carry the body from the main road to his garden where he had recently prepared a new tomb for himself. As the men transport the wounded body, the women watch so they know where to find Jesus after the double Sabbath (Passover and Saturday), or three days later.

Matthew 27:62–66 “After three days I will rise again” Remembering Jesus’ claims that he would rise again, the next day, Passover or the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the chief priest and Pharisees asked Pilate for a “watch” of Roman guards to ensure no one could steal Jesus’ body and claim He had resurrected. Pilate agreed to send soldiers to make the “sure . . . seal” (Matthew 27:65, 66).

Saturday: After Jesus’ Body is placed in the Tomb, He Organizes Preaching in the Spirit World (D&C 138)

1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6, “[Jesus] went and preached unto the spirits in prison” Our understanding of Easter and what happened during the three days and nights following Jesus’ entombment, was revealed on October 3, 1918. That fall, President Joseph F. Smith was nearly 80 years old, WWI was drawing to a close, and the influenza epidemic struck the USA. He was filled with sorrow at the passing of loved ones and spent much time pondering about death and the state of his departed friends and family. During his mediation over 1 Peter’s verses about Jesus’ preaching among the dead, President Smith received a vision of Jesus’ work among the spirits immediately following His death.

In his vision President Smith saw the excited state of the righteous spirits who had already departed their earth life and were now living in the spirit world. The righteous knew of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice and eagerly anticipated His arrival to the spirit world (D&C 138:15). Jesus was the first to be resurrected, or “the first fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20), thus all the posterity of Adam had remained as spirits without their bodies—which was a bondage to them. The prophet’s understanding was opened and he saw the valiant gathered to meet the Lord in heaven:

And the saints rejoiced in their redemption, and bowed the knee and acknowledged the Son of God as their Redeemer and Deliverer from death and the chains of hell. . . I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them; But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead.

President Joseph F. Smith reported his vision the next day in General Conference. Before the month was out, it was canonized as the next section of revelations collected in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 138).

Jesus' death was joyously anticipated far more by those millions who were waiting for, and in need of His redeeming sacrifice in order that they too may be resurrected. Adam, Eve, their faithful daughters and sons including Able and Seth, and all the great prophets and their wives and righteous family members were gathered to greet the Lord as He finished His second estate (D&C 138:38]–40). When Jesus arrived in the world of spirits, these valiant spirit men and women were organized into missionary forces to teach the wicked the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Plan of Salvation, and the way to repent.

Sunday: Easter Morning—Jesus' Resurrection (Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–11; Luke 23:56–24:12; John 20:1–18)

Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1– 3; Luke 24:1; John 20:1 “The first day of the week” would be Sunday. From this point on, Sunday becomes the Christian Sabbath. It is a day to remember the resurrection as the most memorable day in the history of the world. The resurrection is the reason why Christians worship on Sunday rather than the Jewish day of rest, Saturday (adopted from the story of the creation). Several women had been at the cross and now returned that morning. I have organized the names from the four Gospel texts into a table.

Woman Mentioned at Jesus' Cross and Tomb

Matt 27:56	Mark 15:40; 16:1	Luke 24:10	John 19:25
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
Mary, mother of James and Joses	Mary, mother of James and Joses	Mary, mother of James	Mary, wife of Cleopas
		Joanna wife of Chuza	Jesus' mother
Mother of Zebedee's Children	Salome	Other women	Jesus' mother's sister

All the women mentioned had been traveling with Jesus and the apostles on multiple missions (Luke 8:2–3). As upright Jewesses, they rested on the Sabbath and did not return to the tomb. For three nights and two full days the women have stayed at indoors. But now it is the early on the third day, as Jewish days begin at night).²⁷ The sabbath laws restricted walking, carrying, and anointing, but they allowed one to prepare ointments for the dead at home. After waiting, obediently keeping the laws of the Sabbath, the women courageously made their way through the dark city streets. They'd have to walk near Golgotha again, with its horrific memories of Jesus' crucifixion from just three days ago. Though it was still dark, I presume they may have smelled the remains of the feasts or perhaps the blood from sacrificial animals and the human crucifixions. When they finally arrived at Joseph of Arimathea's garden, they ask themselves, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” (Mark 16:3, NIV). Fortunately, God had prepared the way for them to be the first witnesses of the empty tomb.

(Each Gospel account differs in which details they include in their retelling of Easter morning. For this study guide, I will focus on the Matthew's account here, we will study the others Gospels in late June when we return to Resurrection morning.)

Matthew 28:2 “. . . earthquake . . . angels . . . rolled back the stone” God used “earthquakes” as a means to speak to mankind many times in scripture (i.e. Elijah, Alma the Younger, Saul/Paul, destructions, etc.). The miracle of God’s intervention is in the timing. Earthquakes are known in this area, but the timing corresponded with the angelic arrival and rolling away the stone to open the tomb. This is the first time in Matthew’s Gospel, since the nativity narrative, that “the angel of the Lord” is mentioned. It is one of the many parallels between Jesus’ birth and death accounts in Matthew and Luke (as they are the only two who give us an account of Jesus’ nativity).²⁸

Matthew 28:3–4 “their countenance was like lightening” (JST) Most angelic visitations are described with dazzling, shining clothes and faces (Joseph Smith’s History in the Pearl of Great Price included).

The description of the Roman guards as “[becoming] as dead men” can also translated as being “paralyzed with fright (Anchor Bible).

Matthew 28:5– 6 “fear not” is the standard greeting by angels as seen 63 times in the KJV Bible (and variations of the Greek word is found 95 times in the New Testament alone). It is often used by angels or prophets. The women had two witnesses testifying to them: The angels and the physical evidence. The angels used the same phrase, “come, see,” just as when Jesus invited His first disciples to follow Him.

Matthew 28:7–8 “go quickly and tell” The angels asked the women to become the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the news of the resurrected Christ. Remember women were not allowed to be a witness in a Jewish court of law. Under the rabbinic oral traditions (which the Pharisees followed), they were even discouraged from speaking to men in general.²⁹ This ability for women to witness, speak to men, and work with the leaders was a new dimension of Christianity that emancipated women and changed the definition of a witness. The angelic command was followed by the women. Even though they were fearful (and not ultimately believed), they ran to find the disciples to share the news. (Note that Mark 16:8 does not remember that the women spoke at all.)

Jesus’ Visitation to the Women (Matthew 28:9–15)

Matthew 28:9 “Jesus met them” The women were obedient and thereby blessed by a visitation from Jesus. Matthew alone mentions this visitation of the resurrected Lord to all the women. We see this was a separate visitation than the one to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb, because she cannot embrace the Lord, but the group of women are allowed to hold his feet in worship. (Note that Matthew was also the only one to mention that women and children joined the feeding of the miraculous 5,000 and 4,000).

Matthew 28:10, Jesus’ visit was to calm the women’s fears and give them the courage and information they needed to give the apostles. Why would the Lord do this? What would it have felt like for the Jewish apostles to receive their orders from women? How much humility was needed to receive this message?

This was the last eyewitness event in Matthew that occurred on Easter. Although, John 20:11 and John 18 record the risen Lord appearing to Mary Magdalene when she returned to the garden. Luke 24:13 and John 35 tell of Jesus appearing to two unnamed disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the

Lord appearing to Peter alone (Luke 24:34). Three other Gospels record the Lord's visit to His apostles later that night (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36–48; John 20:19–23).

The Guard Told the Chief Priests (Matthew 28:11–15)

Matthew 28:11 “the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything” (NIV) The “watch,” or guards placed to protect the tomb from robbers, were probably Roman soldiers. The Gospels show even the enemies of Jesus (the “chief priests”) were witnesses of His resurrection through the witness of the Roman soldiers.

Matthew 28:12–15 “they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers” (ESV) The bribe offered to silence the soldiers is hard to believe. In Rome, if a guard slept or allowed the protected object to be lost (i.e. the body of Jesus), it was a capital offense—earning a penalty of death.³⁰ The chief priests promised to stand up for the guard if Pilate heard about it. It is odd to have the Roman soldiers preferring Jewish protection, but that is how Matthew recorded it. The other Gospels have no record of this.

Easter Connections in the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon adds a beautiful dimension to our understanding of Easter. It is filled with clarifying teachings on the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Starting off with the books of Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, and Alma, we find great teachings that augment our understanding of the Savior's “great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:10–14).³¹

While the events of Jesus' last week are not related in the Book of Mormon, the doctrines underlying the experiences of His suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross are clarified in simple plainness in the Book of Mormon. When I have compared and contrasted the doctrine of the atonement in the biblical canon with the Book of Mormon (a volume one third the size), I have found more than double the amount of information. In addition to the quantity, the teachings in the Book of Mormon provide a beautiful quality that brings new dimensions to our understanding of the Atonement.

The Book of Mormon also enhances our understanding of Easter by providing a new witness from another corner of the earth. Those Israelites living in the New World experienced even more violent signs and natural disasters at the death of the Messiah. Those horrific natural disasters occurred for three full days (versus the three hours of darkness described in the New Testament) from the time of the Lord's crucifixion until His Resurrection:

There arose a great storm, such a one as never had been known in all the land. And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder (3 Nephi 8:5–6).

Descriptions continue on for another twenty verses.

The Book of Mormon also expands our understanding of the importance of the sacrament as an ordinance introduced at Lord's Last Supper by reading about its important daily role in Jesus' first two days with the Nephites at the Temple in Bountiful (3 Nephi 18:1–6; 20:3–8). Then we learn summarily that He “did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them 3)”Nephi 26:13.(

The Easter stories are beautiful in the biblical accounts, but with the addition of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, our understanding of the ramifications of Easter become all the more exquisite and thrilling.

Endnotes

1. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1242. Luke includes a long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. This section begins the fifth section in Luke's Gospel (starting in Luke 19:28). It is mainly devoted to Jesus' ministry at the temple in Jerusalem, and follows Matthew's account or older source material closely.
2. John's Gospel gives the clearest date to adjust the timing the week. In John 12:1, it states that Jesus arrives in Bethany "six days before passover." It appears He spent the night there and left the next morning for Jerusalem, which places the Last Supper on Wednesday night and the Passover beginning on Thursday night.
3. Josephus, *Wars*, 6.1.3. Herod leveled off the top of Mount Moriah to build a 35-acre platform for his architectural masterpiece. He began in 20 BC, and was finished near AD 63. It stood for only a few years before Titus destroyed it in August of 70 AD.
4. Lloyd R. Bailey, "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell," *Biblical Archeologist*, 49 (1986): 189. Rabbi David Kimhi in 1200 AD, perpetuated the assumptions that during the late Second Temple era, the garbage dumped into the Hinnom Valley was continually burning, and referred to as Gehenna or hell. Bailey finds no archeological evidence of burning a in that area during in the Roman era.
5. It appears that somewhere in the creation of Matthew's text, a writer misunderstood Zechariah's prophesy to include two donkeys. Matthew 21:2, has two donkeys, while the other Gospels, and the JST of Matthew, have just one.
6. Palm trees grew closer to the two seas (i.e. near Jericho or the Mediterranean), but were imported as needed for feasts.
7. The timing of the cleansing of the Temple was discussed the Come Follow Me commentary for John 2. In short, the Gospel of John more trustworthy chronologically. It is organized with at Jesus traveling to Jerusalem for at least three Passovers, as well as other trips.
8. I love the story from LDS Reference Library about Edersheim trying to figure out this story. He went to Israel and "looked for a fig tree. Finding one, he reached into the branches, and drew out his hand, and found he had a few leaves from the previous autumn, and some round grey substances. They looked like lozenges. Edersheim sought out several pedestrians until he found one that could speak German. He was told that the little grey objects were edible. That travelers used them to postpone hunger until they could reach an inn. 'Unless you find those on the tree branches in the spring,' he was told, 'the tree will not bear fruit in the summer.'"
9. Enos 1:15; D&C 4:7; 8:1; 11:14; 14:8; 18:18; 20:14; etc.
10. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 381.
11. The JST adds substantial portions to Matthew 21:33 and 46. The text transitions from one parable to another in the JST by defending John the Baptist again and explaining that the audience is receiving parables because of their unbelief.
12. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, ed. *Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 290–304.
13. Hallel consisted of Psalms 113–118. It is chanted at Passover, Feast of the Tabernacles, Hanukah, in synagogue worship, and at many other times and places.
14. Steven and Julie Hite, compiled, *The New Testament with Joseph Smith Translation* (Orem, UT: Veritas Group, 1994), 173–378.
15. James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret, reprint 1982), 617–618. In the endnotes to chapter 33, Talmage suggests that due to the large crowds in Jerusalem, Jews had two days to celebrate the Passover, "two nights were devoted yearly to the paschal observance." I have not found this anywhere else in first hand sources dating to the Second Temple era
16. The Synoptic Gospels include preparing for the feast and the feast. The week of Unleavened bread begins at sundown with the feast of the Passover. All four Gospels have Jesus in Jerusalem four days before the feast. This means the last Supper would have been on a Wednesday night. We will discuss this in more detail in June when we look at these chapters in more detail.
17. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke: A New Rendition* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017).
18. Whether the tradition of breaking the bread and hiding it as the *afikoman*, was practiced at the time of Jesus is debated. Many of the traditions recorded from the Second Temple era may have started at a later date.
19. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 313.
20. Dean C. Jessee, comp. and ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1984), 181.

Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:432. Ehat Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 140.

21. Spencer J. Condie, *In Perfect Balance* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1993), 46.

22. Satan uses counterfeits to interrupt the Lord's timing starting with tempting Adam and Eve to take the fruit from his hand rather than from God's hand and on God's timing.

23. W.F. Albright, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 3329.

24. Beryl Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (England: Oxford University Press, 1991), 161.

25. The Greek word for "slave" / *doulos* and "servant" / *doulos* overlaps. So even though the KJV uses servant, the word can also mean slave (i.e. Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:35; Luke 1:38; etc.).

26. All four Gospels document that devoted women stayed beside Jesus at Golgotha, and then came to tomb (see Table 1, or Matthew 27:55–56, 61; 28:1; Mark 15:40–41; 16:1; Luke 23:55–56; 24:1–10; John 19:25; 20:1). Jesus' siblings did not believe that He was the Messiah at this point. As we do not hear of Joseph alive during Jesus' ministry, we assume that Mary is a widow. In that era, poor widows needed a relative to provide for them (as women were not permitted to work except in a few limited areas). Perhaps, Mary's closest *believing* male relative, was John, the Beloved disciple. One can assume that John is Jesus' first cousin by lining up all the women at the tomb by name and finding "Mary's sister" lines up with the wife of Zebedee (James and John's father). Otherwise, Jesus' aunt may fit into the place of "other women," both seem possible. See Table 1.

27. In the creation, it was dark before light, so Jews begin their day at night. It appears that year, as periodically happens, the Jews had two "holy days," or sabbaths, back to back. This allows Jesus' prophecy to be fulfilled completely: "three days and three nights." If the passover began on Thursday night and extended until Friday sundown, then their weekly Sabbath lasted from Friday sundown until Saturday sundown. They women came while it was still dark on the morning of the third day, Sunday.

28. Lynne Hilton Wilson, "Jesus' Atonement Foretold through His Birth." *To Save the Lost: An Easter Celebration* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 2009).

29. *Mishnah, Avotb* 1:5; "Talk not much with womankind . . . they said this of a man's own wife: how much more of his fellow's wife!" In 1963 Philip Blackman translated the same passage, "engage not in much gossip with womankind." A century before Jesus' birth, Ben Sira recorded, "A silent wife is a gift from the Lord; her restraint is more than money can buy" (*Ecclesiasticus*, 26:14; John 15). More extreme, a renowned Rabbi Joshua claimed that any girl or woman found speaking to a man in the street was guilty of breaking the law of chastity unless there was evidence to the contrary (*Mishnah, Ketuboth* 1:8). For more, see Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapter 2.

30. Kent Jackson, and Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures vol. 5: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 454.

31. 2 Nephi 9:7, 25–26; Jacob 4:11–12; Mosiah 3:15–19; 4:6–7; 13:28; Alma 7; 21:9; 30:17; 34:9–14; 42:15, 23; etc.