**Book of John and Jewish Festivals**

Resource:

From Shadow to Reality by John Oakes Ilumination Publishers [www.ipibooks.com](http://www.ipibooks.com)

The Moses Connection in John’s Gospel by Bill R. Day Mariner Publishing

Purpose of John: John 20:31

But these are written that you may believe[a] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Theme: Jesus is the Son of God who reveals God’s glory.

Unique things about John:

More dialogues 5:19-47, 6:25-59, 7:14-44, 8:12-59, 9:40-10:21, 10:22-42, 12:23-36

More personal conversations 3:1-21, 4:1-38

More private teaching 14:1-16:37

Dualistic themes (light vs dark, God vs world, etc.)

More philosophical

Emphasis on who Jesus is. Jesus does not hide who he is at all. He makes it clear from the beginning exactly who he is.

Symbols and metaphors (light, life, bread, gate, etc.)

Miracles as signs

Most important for this lesson:

More Jewish in perspective

Chronology based on festivals

Ministry of three years based on the Passovers which are recorded.

More emphasis on Judean ministry. Majority of what is recorded happened in Jerusalem.

Things to bear in mind:

Despite what many scholars say, John is the most Jewish of the gospels.

Matthew: Jesus is revealed for who he is through the fulfillment of prophecy and the Jewish messianic expectation.

Matthew 5:17

5:17 Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets (John 5:26). Jesus does this in a wide variety of ways.

a. He literally fulfilled all the requirements of the Law of Moses.

b. He satisfied the penalty for all who did not fully obey the Law of Moses.

c. He fulfilled the foreshadows and prefigures contained in the entire Law of Moses (the sacrifices, the festivals, the laws, the items in the tabernacle, etc.)

Luke: Jesus is revealed for who he is through his ministry being a fulfillment of Old Testament expectations. Luke 4:18-21 Today this scripture (concerning his ministry) is fulfilled in your hearing. Specifically, this is seen in his ministry to the poor, the disenfranchised, women, Gentiles and outcasts in general.

John: Jesus is revealed through his statements about himself and through his miracles and….

 Through his fulfillment of the messianic expectation through the Jewish festivals.

Jesus is also revealed as the antitype to Moses in his life and ministry.

Bill R. Day, author of The Moses Connection: Early Jewish messianic expectations and early Christian hermeneutics “instead of looking for only a few specific verbal predictions to be fulfilled in the life and times of the Messiah, they were looking for a reenactment of the entire salvation history of Israel. The Jews of Jesus’ day were looking for the events and miracles of their divine history to be repeated in the Messianic age.

Jesus certainly saw it this way. John 5:39-40. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

John starts his book by revealing one of his major theses, which is that Moses is the type and Jesus is the antitype. John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

[an aside I will not have time for: Jesus is the Prophet who is to come of Deuteronomy 18:17-19. Many in John realize that Jesus is this Prophet like Moses John 1:25, 6:14, 7:40 surely this is the Prophet)

Outline:

I. Prologue 1:1-1:18

II. Book of Signs 1:19-12:50

III. Book of Glory Passion Story 13:1-20:31

IV. Epilogue 21:1-21:25

Theme: The Son of who reveals God’s glory.

Theme verses 1:14, 1:18, 3:16 20:30-31

7 I AM statements

I AM the bread of life 6:35

I AM the light of the world 8:12,9:5

I AM the door (and the gate) 10:7

I AM the good shepherd 10:1,14

I AM the resurrection and the life 11:25

I AM the Way the Truth and the Life 14:6

I AM the true vine 15:1

All are metaphors

7 signs

water to wine 2:1-11

healing of official’s son 4:43-54

healing at pool of Bethesda 5:1-5

feeding of 5000 6:1-14

walking on water 6:16-21

man born blind 9:1-12

resurrection of Lazarus 11:1-44

[miraculous catch of fish John 21:1-13]

Purpose: To bring about belief and to give glory to God (Jn 20:30-31) and to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the expectation in the Jewish festivals.

I. Water to wine Jn 2:1-11. v. 11 “He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith

in him”

metaphor/symbol: the marriage feast in heaven. Isaiah 25:6 Eschatology

empty jars = Jewish ritual wine = New Covenant

In the synoptics, the miracles point to the Kingdom of God

John: 2:11 God’s glory was revealed and people (the disciples in this case) put their faith in Jesus.

Here Jesus turns water to wine in a parallel to Moses turning water to blood.

Is it a coincidence that the first recorded miracle is Moses and evidence that he is to be the deliverer of Israel is turning water to blood (Exodus 7)? I doubt it. With this miracle we are introduced to the second and greater Moses.

II. Another “sign” Jesus clears the temple Jn 2:12-17 Again, remember that a sign is not merely a miracle, but evidence that (pointing to the fact that) Jesus is the Messiah—the fulfillment of the messianic expectation.

Note: John 2:13 It was almost time for the Jewish Passover. The timing is very significant.

“The Jews” demand a sign to prove his authority to act this way.

John 2:18-19

Note: The Jews assumed that authority as an inspired teacher must be supported by “signs.”

Jesus: No sign will be given you if you demand one.

Back to 2:18-19. What is the sign of Jesus?—the sign proving my right to be greater than the temple? I will be raised from the dead on the third day.

Jesus shows that he has authority, even over things of the temple.

Jesus: The temple of God is my body!

Also, note that Jesus is cleansing the temple as an antitype to the cleansing of one’s house before the Passover. It is his house, and he is cleansing it. Jesus cleanses his own house during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Jesus and Moses a huge theme in John. John 3:14 I am the fulfillment of Moses in this: Just like he lifted up the snake, so I will be lifted up. The symbolism is awesome. See Numbers 21:4-9.

Also, notice in John 4:1-26 Jesus tells the woman at the well that he is the Messiah because he is the one who will, like Moses, give water, but this water will well up to eternal life. Jn 4:13-14. 4:26 I am the Messiah (because I give this water).

III. Jesus heals official’s Son 4:43-54 (parallels Matt 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10) “the second miraculous sign”

Healing for Gentiles too.

Healing from a distance.

Result: faith 4:53 Your son will live “he and all his household believed.”

Gentile man believes without seeing. (unlike Thomas, but like us John 20:29)

The context for this miracle is probably the Feast of Dedication (see below). This is a Feast about resurrection and life from the dead.

IV. 3rd sign. Healing at the pool of Bethesda 5:1-5

Here we begin to more clearly the theme of Jesus replacing/being greater than the Jewish festivals.

Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath, (and of booths, Passover)

1. Jesus greater than the Sabbath Jn 5:1-18

2. Jesus greater than Passover Jn 6:1-70

3. Jesus greater than Booths/Tabernacles Jn 7:1-9:41

4. Jesus greater than Festival of Lights/Feast of Dedication (Chanukkah) Jn 10

5:18 Result: The Jews tried even harder to kill him. Why? He claims to be equal to God.

“My father is always at work and I, too, am working” (v17) Thus showing his supremacy, even over the Sabbath.

(skip the long discourse after this event, and skip to the conclusion)

Jesus: There are three things which testify about me:

a. John the Baptist

b. The miracles

c. Prophecy/Scripture

V Sign #4 Feeding 5000.

Theme: Jesus is the antitype to Moses and will replace the Passover.

Type: Marriage feast with God

John 6:4 The Jewish Passover was near. (to set up the connection)

Jesus made bread during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Jesus to Phillip: Where should we buy bread? (Phillip was from Bethsaida. He lived closer to this site than the other apostles) 200 denarii = 200 day’s wages for a common worker. Phillip faces the facts.

Jesus gives bread (like the manna) and fish.

Q: What did Jesus actually do here? CS Lewis In his miracles, Jesus does what God does all the time, except in a small way.

People’s response: Increased faith. 6:14 “Surely this is the Prophet” (cf Deuteronomy 18:17-19 Notice the strong words to the Jews listen to him)

What did Moses do? Gave bread (fulfilled by sign #4), part the Red Sea (fulfilled by sign #5), gave water (John 7:38). Jesus will do all these things.

5:45 I am greater than Moses. If you believed Moses, you would believe me (and therefore would not be offended that I healed on the Sabbath). You are rejecting Moses

Jesus is reenacting the saving events in Jewish history.

VI Sign #5 (a bit of an aside, which only makes sense if you realize that John is showing Jesus as the antitype of Moses in the miracles he worked) Jesus walks on water Jn 6:16-24 (Matt14:22-33, Mark 6:47-51 where the power of Jesus is more emphasized. This is not the main emphasis of John with this miracle)

John’s emphasis: Jesus walks on the water as a parallel to Moses parting the water. An Exodus/Passover scene.

v. 20 “It is I” (I AM that I AM *ego eimi*) (Recalls Exodus 3:14) Do not be afraid. Suddenly they are on the other side (recalling the crossing of the Red Sea)

VII. Discourse on Jesus as Bread of Life. A key discourse in John!

John 6:25-27 Seek spiritual food, not physical food (We need that message!)

“Work” for spiritual food. An interesting concept. (Reminds us of Matthew 6:19 Store up treasures in heaven)

v. 28-29 What is the work of God? Believe. Ironic on the part of Jesus and ironic for “faith –only” Christians today.

v. 30 Jews demand a sign again (recall clearing the temple)

Jesus: I gave you bread. I am greater than Moses. Isn’t that testimony enough?

6:35 In fact: I AM the bread of life.

Q: In what sense is Jesus the bread of life? Both physically v. 35 and eternally v. 47-51.

What is “bread” for you? What is it that will fulfill you? Jesus offers this! v. 34 We want this bread! What do you hunger for (35b) What do you thirst for? (35c)

People’s response: grumbling 6:41

Jesus takes it higher: 6:48-51. What is he claiming? He is spiritual bread which, if eaten gives eternal life.

v. 53-59 You must eat the flesh and the blood. He is talking about being the Bread of Life.

This is not a prefigure of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is a remembrance of this fact. We must participate intimately in Jesus.

[v. 60-70 Response. Many left Jesus. v. 67 John to reader: What about you?

Peter: To whom shall we go?]

John 7:1-9:41 Tabernacle Discourses.

The Tabernacle discourses include many claims of Jesus

1. Jn 7:16-19 “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Response: You are demon-possessed.

2. 7:37-38 I am the source of living water.

* + Response: He is the Prophet. He is the Christ. Tried to seize him

3. 8:12 I AM the light of the world.

* + Response: Many put their faith in him.

4. 8:46 Sinless

* + Response: A Samaritan and Demon-possessed.

5. 8:51 If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. (I am greater than Abraham)

* + Response: You are demon-possessed

6. 8:58 Before Abraham was born, I AM. (claims to be God)

* + Response: Picked up stones to stone him.

Tabernacles: the Feast of Tabernacles or *sukkoth* (literally, tabernacle) as it

is known in Hebrew. It is one of the three feasts commanded by the Lord that all males

should annually attend (Ex. 23:17; 34:23) and what Josephus calls the “most holy and

most eminent” of the three feasts of the Hebrews

1. Harvest Festival (Fall Harvest)

2. A remembrance of wilderness wandering—of living in intimate fellowship with God.

Jesus’ point: I am tabernacling with my people (John 1:14 The Word became flesh and tabermacled among us)

John 7:37 If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.

Jesus is drawing their attention to the Miracle of Moses bringing water from a rock.

 Note, the context is Feast of Booths with its water theme. An important part of Tabernacles for us is the water-pouring ceremony.

During the Feast of Tabernacles a priest marched in procession from the Temple to the Pool of Siloam. He filled a golden pitcher with water from the Pool of Siloam, after which he recited Isaiah 12:3. ”With joy, you will draw water from the well of salvation.” With a solemn procession from the Pool of Siloam. (which is where the man born blind had to wash). Then the crowd marched with the priest and the pitcher, passing through the Water Gate (this is why it had that name) to the temple (which was dedicated on the last day of Tabernacles) carrying myrtle and willow twigs, tied to a palm branch in the right hand, and a citron or lemon in the left. They sang the praise Psalms 113-118. On the 7th day they did this seven times. The water was poured out at the altar of burnt offering. The water was a symbol of the Holy Spirit, drawing attention to the Messianic age.

“To appreciate the Messianic significance of Christ’s offer of His living water, it is important to remember Zechariah’s vision of the coming of the Lord when ‘living waters will flow out of Jerusalem.’ On that day, all the nations will come to Jerusalem ‘ to keep the feast of booths’ (Zech 14:8,16).

Zech 14:16 Then the survivors from all the nations that have attached Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

Similarly, Ezekiel sees the coming of a Messianic ‘Prince’ who will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Ez 45:25) and then water will flow from the threshold of the Temple to all the land (Ez 47:1-11).

Jesus spoke of offering streams of living water on the last great day of the feast (7:37)—the day that they **did not do** the water ceremony.

Jesus said, “as the Scripture has said (v. 38). This is probably a reference to Joel 3:18.

Joel 3:18 “In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord’s house [ie. the Tabernacle], and will water the valley of acacias. v. 30 Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations. Their bloodguilt which I have not pardoned, I will pardon”

Again, at Tabernacles and on the cross, Jesus fulfills this expectation.

Jesus: The Messianic age has come. The new Moses is here

[an interesting side note. John is the only one who mentions that Jesus said “I thirst” on the cross. The one who offers living water, from whom, if we go to him we will never thirst, thirsted in the cross]

See the response 7:40-43. Surely this is the Prophet (the one like Moses in Deut 18:17)

7:41 Some begin to think he is the Messiah? John to reader: What about you?

Next: John 8:12 I am the light of the world. Again, this has a direct reference to the Feast of Tabernacles.

**The Illumination of the Temple**

The two major ceremonies of the Feast of Tabernacles were the water procession and the illumination of the Temple. Most commentators maintain that the setting of Jesus’ self-proclamation as the Light of the World is the nightly illumination of the Court of Women that took place during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The meaning of the illumination of the Temple was similar to that of the pouring of the water. The light shining out of the Temple into the darkness around was seen ‘as a symbol not only of the Shekinah (God’s glory manifested in the Most Holy above the ark) which once filled the Temple, but also of the ‘great light’ that ‘the people that walked in darkness’ were to see, and which was to shine ‘upon them that dwell in the land of the shadow of death’ (Isa 9:2).

It seems most probable that it was in the context of this illumination ceremony that Jesus said: “I am the light of the world’ he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

By proclaiming Himself as the light of the world, Christ revealed Himself to be the fulfillment of the Messianic pillar of fire that guided the Israelites through the wilderness.

The figure of living water typifies Christ as the Savior, while that of the Light represents Jesus as the Revealer of God’s will for mankind.

Jesus said: ‘I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness” (John 12:46).

Through Jesus we can become “sons of light” John 12:36)

More on Jesus as the light of the world in John 9

John 8:27-30 When you have lifted up the Son of Man (look at the irony!!!) they you will know that I am the one I claim to be. Notice v. 30 Many put their faith in him. What about you?

**John 9:1-41 Sign #6 Healing of the man born blind. Jesus proves that he is the light of the world.**

John 9:3-5. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

[also note, v. 3 that the man was blind so that the glory of God might be seen]

Note that this miracle involves both water (from the Pool of Siloam, no less) and light, recalling the two great ceremonies at Tabernacles.

When the man washed the dirt from his eyes in the Pool of Siloam, a brilliant light entered his eyes for the first time.

Note that the man’s faith (and the amount of light he has) grows more and more as the story goes along:

v. 11 the man Jesus.

v. 17 the Prophet.

v. 33 he is from God.

v. 38 Lord, I believe!!!

Of course, the parents and the Pharisees have the opposite experience.

Summary: John 9:39-41. We all need this light.

John 10: Context: The feast of Dedication Hanukkuh. (John 10:22)

John 10:7 I am the gate John 10:11, 14 I am the good shepherd.

Note: The shepherd discourse in Ezekiel 34:2-10 was part of the Hanukkah liturgy.

Also note that the need for the dedication of the temple was because of bad shepherds (Daniel 11, 1st Macabbees)

David as a foreshadow. He laid down his life for the sheep 1 Samuel 17:34)

John 10:14-18 I am the good shepherd, and I am also the sacrificial sheep! I am a willing knowledgeable sheep!

v. 19 Response: You are demon possessed! You are mad!!! (again, John calling us to make a choice about Jesus)

John 10:22 Jesus in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication. This is a feast associated with the rededication of the temple after the abomination of desolation of Antiochus Epiphanes. Judas Maccabaeus was considered a deliverer of Israel (and a prefigure of the Messiah). This was like a resurrection of Judaism, as if from the dead. The point of this feast is that God will resurrect his people. Theme of this section is that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, as demonstrated when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus shows his ministry to be parallel to the Feast of Dedication in John 10:25-28 I will resurrect my people.

John 10:25, 32, 38 The miracles testify to my right to say these things.

**John 11: Sign #7 (for John) the greatest sign of Jesus’ ministry. The Raising of Lazarus**

John 11:4 This sickness will not end in death (irony here)

John 11:4 Why? (the usual reason) so that God and his Son will be glorified.

John 11:23-26 I AM the resurrection and the life. Note the connection to the Feast of Dedication.

Question for the reader: Do you believe Jesus????

Again, Jesus proves his claim by performing an equivalent physical miracle.

John 11:38-44

Response:45-51 Deep irony here!

v. 48 is ironic. (and it happened in AD 70 because they did NOT believe in him)

v. 50 is very ironic. It is better that one man should die for the people, rather than the entire nation perish.

John’s challenge to the reader: Which are you? John offers a stark choice. Will you believe and, by believing, have life in his name (John 20:29-31).

Here Jesus fulfills the expectation of the Feast of Firstfruits in that he is a harvest before the harvest, and he fulfills the expectation of the Feast of Dedication.

12:12 The passion story begins as Jesus enters Jerusalem.

The scene of Jesus entering Jerusalem is similar to the crowds who welcomed Simon Maccabeus into Jerusalem with shouts of praise and waving palm branches (1 Maccabees 13:51)

Crowd shouts Hosannah (save us now) Sounds like Psalm 118:22-26, a psalm which was read at Passover. The crowd is hailing Jesus as king and Messiah. Their political deliverer.

12:23 The hour has come. The time is here. The stage is set. All is prepared. No turning back now. This leads to 12:24

This more or less ends our topic, but….

By the way, the greatest example of Jesus fulfilling the expectation of a Jewish Passover is in the third Passover of his ministry, which is his final and greatest sign.

Jesus was offered as the sacrificial Passover lamb on the eve of the Passover.

His blood was spread on a wooden beam, as was done during the original Passover.

None of his bones were broken, as was reenacted at every Passover.

He celebrated the last Seder with his apostles, at which he tells him that from now on, He will be the bread and the wine that is offered at the Passover.

Then Jesus became the sacrificial lamb that saves all of us from our own spiritual Egypt.

He is the lamb, slain from the creation of the world. (Rev 13:8). For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the antitype to the Feast of Passover, which is the Lord’s Supper. 1 Cor 5:8.

By the way, Jesus also fulfilled the expectation contained in the Feast of Firstfruits. The Passover was the 14th of Nisan. The Feast of Firstfruits was on 15th of Nisan. This was the day that Jesus was raised from the dead, because Jesus is the firstfruit from the dead. 1 Cor 15:20.

**FEAST OF TABERNACLES IN THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD**

**Feast of Tabernacles, One of Three Temple Feasts**

After the children of Israel were freed from Egyptian bondage and led by Moses to Mt. Sinai, the Lord had Moses prepare Israel to enter into a covenant with him in order to make of them “a peculiar treasure unto [the Lord] above all people” (see Exodus 19). The initial covenant Israel entered into included this command: “Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. . .Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD” (Exodus 23:14,17). The three feasts became known as the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Weeks (often called the feast of Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles. The three feasts were held at the three times of the year when many parts of the ancient world held celebrations associated with the harvest of crops. Though the Lord commanded that all males appear at the temple during these three feasts, it appears that at least during the second temple period, often the whole family participated in the worship associated with the feasts (see Luke 2:41-50). The second thing necessary to change the focus of the agricultural feasts was to give each feast a religious focus. In light of how modern temples are used, it seems clear that these feasts were intended to be teaching experiences in which Israel would be reminded of past events and taught of future events. Further, this would be a time to renew covenants made with God. The Feast of Passover reminded Israel of their exodus from Egyptian bondage and the triumph of God over idolatry (see Exodus 12:12). It also was to remind them of the future coming of the Messiah who would free them from spiritual bondage. The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost reminded Israel of the law God gave to Israel at Mt. Sinai in the third month following their exodus from Egypt.13 It also foreshadowed the giving of the higher law at a future time.14 The Feast of Tabernacles recalled Israel’s wandering in the wilderness for forty years and their eventual arrival into the promised land, Israel’s permanent home. It also anticipated the future coming of the Messiah. However, it may have taken Israel many years to view these feasts as times of worshiping God.

**Feast of Tabernacle Customs**

During the second temple period, the Feast of Tabernacles included a number of rituals. Some were instituted through Biblical legislation while others were developed and added over time. Those not found in the Bible are only known through Rabbinical writings.

**Length of the Feast**

In the priestly writings of Leviticus (23:33-44), we learn that the feast was to be held for seven days. The first day was to be a “holy convocation”; the Hebrew is *mikra kodesh* which means a holy summons. “It stresses the summons to an assembly where Israel, in a state of special holiness, is called to fulfil its sacred functions. Holy convocations were central aspects of each of the three great Feasts and the Day of Atonement. They were days of rest, like the sabbath, and in later times were known as sabbaths.” An additional “holy convocation” was to be called 15 after the seven days were complete making the feast a total of eight days.16 The eight day was referred to as the “great day of the feast” (John 7:37).

**Dwelling in Booths**

We are also told in Leviticus that the Israelites were to build booths or small huts outside of their houses. During the seven days of the feast they were to live in the booths so that their “generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (23:43). It is from these booths (the Hebrew is *Sukkoth*) that the Feast of Tabernacles receives its name. These booths were to remind Israel that their forefathers lived in tents during the wilderness journey and did so until they came into the promised land where they dwelt in permanent houses. Living in booths may have also reminded Israel that mortality is not the final and permanent resting place for mankind. Just as Israel was brought to a promised land for a permanent home, God’s children will be brought into their final resting place only during the millennial reign of the Messiah. The booths were generally of modest size, at least three walls and roof, and had to be outside. They could be placed in a courtyard or on the roof of a house.17 In Nehemiah 8:16, we are told that when the Feast of Tabernacles was reinstituted after the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile, the Jews set up their booths in a number of different places: “every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.” Rabbinical writings tell us that those traveling some distances were exempt from living in a booths if they so desired (see Talmud Sukkah 26a).

**Water Drawing Ceremony**

In describing the rejoicing that was experienced at the place of the water-drawing18 during the festivities of the lighting of the candelabra, one of the rites of the Feast of Tabernacles which had developed by the second temple period,19 the Talmud tells of Rabbi Joshua ben Hanania who states: When we used to rejoice at the place of the Water-Drawing, our eyes saw no sleep. How was this? The first hour [was occupied with] the daily morning sacrifice; from there [we proceeded] to prayers; from there [we proceeded] to the additional sacrifice, then the prayers to the additional sacrifice, then to the House of Study, then the eating and drinking, then the afternoon prayer, then the daily evening sacrifice, and after that the Rejoicing at the place of the Water-Drawing [all night]. (Talmud Sukkah 53a.) In this description, the order of events of an average day during the Feast of Tabernacles is revealed, albeit incomplete, as will now be shown. The morning would begin with the normal daily morning burnt offering. However, during the Feast of Tabernacles a rite was added to the daily burnt offering called the water-drawing ceremony. During the preparation of the burnt offering,20 a procession of priests with the accompaniment of flute playing and singing wended their way from the temple down to the Pool of Siloam where a priest filled a golden flask with water while a choir repeated Isa. 12:3: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Mishnah Sukkah 4:9; 5:1; Talmud Sukkah 48b). The Pool of Siloam was a collecting pool for the spring Gihon, the major water supply for Jerusalem. The Jews referred to water from springs or streams fit for drinking as “living water.” Living water was considered the most superior form of water for ritual purification.21

The priests returned to the temple via the Water Gate, a gate on the south side of the wall immediately surrounding the temple within the court of Gentiles.22 Arriving at the Water Gate a blast was made on a *shofar* (Heb.for ram’s horn). The *shofar* was a signaling instrument used to announce major events such as the beginning of the Sabbath, new moons, the death of a notable, or warned of approaching danger. In this case, the *shofar* announced the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles which began with the water-drawing ceremony. Upon the blasting of the *shofar*, the group moved towards the altar of sacrifice located in the Court of the Priests which surrounded the Temple. Either earlier or during the same time the water-drawing rite was taking place, other priests decorated the altar with willows. The priests went to “a place below Jerusalem called Motsa” where they collected willow branches. These were brought up and placed around the altar so that “their tops bent over the top of the Altar” (Mishnah Sukkah 4:5). The priest with the golden flask filled with water ascended the altar and poured the libation on the morning burnt offering. While doing this, the procession that had followed the priest would circle the altar.

Already at the temple many pilgrims would have arrived with each having a *lulab,* which consisted of a tree branch in one hand and a citron in the other (Mishnah 3:1-7).23 While the morning sacrifice was being offered with the special water libation, the pilgrims would wave their *lulabs*. The waving of the *lulab* was a Biblical injunction: “And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days” (Leviticus 23:40). The *lulab* was a sign of the harvest.24 It appears that pilgrims joined in with the priests who were circling the altar. However, this is a matter of debate. George MacRae seems to suggest that this procession was of priests alone. But an incident 25 mentioned in the Mishnah may suggest otherwise. Mishnah Sukkah 4:9 tells us that after the water was poured into the Silver Bowl, it was said to the officiating priest: “Raise thy hand!” The reason for saying this was that “on one occasion [a Sadducean priest] poured over his feet” the water (for the Sadducees did not hold to this tradition). This so outraged the pilgrims that “all the people pelted him with their citrons.” This suggests that if the pilgrims were not in the procession itself they were at least close enough for them to be able to pelt the priest. The only logical places would be the court of the priests itself or perhaps in the court of the Israelites though the latter seems less likely due to its size.26 From an incident related by Josephus, it seems clear that the people did not hesitate to enter into the court of the priests during the Feast of Tabernacles. The text reads: As to Alexander [Janaeus], his own people were seditious against him; for at a festival which was then celebrated, when he stood upon the altar, and was going to sacrifice, the nation rose upon him with citrons, [which they then had in their hands, because] the law of the Jews required, that at the feast of tabernacles every one should have branches of palm-tree and citron-tree: which thing we have elsewhere related. They also reviled him, as derived from a captive, and so unworthy of his dignity and of sacrificing.

The text then tells that Alexander was so outraged with the reaction of the people that he slew six thousand of them. The next action of the king is important in this discussion. He also built a partition-wall of wood round the altar and the temple, as far as that partition within which it was only lawful for the priests to enter; and by this means he obstructed the multitude from coming at him.27 It is S. Safrai’s belief that the people were involved in the procession itself. Says he: The people participated in all the rites of the Feast of Tabernacles and, with the exception of the water-libation which was performed by a priest or the high priest, their role in Temple rites and customs was equal to that of the priests. They surrounded the altar with palm-branches and with willow, which is, of course, the essence of the water-libation ceremonies . . . All the people participated in the procession around the altar, (from which they were barred during the rest of the year) with the palm-branch.28

In a footnote, Safrai says: “In Mishnah Sukkah 4:5 the identity of the encirclers is not given, but it is understood in this way in Palestinian Talmud.”29 Whether walking around the altar or observing the procession, the following was said by the pilgrims while waving30 their *lulabs*: “We beseech Thee, O Eternal, save now, we beseech thee, O Eternal, send prosperity, we pray.” Mishnah Sukkah 4:5 gives an alternative to what was said: “R. Judah said, (they were saying), ‘Ani waho, save now.’”31 The priest who had charge of pouring the water32 went up the ramp and offered the water libation with a wine libation into two silver bowls on the south-west corner of the altar. The water-drawing ceremony proceeded in this manner every day of the feast except on the seventh day when the priests (and pilgrims?) circled the altar seven times instead of just once (Mishnah Sukkah 4:5). The circumambulation of the altar seven times ended the water-drawing ritual. It was not performed on the eighth day (Mishnah Sukkah 4:1, 5),33 though it appears that a prayer for rain was given on the eighth day (Talmud Taanith 2a-3a).

Rabbinic writers have assigned meanings to the rites of the pouring of water on the altar and the waving of the *lulabs*. Talmud Rosh Hashanah 16a describes the meaning of the water-drawing rite in this way: Why did the Torah enjoin on us to pour out water on Tabernacles? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, Pour out water before Me on Tabernacles, so that your rains this year may be blessed. The thought seems to be that by keeping the feast with the water-drawing ceremony the people would be in harmony with the law of Moses thus reaping the blessings of the law. A close look at the blessings and curses associated with the law of Moses found in Deuteronomy 28 reveals that those who keep the law will be blessed with rain.34 Hence, we are told in the Mishnah that The world is judged at four periods in the year: on Passover, for grain; on the Festival of Weeks, for the fruits of trees; on the New Year, all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him, like flocks of sheep, as it is said, He Who fashioneth the hearts of them all, Who understandeth all their doings; and on the Festival of Tabernacles, they are judged for water. (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:2) The Talmud suggests that upon the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles, the people actually looked for a sign from heaven regarding this judgment. The sign would be given in the direction of the wind. The Talmud states: But [did not] R. Isaac b. Abdimi say: ‘On the night following the last day of the [*Sukkoth*] Festival all were gazing upon the smoke arising from the pile of wood. If it inclined northward, the poor rejoiced and the people of means were sad, because the rains of the coming year would be abundant and their fruits would rot.35 If it inclined southward, the poor were depressed and the men of means rejoiced, for there would be little rain that year and the fruit could be preserved. If it inclined eastwards, all rejoiced;36 if westwards37 all were depressed’? (Yoma 21b)

**The Lighting Ceremony**

Normally, upon the conclusion of the afternoon burnt offering, probably around sunset, the gates of the temple would be closed.44 However on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles the gates were left opened so that all might participate in the final rite of the day. This occasion proved to be a most joyous and festive observance. Mishnah Sukkah 5:2 says that “At the close of the first Holyday” the priests would descend from the Court of the Israelites down into the Court of Women.45 In the court four huge candelabra were placed, each “with four golden bowls at their tops and four ladders to each one.” The Talmud says that each were fifty cubits in height (Sukkah 52b). Wicks made “from the worn-out drawers and girdles of the priests” were placed in each bowl and lit (Mishnah Sukkah 5:3). A Mishnaic source informs us that “there was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up with the light” which came from these candelabras (Sukkah 5:3) and the Talmud mentions that “a woman could sift wheat by the illumination” of these lights (Sukkah 53a).

The rest of the night was spent in joyous activities in the Court of Women. Mishnah Sukkah 5:4 says: Pious men and men of good deeds used to dance before them (the candelabra) with burning torches in their hands and sang before them songs and praises. And the Levites on harps, and on lyres, and with cymbals, and with trumpets and with other instruments of music without number upon the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the Women’s Court, corresponding to the Fifteen Songs of Ascent in the Psalms [Psalms 120-134]; upon them the Levites used to stand with musical instruments and sing hymns. The festivities surrounding the illumination rite concluded the festival day. However, it is not clear whether or not the illumination rite was done every night, or whether the lights remained lit during the whole feast.

**The Messianic Nature of the Feast**

The water drawing ceremony and the lighting of the candelabra were additional aspects of the feast not found in Biblical legislation. 46 Nevertheless, they had apparently become part of the ceremonies of the feast to portray the future messianic age. We gather this from the fact that as part of the ceremonies associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, Zechariah 14, a messianic chapter, was read to all the people. Talmud Megillah 31a says: “On the first day of Tabernacles we read the section of the festivals in Leviticus, and for *haftarah* [a section from the prophetic books recited after the reading from the Pentateuch on Sabbaths and Holy-days], *Behold a day cometh for the Lord* (Zech.14).” What is the connection between Zechariah 14 and the Feast of Tabernacles? Chapter fourteen describes the time when “the day of the Lord cometh.” At a time when “all nations” have gathered against Jerusalem, the Lord will return and save his people by standing upon the Mount of Olives which shall “cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and the toward the west” providing a way to escape through the valley created. Having saved his people, the Lord insists that “every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up47 from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles” (vs. 16). Failure to keep this command would result in the rains failing (see vs.s 17-19). This is the first Biblical association of rain with the festival. But as George MacRae has said: “When we consider the original agricultural nature of the festival and the fact that it was celebrated at the end of the harvest and immediately before the autumnal rainy season, we can well imagine that the petition for rain is as old as the feast itself.”

With the coming of the Lord, the messianic age is inaugurated. Zechariah points out two important aspects associated with the messianic age. The first is perpetual light. In Zechariah 14:6-7, describing the day the Lord comes, it says: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark:49 but it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.” The second characteristic of the messianic age is akin to rain, that of water. Zechariah says: “And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem” (Zech. 14:8).50 It seems safe to assume that by the reading of Zechariah 14 during the feast the application of these messianic features to the Feast of Tabernacles was commonplace among the people. From the foregoing, it is possible to see that the two features of the messianic age described by Zechariah in chapter 14 were made an important part of the Feast of Tabernacles ceremonies. The water-drawing ceremony is the compliment of the living water flowing from Jerusalem in 14:8. The lighting of the huge candelabra is the symbolic counterpart of the continuous day found in 14:6-7. Zechariah 14 gives us understanding as to the meaning of the lighting ceremony. When the Messiah comes, inaugurating the messianic age, he will be the light of all the world, not just the Jews. This is perhaps why four candelabra were used in the lighting ceremony. Four is often a symbolic number representing geographical completeness. This is because there are four corners of the world. Thus, the lighting of the four candelabra would have symbolized that light would be given to *all* the world through the coming Messiah. This would have been emphasized further by the fact that each candelabra had four bowls.51

**JESUS AND THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES**

**Jesus and the Living Waters**

It is in this setting that we find Jesus in John 7-9. John 7:14 says that Jesus arrived midway through the feast. 52 His first few days at the temple were filled with confrontations concerning the authority of his teachings (John 7: 15-36). Then on “the last day, that great day of the feast,” Jesus “stood” and issued this challenge: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38). Then John added, “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive” (John 7:39). That is, the Holy Ghost which is given to those who come unto Christ brings life to their souls.

The impact of this challenge is lost unless one understands the water-drawing ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles. For seven days the priests had drawn water from the pool of Siloam, a pool of living waters. The water was poured into the silver bowl on the altar while pilgrims chanted to God, “Save now, we beseech thee.” To emphasize the importance of this ritual, on the seventh day of the feast, the pilgrims encircled the altar seven times. The absence of the water-drawing ceremony on the eighth day would have been profound. Hence, on the day when living water was not drawn from the spring, and only a prayer for rain was offered--a day that perhaps symbolized Israel’s dependence upon God for water that sustains life--the Savior declared that if any thirst, they should come to *him* for living waters. However, the water he offered was not for physical but spiritual survival. His water was the cleansing and sustaining influence of the Holy Ghost necessary for the salvation of the souls of mankind. The prayers of the priests and pilgrims attending the Feast of Tabernacles had been answered but not in the way they had expected!

The theme of Christ as the living waters permeates the gospel of John wherein is recorded several incidences that occurred during the ministry of Christ that revolve around water. For example, John records the story of the Savior offering living water to the woman of Samaria who was drawing water from a well. To her, he said: “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14). That Christ has the power to give this living water is demonstrated through two stories that evidence Christ’s power over water: the marriage at Cana where Christ turned water turn to wine (John 2:1-11) and the Savior’s walking on water (John 615-21). To dramatize the point further, John, alone, records the piercing of the Savior’s side while upon the cross. In that account it is said the when the soldiers were breaking the legs of the three who were crucified, they saw that the Savior was already dead “and they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood *and water*” (John 19:33- 34; emphasis added). John’s point is clear. The living waters do come from the Savior.53 In view of this, the reader of John’s gospel is stunned to discover that while on the cross the Savior cried out, “I thirst” (John 19:28), a statement only recorded by John. He to whom all must go to receive “living waters” so they may “never thirst” again (John 4:14), now thirsted! This pathetic statement reveals that while on the cross, the Savior, in bearing our sins, infirmities, fears, guilt, and remorse, had “descended below all things” that he might comprehend “all things” (D&C 88:6). Thus, he became like “the poor and needy” who “seek water, and there is none” (Isaiah 41:17). He had become like us, lost, alone, and thirsty. In this condition, the Savior gained the compassion and mercy needed to bring the living waters to those who seek it.

**Jesus is the Light of the World**

On the day following the Savior’s challenge to come to him for living water, the Savior was once again at the temple teaching. While in the Court of Women,54 the Savior declared to the multitude, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Could there be any doubt in the minds of his listeners as to what he was claiming? In the very place where the huge candelabras were lit giving light to “every courtyard in Jerusalem” symbolizing the continuous light given to all the world during the messianic age, Jesus proclaimed that *he* was that light.55 Not only the light of Jerusalem, but of all the world. Even the Jews own traditions had taught them that God gives man light.56 That he was claiming to be the Messiah in their own hearing is obvious. That he was replacing both a sacred time and place is unmistakable.57 To give credence to His claim, the Savior demonstrated his power to give light to the world through a miracle that is recorded only by John. In chapter nine, the story of the man born blind follows on the heals of the Feast of the Tabernacles. The story begins when Jesus “saw a man which was blind from his birth” (vs. 1). When asked why, the Savior responded “that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (vs. 3). Then he said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (vss. 4-5). Upon that “he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (vs. 6). The man did exactly what he was told. After he had washed his eyes in the same pool that the priest had drawn water as part of the water drawing ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles, he came out seeing.

Two major symbols of the Feast of Tabernacles, water and light, were present in the miracle. By spitting onto the ground, Jesus demonstrated that indeed the living waters or the Spirit of the Holy Ghost which can give man light does indeed come from Him, for “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). This is further emphasized by the washing of the waters in the pool of Siloam which has already been shown to have symbolized the Holy Ghost.58