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Lenet Hadley Read

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**Title** Joseph Smith's Receipt of the Plates and the Israelite Feast of Trumpets

**Author(s)** Lenet Hadley Read

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**Abstract** Joseph Smith received the golden plates on the Israelite Day of Remembrance (or Rosh ha-Shanah). Biblical references and interpretation by Jewish sages through the centuries set this day as the day God would remember his covenants with Israel to bring them back from exile. Also called the Feast of Trumpets, this day features ritual trumpet blasts to signify the issuance of revelation and a call for Israel to gather for God's word of redemption. The day, which is set at the time of Israel's final agricultural harvest, also symbolizes the Lord's final harvest of souls. Furthermore, it initiates the completion of the Lord's time periods, the Days of Awe, and signifies the last time to prepare for final judgment and the Messianic Age. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is literally fulfilling such prophecies of the day.

Ether

487-96

1-1

238-47

I

496

2

247-48

II

## Joseph Smith's Receipt of the Plates and the Israelite Feast of Trumpets

III

IV

V

208-12

VI

212-18

Lenet Hadley Read

**Abstract:** Joseph Smith received the golden plates on the Israelite Day of Remembrance (or Rosh ha-Shanah). Biblical references and interpretation by Jewish sages through the centuries set this day as the day God would remember his covenants with Israel to bring them back from exile. Also called the Feast of Trumpets, on this day ritual trumpet blasts signify the issuance of revelation and a call for Israel to gather for God's word of redemption. Set at the time of Israel's final agricultural harvest, the day also symbolizes the Lord's final harvest of souls. Furthermore, it initiates the completion of the Lord's time periods, the Days of Awe, and signifies the last time to prepare for final judgment and the Messianic Age. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is literally fulfilling such prophecies of the day.

In addition to the Sabbath, six biblical holy days hold prominent importance in Israel as times of worship with prophetic implication. They began at God's command (Leviticus 23). The first three observances—Passover, the barley sheaf offering, the Feast of Weeks—coincide with Israel's first yearly harvest and hold prophetic witness of Christ's mortal ministry,<sup>1</sup> which his death, resurrection, and initial harvest of souls fulfilled, on the very days those festivals were observed.<sup>2</sup> The final three holy times—Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles—fall at Israel's final harvest and also hold

<sup>1</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 428–32.

<sup>2</sup> John P. Pratt, "The Restoration of Priesthood Keys on Easter 1836," *Ensign* 15 (June 1985): 59–68 and 15 (July 1985): 55–64; Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 48–50, 84–85; Lenet Hadley Read, "Symbols of the Harvest," *Ensign* 5 (January 1975): 32–36; McConkie, *Promised Messiah*, 428–32.

prophetic meaning for the Lord's work among his people.<sup>3</sup> These last three worship times, taken together, are called Israel's High Holy Days, or Days of Awe.

Joseph Smith's history dates the reception of the golden plates: "On the twenty-second day of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven" (Joseph Smith—History 1:59). Interestingly, 22 September 1827 was the day Jews throughout the world celebrated the Feast of Trumpets,<sup>4</sup> which initiates the Days of Awe. Because of the prophetic pattern in Israel's holy days, the question arises, how much significance is there to the correlation between these two events?

While scholars do not completely agree on everything concerning the Feast of Trumpets, various methods can be used to ascertain its purpose and significance, i.e., its origins as a biblical commandment; its timing; its names; its history; its ritual, including prayers offered and scriptures read; its role according to tradition; its relationship to other holy days; and its significance as seen by rabbis and scholars.

An examination of the Feast of Trumpets from these perspectives reveals four major meanings, which work together as a unity. The Feast of Trumpets signifies the time of Israel's final harvest; the Day of Remembrance of God's covenants with Israel; the announcement of revelation or truth; and preparation for God's holiest times, including the Messianic Age. These four purposes bear strong corollaries with the restoration of the gospel, beginning with the reception of the Book of Mormon.

### **The Feast of Trumpets Signifies Israel's Final Harvest**

The Lord commanded Israel, "In the seventh month, in the first *day* of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets" (Leviticus 23:24). By setting the festival in the seventh month of the Judaic calendar, (usually falling in our September), the day, like other Israelite holy days God commanded, was *timed* to coincide with an agricultural harvest (Exodus 34:22), in this case the harvest of fruits and grapes, the

<sup>3</sup> McConkie, *Promised Messiah*, 432–37; Read, "Symbols of the Harvest," 35–36.

<sup>4</sup> Eduard Mahler, *Handbuch der jüdischen Chronologie* (Leipzig: Fock, 1916), 588. Verification can also be obtained from Jewish community libraries. The date can be recalculated from Jewish calendars.

final harvest of the year.<sup>5</sup> In fact, this festival was also anciently called the Feast of Ingathering [of the harvest].<sup>6</sup> The Feast of Tabernacles, which follows a short time later, celebrates the completion of all of Israel's harvests.

The correlation of Israel's holy days with harvest periods has been shown to be important typologically. According to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, the harvest which the High Holy Days celebrate is symbolic of *Christ's final harvest of souls*. In speaking of the symbolism of the final festival as a completed harvest, he states, "The fact that [The Feast of Tabernacles] celebrated the completion of the full harvest symbolizes the gospel reality that it is the mission of the house of Israel to gather all nations to Jehovah, a process that is now going forward, but will not be completed until that millennial day when 'the Lord shall be king over all the earth' and shall reign personally thereon."<sup>7</sup> In other words, the Feast of Tabernacles is a "type" of Christ's Messianic reign after the completed harvest of souls (see also Zechariah 14:16).

Certainly, the Lord's word to Latter-day Saints is replete with "harvest" imagery. "For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not" (D&C 4:4).

The Book of Mormon has been a major instrument in initiating and perpetuating the Lord's final harvest. Therefore, it appears highly meaningful that the golden plates were received on the Feast of Ingathering, a holy day which coincided with

<sup>5</sup> Norman H. Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival: Its Origins and Development* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1947), 24; Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* (New York: KTAV, 1978), 18–19; Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies* (New York: KTAV, 1980), 182; Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals from Their Beginning to Our Own Day*, tr. Samuel Jaffe (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1938), 113, 116.

<sup>6</sup> Apparently, because they both celebrated the same harvest, the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles were referred to as a feast of Ingathering. Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival*, 17, 23–28; Bloch, *Jewish Holy Days*, 18–19; Bloch, *Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 181–83; Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals from Their Beginning to Our Own Day*, 113.

<sup>7</sup> McConkie, *The Promised Messiah*, 433.

Israel's final harvest and symbolized Israel's final harvest of souls.<sup>8</sup>

### The Feast of Trumpets Signifies God's Remembrance of His Covenants with Israel

One of the original names given to the day is Yom ha-Zikkaron ("Day of Remembrance").<sup>9</sup> This name originates from the Lord's commandment to blow trumpets for remembrance on that day. The term *zikhron* means "memorial" or "remembrance," and, according to one authority, "The significance of *zikhron* is inherent in its definition, a sound which will arouse God's remembrance (or judgment) of his people."<sup>10</sup>

Tradition and biblical history show a connection between this holy day and God's remembrance of his covenants with Israel. First, like other holy days, it is a memorial of Israel's deliverance by God from their exile in Egypt,<sup>11</sup> which is understood by many to be a pattern for Israel's future exiles and exoduses (Jeremiah 16:14–15).<sup>12</sup> In addition, according to Jewish tradition the Israelites returned to freedom from slavery on this date, prior to the completed Exodus.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the Lord remembered Israel on this day after their return from exile in Babylon—when they were granted spiritual renewal. On *the first day of the seventh month*, Ezra read again from the book of the law, and the people rejoiced greatly because he "gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:1–12). Through the exile, they had lost God's truths, which were now restored in clarity.

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<sup>8</sup> Bloch, *The Jewish Holy Days*, 21, states the persistent belief, "The ingathering of the Jewish people and its ultimate return to God will be announced by a prolonged blast of the shofar."

<sup>9</sup> Louis Jacobs, "Ro'sh Ha-shanah and Yom Kippur," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 12 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 12:474; Max Arzt, *Justice and Mercy: Commentary on the Liturgy of the New Year and the Day of Atonement* (San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 36, 146.

<sup>10</sup> Bloch, *Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 142.

<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Rosh Hashanah: Its Significance, Laws, and Prayers* (Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah, 1983), 60, 99.

<sup>12</sup> Nehama Liebowitz, *Studies in Shemot (Exodus)* (Jerusalem: The World Zionist Organization, 1981), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Scherman and Zlotowitz, *Rosh Hashanah*, 99.

Hearing the Lord's truths again brought them repentance and joy.

On the very day, then, when they were observing the Day of Remembrance, they were actively engaged in *hearing again the true law after its loss while in exile*. The full importance of this situation can only be grasped when we realize that the return from Babylonian exile is a "type" of the latter-day return from spiritual Babylon.<sup>14</sup> As the return from Babylon would have its latter-day counterpart, the Day of Remembrance would have its latter-day counterpart.

Many scholars agree that the major theme of the day is "Remembrance," God's remembrance of his covenants with Israel, and the need of Israel's remembrance of their God.<sup>15</sup> The prayers of the day contain many pleadings and high expectations toward these ends. Such pleadings include, "Remember us unto life" and "May our remembrance . . . come before Thee."<sup>16</sup> Specific hope is uttered that God will even remember them "for deliverance and well-being on this Day of Remembrance."<sup>17</sup>

The prayers "invoke the merit of the patriarchs and the covenant made with them."<sup>18</sup> And the blessings expected from God in return are phrased, "I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 26:45).<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the prayers, many readings of the service concentrate on the Lord's promises to remember his covenants—with implications for Israel's restoration and return from exile.<sup>20</sup> Some of these readings date from very early times. One scholar states, "Beyond any shadow of doubt the leading motif in the choice of the readings for Rosh ha-Shanah during the two centuries or so before Christ was Remembrance."<sup>21</sup> Among readings still used today are scriptures prophesying the restoration of Ephraim. One, Jeremiah 31:1–20, calls Ephraim

<sup>14</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 289–93.

<sup>15</sup> Arzt, *Justice and Mercy*, 129; Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival*, 162, 172.

<sup>16</sup> Arzt, *Justice and Mercy*, 32; Other examples of this theme are shown on 108, 112–13.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 121–48.

<sup>21</sup> Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival*, 172.

“a darling son unto me” and states that “I do earnestly remember him.” One sage cites the words, *zakhor ezkerenu* (“I shall remember him”) as especially meaningful for the Day of Remembrance.<sup>22</sup> Also read are scriptures dealing with the ending of Sarah’s and Hannah’s barrenness (Genesis 21; 1 Samuel 1–2:10). According to tradition, Rachel, Hannah and Sarah were remembered on this day, their fruitfulness restored.<sup>23</sup> The implication of such “remembrances” is the final fulfillment of covenanted blessings previously promised but seemingly forgotten. After barren Rachel was remembered, she was blessed with Joseph from whom came Ephraim and Manasseh. Through Hannah’s ended barrenness came the return to a righteous priesthood.

Throughout the centuries, various Jewish scholars, in explaining the purpose of the trumpet sound on the Feast of Trumpets, have seen it as *signal* of Israel’s redemption from world-wide exile.<sup>24</sup> That concept comes from scriptural references in the prophets and the psalms, such as Isaiah 27:13. “And it shall come to pass in that day [the time of regathering], that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt.”<sup>25</sup>

Zechariah 9:14 and the surrounding prophecies are used to confirm the relationship.<sup>26</sup> Zechariah’s statement, “And the Lord God shall blow the trumpet,” accompanies pronouncements that Ephraim would help raise up God’s covenanted people (Zechariah 9:13), and that those of Israel’s blood would again become his flock (Zechariah 9:16.).

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<sup>22</sup> Arzt, *Justice and Mercy*, 146–48.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 129; Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival*, 168. One source of this tradition is The Talmud (b.RH 11a), which says, “On New Year Sarah, Rachel and Hannah were visited [for their barrenness ended].”

<sup>24</sup> Scherman and Zlotowitz, *Rosh Hashanah*, 58, 61–62, 112–13, 117–18; Arzt, *Justice and Mercy*, 55, 94, 154; Bloch, *Jewish Holy Days*, 21; Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival*, 162; Leo Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance* (New York: Behrman House and Summit Books, 1980), 95.

<sup>25</sup> Scherman and Zlotowitz, *Rosh Hashanah*, 58, 112–13; Bloch, *Jewish Holy Days*, 21; Philip Goodman, ed., *The Rosh Hashanah Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1970), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Bloch, *Jewish Holy Days*, 21; Goodman, *The Rosh Hashanah Anthology*, 22.



The name most often used today for the feast is Rosh ha-Shanah, which means the New Year. But this was not the original name, and the day's significance is really as a "new beginning." It is understood to be the day when the Lord moves from his seat of judgment and sits instead upon the seat of mercy.<sup>27</sup> Layer upon layer, this holy day symbolizes that new beginning Israel would experience as God has mercy upon them in exile, remembers his covenants with their fathers, and restores them as his people. This new beginning for Israel was to be initiated with the sounding of the trumpet. A commentator on Rosh ha-Shanah's liturgy explains, "Expectantly, we await the sounding of the *Shofar* of Liberation, when Zion will be free to receive its exiled children from all parts of the earth."<sup>28</sup>

### The Trumpet Signifies the Proclaiming of Truth

The blowing of the trumpet (a shofar or ram's horn is used in modern practice) is the major ritual of the Feast of Trumpets. These instruments are seen as a symbol of revelation as well as redemption.<sup>29</sup> The trumpet sound is associated with revelation because the first mention of it was at Mount Sinai. It is understood, therefore, to be a memorial of Sinai. "The celebration of Passover was to be an annual reminder of the exodus. The ritual blast of the shofar would similarly recall by association the revelation on Mount Sinai."<sup>30</sup>

However, the sound of the shofar is seen not only as a memorial of Sinai's revelation, but as having importance for the future as well. Because the trumpet preceded God's revealing of his law at Sinai (Exodus 19:16), some interpreters declare that the trumpet on Rosh ha-Shanah signifies a further gift of revelation, in particular, the granting of the true law,<sup>31</sup> resulting in redemption. "The smaller horn was sounded at Sinai, but the great shofar will initiate redemption."<sup>32</sup> We can see why "Trumpets," a prayer regarding revelation, is recited on Rosh ha-Shanah.<sup>33</sup>

27 Arzt, *Justice and Mercy*, 149.

28 Ibid., 55; see also 94.

29 Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance*, 95.

30 Bloch, *Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 144.

31 Goodman, *The Rosh Hashanah Anthology*, 42.

32 Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance*, 95.

33 Goodman, *The Rosh Hashanah Anthology*, 42.

The scriptures, both ancient and modern, speak of the trumpet as preceding proclamations of truth which lead to redemption (Isaiah 58:1; Alma 29:1; D&C 33:2). The imagery of proclaiming the gospel like a trumpet remains a part of our heritage. "And at all times, and in all places, he shall open his mouth and declare my gospel as with the voice of a trump" (D&C 24:12).

Furthermore, one of the most common symbols of the restored gospel is that of the angel Moroni portrayed in the act of blowing the trumpet. We know this image symbolizes proclaiming the gospel to the world, particularly to the house of Israel. Indeed, much of the fullness of the Lord's truth began with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

In the scriptures, the sound of the trumpet is also used as a call for God's people to assemble or gather (Numbers 10:2–3), as a warning (Numbers 10:9; Joel 2:1), as a signal of something important to come (Revelation 8–9). The sound of the trumpet on the one festival day set aside by God for the blowing of the trumpet seems to carry all of these meanings, and therefore does signify something important in the destiny of Israel. The truth which came out of the golden plates is still causing a gathering, is still offering its warnings, and is still acting as harbinger of great things to come.

### **The Festival Signifies Preparation for the Messianic Age**

It would be a great mistake to see the Feast of Trumpets as a festival without relationship to any other. Part of its significance is in its juxtaposition to the Lord's other holy days, particularly as preparation for those days considered most holy of all days.

The Feast of Trumpets (Rosh ha-Shanah), Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) are together called the High Holy Days, and the Days of Awe. To begin with, these days fall in the seventh month of the Judaic calendar, which gives them special status—as seventh periods of days, weeks, months, years, are generally considered particularly holy and significant, and as times of completion.

The trumpet sound of Rosh ha-Shanah includes the need for repentance in preparation for the days ahead.<sup>34</sup> One scholar

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<sup>34</sup> Snaitch, *The Jewish New Year Festival*, 165.

enunciates its message as, "Awake from your slumbers, you who have fallen asleep in life, and reflect on your deeds. Remember your Creator."<sup>35</sup> The way the ram's horn is blown portrays that theme. First comes a long lengthy note promising hope. Sets of short notes follow to symbolize weeping for one's transgressions and the desire to forsake them. A last long note promises God's forgiveness to the truly repentant.<sup>36</sup>

The day's prayers of repentance are said to prepare one for the coming Messianic Age.<sup>37</sup> It is believed the Lord makes a prejudgment on Rosh Hashanah as to "who shall live and who shall die; . . . who shall be cast down and who elevated."<sup>38</sup> However, those judgments can be changed through repentance, prayer, and charity since the final judgments are not "sealed" until the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur.

The days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur therefore signify the only time left to repent, and are thus called the Ten Days of Penitence. The intervening time period is a *crucial period* for returning to God and to righteousness, with the trumpet sound representing God's *final warning before the rapidly approaching judgment*.<sup>39</sup>

The Day of Atonement is considered the day when the unrepentant are doomed, but the repentant are forgiven and reconciled with God. Worshippers on Yom Kippur believe they spiritually enter the Holy of Holies, symbolic of entering God's presence, and that this sacred time permits them their "highest and deepest communion with God."<sup>40</sup>

The relationship between these holy days may bear witness of what will occur in the last days. While Christ performed the acts of atonement through his suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection, the work is not yet complete. Christ's *return* will actually complete the reconciliation between him and mankind, serving as the great time of At-one-ment, when repentant individuals can physically enter his presence.<sup>41</sup>

35 Maimonides, Code of Law, Repentance 3:4.

36 Jacobs, "Ro'sh Ha-shanah and Yom Kippur," in Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 12:474.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Scherman and Zlotowitz, *Rosh Hashanah*, 111.

40 Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance*, 92.

41 I am not necessarily saying that Christ's return will actually occur on the Day of Atonement. While the pattern of Christ's fulfillment of events on his holy days might indicate the wisdom to be prepared on that

Because Israel's last three holy days signify something momentous to come, the period between Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur are called The Days of Awe, with the Day of Atonement considered most "awesome" and most holy of all days. The Feast of Tabernacles follows. We have already learned it signifies the completed harvest and the Messiah's reign.

### **The Reception of the Golden Plates Fulfilled the Prophecies Associated with the Feast of Trumpets**

Was the coming forth of the Book of Mormon on Rosh ha-Shanah coincidental? Truth is often manifest through fulfillment.

The golden plates were delivered to Joseph Smith early in the morning of 22 September 1827. The Feast of Trumpets, with prayers pleading for God's remembrance of his still exiled people, had begun at sundown the previous evening. The services continued that morning, with the sound of trumpets. All that those trumpets symbolized was now to be fulfilled. That day, God remembered his people. That day, new revelation was granted, which would bring a return to the true law. That day Israel's final harvest began. From then on, Israel would be called to repentance in preparation for the time of judgment ahead.

The Book of Mormon continues to reawaken exiled Israel, bringing them back to true worship and renewed covenants. It is the means of helping Israel prepare for the coming Day of Atonement, when the Christ will reappear and reconcile all repentant unto himself. The days are approaching when the harvest will be completed and Christ will come and dwell with his people, therefore keeping the ultimate Feast of the Tabernacles. It was Moroni who delivered the golden plates on 22 September 1827—the Feast of Trumpets. Now his image *trumpets* from temple spires the *final warning* to awaken, gather, repent, and prepare.

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day, it is more wise to be prepared on every day. The point being made is that the relationship of these three holy days bears another witness of what will occur in the last days. The final harvest of Israel has begun. When Christ returns, the repentant and obedient will be fully reconciled with him, physically entering into his presence after being cut off due to sin. Afterwards, Christ will reign during the Millennium when the spiritual harvest is complete.

The Lord has used many ways to prophesy of what would come to pass in the future. We have long been familiar with prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, who spoke of the restoration of Israel and the gospel in the latter-days. However, the Lord has also told us that his ways are often difficult to find out. When we do discover them, we shall feel awe (D&C 76:114-19).

In addition to other prophecies, the Lord also foretold his future works through the holy days he established in Israel. Through the first of these holy days he witnessed of his crucifixion (Passover), his resurrection (offering of the first sheaf of barley), and of the beginning of his first harvest (fulfilled on Pentecost). His early disciples were aware of these connections and used them to bear testimony of Christ as the Messiah (1 Corinthians 5:7; 15:20).

Through the last three holy days, the Lord has witnessed of his latter-day remembrance of Israel's covenants (Feast of Trumpets), his reunification with the repentant who return to his presence (Day of At-one-ment), and of his millennial reign when the harvest is complete (Feast of Tabernacles). These works are a witness for our day. Every witness strengthens our testimony, providing new energy to obey and endure.

Knowing that this is indeed the final harvest with an ever shortening time to labor should create greater motivation to thrust in our sickle with all our might. While working in that harvest, we are called to make known every wonderful work the Lord has performed among the people (D&C 65:4).