

**A study guide to *Reflections on the Savior's Last Week*  
by Brother Eric Huntsman (*Ensign*, April 2009)**

<p>The most important parts of this story—the Savior's atoning work, consisting of His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, His crucifixion, and His triumphant rising from the tomb—are well known to Latter-day Saints.</p> <p>We are grateful for Restoration scripture that gives us added insights and understanding of their significance. However, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John include additional events that prepare Christians to understand the symbolism of the Atonement and why Jesus was uniquely qualified to work "an infinite and eternal sacrifice" (Alma 34:10).</p> <p>Occasionally the four Gospel authors differ in their emphasis of certain aspects of these events, but these differences do not detract from the historical truth of the Savior's actions and teachings.</p> <p>Indeed, they give readers added insights and perspectives into "four mosaics" that function together like different facets of the same diamond.</p> <p><i>Chronology</i></p> <p>For many Christians, "Holy Week" describes a season of observance that begins with Palm Sunday and ends on Easter morning. The Gospels include many events, teachings, and parables from this week. The traditionally accepted sequence of events for this week largely follows the Gospel of Mark, though each of the Gospels provides relative time indicators for each day of Holy Week.</p> <p>However, the four Gospels are actually sparing in chronological detail, so the dating of some events, such as the timing of Passover, is more complicated than it might seem.</p> <p>The only day of the week clearly identified is the Sunday on which Mary Magdalene and the other women found the empty tomb (see Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1–2; John 20:1). Rather than trying to cover all the events and parables of Holy Week, let us try to understand Jesus Christ and His mission by approaching the week broadly, pausing at selected points to reflect on symbolism.</p>	<p>What are the three components of the Atonement?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol> <p>Why do you think the differences in the accounts are not significant?</p> <p>Do you think it's possible for differing accounts to actually strengthen a story's impact? In what way?</p> <p>Why do you suppose the events of Holy Week largely follow the Gospel of Mark? What are some possible reasons for this?</p> <p>Does this surprise you? Would you think it would be easier to determine timings?</p> <p>How does it benefit us to focus on symbolism, rather than specific events?</p>
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### *The Anointing at Bethany*

John 12:1–9 recounts that Martha served a special dinner to Jesus, some of His disciples, and her brother, Lazarus, who had recently been raised from the dead, before the Master entered Jerusalem for His final week.

During the course of the meal, Lazarus's other sister, Mary, anointed Jesus's feet. Judas Iscariot rebuked her for wasting the precious ointment in this way, but the Lord commended Mary, connecting this anointing with His coming death and burial.

Matthew 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9 preserve a similar incident, which they place later in the week at the time Judas agreed with the Jewish leadership to betray the Savior.

In ancient Israel it was common to anoint bodies as part of burial rituals. The Hebrew word Messiah and the Greek word Christ both mean "the anointed one," reflecting Jesus's position through these titles.

In earlier periods the Israelites also anointed living people to serve either as rightful kings or as high priests.

**We, like the disciples, must come to know that Jesus is the Son of God and gain a testimony of what He did for us.**

As we reflect on the roles He played during the last week of His mortal life, we need to remember that as our Savior He is both a king and a priest.

### *The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem*

John notes, "On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt'" (John 12:12–15; emphasis added). While a donkey does not seem to be a regal mode of transportation to modern readers, Old Testament kings, especially David, commonly rode donkeys. Furthermore, the prophet Zechariah had

How is Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead symbolic of the atonement? Go deeper than simply that he lived again.

How do we symbolically wash Christ's feet with costly ointment?

How would placing this incident at the same time as Judas's conspiracy change its impact?

Think carefully about modern anointing.

The scriptures tell us that knowing God and Jesus Christ is life eternal. How solid is your testimony of this? If it is not rock solid, you know your spiritual priority.

What is the difference between a king a prince? Why do we need both?

Take a moment to cross reference your scriptures from John 12:12 – 15 to Zechariah 9:9.

specifically foretold that the messianic king would come in this fashion (see Zechariah 9:9).

The waving of tree branches is often associated with Sukkot, the autumn Festival of Tabernacles that commemorates the wandering of the children of Israel in the wilderness.

Once they were in the promised land, however, this festival emphasized the harvest but was also associated with the coronation of Israelite kings.

Furthermore, in the period between the Old and New Testaments, the Festival of Tabernacles developed millennial associations, based largely upon the prophecy that in the last days people of all nations would come to Jerusalem "to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16).

The triumphal entry, remembered today on Palm Sunday, provides a joyful prelude to the many sad events that would intervene between this point and the miracle of the empty tomb.

It represents one of the few times during His mortal ministry when Jesus was recognized as the king He is.

However, the triumphal entry also serves as a symbol of Jesus's Second Coming, allowing us to look forward to the day when He will return in glory and all will accept Him as king.

### *The Cleansing of the Temple and the Cursing of the Fig Tree*

In one of the more dramatic events early in the week, Jesus proceeded to the courtyards around the temple, overthrew the tables of the money changers, and then drove out those involved in the buying and selling of sacrificial animals.

Although modern readers may interpret the cleansing as necessary because these activities were immoral, particularly because they occurred on temple grounds, this business did serve a purpose.

Pilgrims traveling from great distances often would not have been able to bring their own animals for sacrifice and would have needed to exchange foreign currency for coins acceptable for temple offerings. However, Jesus rebuked the money changers and other businessmen, stating that

How deliberate do you think Christ's fulfillment of this prophecy was? Do you think He chose it, or that it just happened and was a fulfillment?

How did Christ figuratively and literally end the wandering of the covenant people?

Can you think of other crowns made of plants?

Where do people go today to worship the Lord of hosts?

In your experience, does joy most often precede or follow sorrow? In the case of Jesus, it both precedes and follows? Is that your experience as well?

How do we show we recognize Christ as king? How will this change at the Second Coming?

How does this incident also show Christ's authority?

Can you think of any modern business practices that may strike you as similarly uncomfortable?

they had made His Father's house "a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). The term "thieves" as used here comes from the Greek *lēistai*, which not only means "robber" or "bandit" but also "revolutionary" or "insurgent."

Because the temple leadership in this period was notoriously corrupt, the Savior's rebuke may have been directed in part at them for allowing, and likely profiting from, these activities.

For more than two centuries the high priests had been political appointees rather than members of an appropriate priestly family. Jesus's condemnation of the leadership might suggest that He was unmasking them as false authorities who had usurped power over the sanctuary and were misusing their assumed positions.

With this in mind, a royal interpretation of the triumphal entry suggests an interesting historical connection between Jesus as king and the temple. From the time of Solomon until the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians, the temple had been, in effect, a royal chapel adjacent to the king's palace.

Ancient kings were adopted at their coronations at the temple as sons of the Lord (see Psalm 2:7), a foreshadowing of how Christ was not only the rightful king but also the actual Son of God.

He had the right to enter the temple, to cleanse it of activities that distracted from proper worship, and to retake authority from those who had usurped it.

About this same time, Jesus cursed a fruitless fig tree just outside of Jerusalem. The tree withered away soon thereafter (see Mark 11:12–14, 20–21). When the disciples asked about this, Jesus explained that if they had faith and did not doubt, they would be able to do even greater things.

There may be layers of symbolism in the event, such as a demonstration of the Lord's power over things on earth. In addition, the house of Israel, like the fig tree, had been called upon to produce good fruit by observing and keeping all the commandments of the Lord. But as a group, they were barren.

Take the time to read this section twice, making sure you understand the underlying reason for Christ's disapproval.

Mark these meanings in your scriptures. So, is it selling or what you do with the money that is the issue?

What other false authority did Christ expose?

So many of the Old Testament ways were types and shadows of Christ. Brother Huntsman's insights here invite us to look more closely at everything we read in the Old Testament, constantly seeking Christ and His covenant.

So, do you think this incident was its own declaration of his lineage?

In Luke 6:42-44; James 3:12, both Jesus and James use the production of figs as a symbol that actions and words flow from the heart and reveal the true person. How does this add meaning to this incident?

How are we sometimes fruitless fig trees? How is it hypocrisy to be a fruitless fig tree?

Particularly in Mark's account, where the story of the fig tree brackets the cleansing of the temple, this incident suggests that the house of Israel, like the fig tree, had not lived up to its potential.

The cursing of the fig tree and the overturning of the money changers' tables, taken together, may foreshadow the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple some 40 years later.

### *Teachings in the Temple*

During the first part of this week Jesus spent the nights in Bethany but came to the temple each day to teach. The Lord delivered some of His most profound lessons at this time. However, He was not without His detractors. These included the chief priests and elders, who repeatedly questioned Him regarding His authority.

Jesus deftly thwarted their attempts to discredit Him; at the same time He denounced their hypocrisy. The verbal sparring over authority elicits another connection to the triumphal entry: Jesus was the rightful leader in Israel, while the chief priests and elders were usurpers who had set themselves up in Jerusalem and in the temple as leaders of Israel.

They were, in fact, the wicked tenants who were falsely exploiting the Lord's vineyard, had rejected the prophets sent to them, and would soon beat and kill the Son (see Matthew 21:33-46).

Interestingly, the chief priests questioned Jesus in an attempt to find fault with Him at the same time that the Passover lambs for the year were being checked for faults. Thus, symbolically the Savior had already begun acting in His role of the lamb for the Atonement's great and infinite sacrifice.

### *The Olivet Discourse*

Leaving the temple, Jesus took His disciples to the Mount of Olives. There He gave them a prophetic discourse that dealt with the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and also focused on the destruction of the world at the Second Coming (see Matthew 24:1-46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36; see also Joseph Smith—Matthew).

This prophecy once again reminds us of the triumphal entry. Jesus had entered Jerusalem seemingly as a

In what ways is a fig tree like a city or a temple?

Why do you think the chief priests and elders were so threatened by Jesus?

In what ways is this still occurring?

Who or what are the usurpers of God's rightful leadership now?

Note the beginning of Christ's moving from figurative to literal lamb of God.

It would not be surprising if Jesus chose this location deliberately. Both Ezekiel (11:23) and Zechariah (14:3-4) had visions about Mount Olivet.

recognized Messiah, and many seemed to have expected Him to ascend the throne as king and political leader at that time. Although that was not His immediate purpose, the Savior explained that He would, in fact, return in glory as king of all the earth.

He then taught the people through parables—such as the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the talents—what they and we must do to prepare for His return.

### *The Last Supper*

After describing these events, all four Gospels shift their emphasis from Jesus's authority as rightful leader and teacher to His priestly role as the one who would perform a sacrifice and His role as the sacrificial lamb who would suffer and die for all mankind.

The Jewish Passover plays a significant symbolic role here. In recalling the ancient Israelites' deliverance from bondage in Egypt, the Passover festival focused in particular on Israel's deliverance from the angel of death. During the yearly celebration the priests sacrificed the paschal lamb in remembrance of the unblemished animal whose blood saved the children of Israel and whose flesh was now eaten as part of a festive meal.

On the evening before He was crucified, Jesus held the Last Supper with His disciples. The first three Gospels explicitly identify this meal as a Passover meal, and Passover imagery is replete throughout the meal (see Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–39).

During the meal, Jesus instituted the ordinance of the sacrament using bread and wine as symbols of His own body and blood.

As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said: "This ordinance commemorating our escape from the angel of darkness should be taken more seriously than it sometimes is. It should be a powerful, reverent, reflective moment. It should encourage spiritual feelings and impressions. As such it should not be rushed. It is not something to 'get over' so that the real purpose of a sacrament meeting can be pursued. This is the real purpose of the meeting. And everything that is said or sung or prayed in those services should be consistent with the grandeur of this sacred ordinance."

Do you think people would have preferred a political leader?

Why do think Jesus chose to use his last days with his disciples to teach with parables they may not understand?

Why do you think that, different until this time, the gospel writers align in this shift?

How many parallels can you think of comparing Jesus to the paschal (Passover) lamb?

Read these three accounts. Consider any differences and mark similarities.

Why are bread and wine particularly appropriate as symbols of body and blood?

Consider how you can incorporate Elder Holland's words into your own Sacramental service mindset.

The Gospel of John preserves a series of farewell remarks that began at the Last Supper and continued through Jesus's experience in Gethsemane (see John 13:31–17:26).

Focusing on Jesus's relationship with the Father, His love for us, and His injunction that we likewise love and serve one another, these moving words provide us further models for our weekly worship services.

### *Gethsemane*

The Savior's farewell words end with the beautiful Intercessory Prayer, sometimes called the great high priestly prayer, wherein Jesus prayed that His disciples "be one" as He and the Father are one (see John 17).

Following this prayer, Jesus retired to a garden on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, where He began the process of Atonement by which this prayer could be answered.

There, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord offered another prayer, during which He suffered such agony that He sweat great drops of blood (see Luke 22:44). Somehow Jesus took upon Himself the weight of our sins and sorrows (see Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:16–19).

As Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–1985) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles testified: "We do not know, we cannot tell, no mortal mind can conceive, the full import of what Christ did in Gethsemane. ... We know that in some way, incomprehensible to us, his suffering satisfied the demands of justice, ransomed penitent souls from the pains and penalties of sin, and made mercy available to those who believe in his holy name."

Reflecting upon what Jesus did in Gethsemane deepens our love for Him. In making us "one" with God, Jesus not only saves us from sin and death but also heals us.

### *Betrayal, Judgment, and Abuse*

In an ancient Israelite sacrifice, the penitent worshiper laid his hands upon the sacrificial animal, symbolically transferring his guilt before the priest led the animal away to be slaughtered and offered on the altar (see Leviticus 1:3–5).

Likewise, Jesus was symbolically led to the altar as He carried our burdens, as He suffered betrayal by His friend

Do you think Christ's disciples truly understood that He would be leaving them? Can you think of any messages the Lord has given you that you didn't truly understand at the time?

How can/should Christ's teachings influence contemporary meetings?

An intercessory prayer is a prayer on behalf of others. It is far more than a trite, "please bless..." It is a literal calling down of the power of God onto the person.

In what way did Christ provide an answer to the prayer he had offered?

Is it important that we cannot fully understand what Christ did for us in Gethsemane? If it's not fully comprehensible, what is the level of our responsibility to understand?

Pause here to reflect in quiet on what Jesus did for you to make you one with God, to save and to heal you.

How are hands laid on the sacrifice now?

and apostle Judas, and as He endured the subsequent indignities at the hands of both Roman and Jewish leaders through His arrest and trial (see Matthew 26:45–27:26; Mark 14:41–15:15; Luke 22:47–23:25; John 18:2–19:16). These experiences were part of His descending “below all things” (D&C 88:6).

Whereas the charge against Jesus before the Jewish authorities was one of breaking religious law by blasphemy, the one laid against Him in the Roman trial was political: the argument that Jesus claimed to be a king was an offense against the Roman order.

After both the Jewish hearing and the Roman trial, Jesus was subjected to abuse: mocking, scourging, spitting. This abuse had been prophesied in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon. As Isaiah prophesied, “With his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus willingly suffered our pains, afflictions, and infirmities that He might “take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” and that He might “know ... how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12).

### *The Death of the Lamb of God*

It is popular in many religious traditions to focus on the extreme suffering of Jesus’s scourging and crucifixion, but the Gospels themselves are sparing of such brutal details.

Instead, they emphasize the words and symbolic acts that fulfill prophecy. These include His crucifixion between two bandits or criminals; the division of His garments; the offering of cheap wine, or “vinegar” (Psalm 69:21) to assuage His thirst; the fact that His legs were not broken; and the piercing of His side. Significantly, the greatest suffering that our Lord experienced on the cross does not seem to be anything that man inflicted upon him. Jesus’s cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34) may reflect, as in Gethsemane, that His carrying the weight of our sins necessarily separated Him from His Father in a way that He had never experienced before.

### *Jesus died as a ransom for all.*

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught: “No member of this Church must ever forget the terrible price paid by our Redeemer, who gave His life that all men might live. ...This was the cross, the instrument of His torture, the terrible device designed to destroy the Man of

Why is Judas’s betrayal important to us? What can we learn from it?

Which do you think was the greater threat to the common order? Christ’s priesthood claim or the political one?

What can we learn from this about what we should gain from our own suffering? What should we be able to do because of it?

When we separate ourselves from God through sin, do we feel as much pain as we should in this separation? If it was that separation that was most painful for the Savior, do we learn something important about ourselves if it causes itself little or no pain?

Peace, the evil recompense for His miraculous work of healing the sick, of causing the blind to see, of raising the dead. This was the cross on which He hung and died on Golgotha's lonely summit. We cannot forget that. We must never forget it, for here our Savior, our Redeemer, the Son of God, gave Himself, a vicarious sacrifice for each of us."

Jesus's being lifted up upon the cross is a fundamental component of the gospel message as later defined by Jesus Himself to the Nephites when He promised that even as He was lifted up by men, so all men will "be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me" (3 Nephi 27:14-15).

Foreshadowed by the brazen serpent that Moses raised in the wilderness, Jesus was lifted up that all might be saved if they would but look to Him (see Numbers 21:6-9; 1 Nephi 17:41; Alma 33:19-22).

The Gospel of John, which explicitly describes Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36), also connects the death of the Savior directly with the Passover. Jesus, as the unblemished or sinless lamb whose bones could not be broken (see Exodus 12:3, 5, 46), died so that spiritual death might "pass over" those who come unto Him. As the blood of the first Passover sacrifice was spread on the doors of each Israelite home, so too did the blood of Christ flow upon the wood of the cross.

According to one approach to the chronology of the last week suggested by the Gospel of John, Passover actually began at sunset the day Jesus was crucified. In this scenario the paschal lambs, which were sacrificed before the beginning of Passover so that they would be ready in time for the Passover meal, would have been sacrificed in the temple at the very time that Jesus was dying on the cross.

### *The Empty Tomb and the Risen Lord*

All four Gospels begin the account of the Resurrection with the empty tomb. The angels' query to the women, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5) continues to be a question that confronts us today, for we must find the living Christ not just in the pages of history or even the scriptures but also through the Holy Spirit in our own lives.

Among the first people to enter the tomb were the Apostles Peter and John (see Luke 24:12; John 20:3-10).

In what ways do we forget? Do you think President Hinckley meant a literal forgetting? If not, then what did he mean?

In the case of the brazen serpent, many were lost because of the "ease of the way." In what ways do we fail to look to God and live because of the ease of the way?

Is there an application for us in modern times in this?

Is this chronology important? If it is not accurate, why would John align these events?

How do we seek the living among the dead? How do we truly find the living Christ in our lives through the Spirit? How do you really make that happen?

However, the first person to see the risen Lord was Mary Magdalene (see Mark 16:9; John 20:11–16). Soon other women saw Him, followed by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (see Matthew 28:9–10; Mark 16:12–13; Luke 24:13–32). Their experiences suggest that all people, not just the Apostles, have the ability to gain a testimony that Jesus was resurrected and lives today.

The most powerful witnesses of Jesus’s living reality were reserved for the Apostles (see Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:33–51; John 20:19–30; Acts 1:2–9), who, “by many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3), gained a special witness of the risen Lord and received a commission to take this news to all the earth.

The miracle of the empty tomb and the subsequent appearances of the risen Lord stand as powerful reminders that the atoning mission of Jesus Christ was not limited to His suffering and death for our sins.

As expressed by the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, the goodness of God is manifest in His preparing a way to overcome the awful monsters of death and hell, which are physical and spiritual death (see 2 Nephi 9:10). Only by overcoming both of these obstacles through the Redemption and the Resurrection can God’s children truly become “one” with Him again.

Do we sometimes hide behind our own humble and simple roles in the gospel to shirk our duty of testimony, assuming that only the leaders need to or can gain an shakable testimony?

Why is this? Is it because of their relationship with Him or their responsibilities to Him? Both? Other reasons?

Why does it sometimes seem easier to accept Christ’s victory over physical, rather than spiritual death?

What are the actions we should take if we truly desire to become one with God?