

July 1-7  
New Testament Lesson # 26  
Ye Shall Be Witnesses unto Me  
(Acts 1-5)  
By Lenet Hadley Read

- I. The importance of Jesus' forty day ministry
- A. **One of the great losses in our New Testament records are those precious teachings Jesus gave His apostles and close disciples in the forty days after His resurrection.**
  - B. It is largely due to this loss that there are so many differences between the Christian churches. Up until His resurrection, Jesus' focus had been that He was the Messiah, who had come to bring salvation. He had given very little information on other doctrines and how to govern His Church. For there is very little found in the Four Gospels we inherited.
  - C. It was likely during the forty day ministry that Jesus concentrated on the other doctrines and organizational structure of His church. **Furthermore, He most likely ceased speaking in parables, but taught His doctrines with clarity.** (For some material on this period see Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, pp.10-44).
  - D. Latter-day Saints are blessed with an enlightening look into the doctrines taught and organizational work done in Jesus' post Resurrection work through the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 11:9-30:2). Surely His acts and teachings were parallel among both.
  - E. Even then, our record does not contain all His teachings or work. Note: "And he did expound all things even from the beginning until the time that he would come in his glory --- yea even all things that should come upon the earth ... And there **cannot be written in this book even an hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach** unto his people" (3 Nephi 26:3, 6). (Emphasis added)  
Surely He gave the same vast teachings unto His apostles and disciples in Jerusalem.
  - F. **Because of the loss of the teachings of the 40-day ministry, most Christian faiths have been forced to seek doctrines and how to govern their churches from the Epistles. But because they give information only in bits and pieces (the full guidance having been previously given personally by apostles, etc), there is little clarity. For this reason Christian Churches vary greatly in their basic doctrines and how they govern their various forms of Christianity.**
- II. Just before leaving, Jesus promised the Gift of the Holy Ghost.
- A. The Gift of the Holy Ghost was a major event in early Christianity. **Its coming had long been prophesied** and prepared for.
  - B. Ancient Israel was commanded to keep on the 50<sup>th</sup> Day, the Feast of Weeks or First fruits (Leviticus 23:15-22). This feast day was to be observed fifty days from the time of the offering of the first sheaf of the harvest. Instead of unleavened bread, two loaves of *leavened* bread were to be offered. "They are the firstfruits unto the Lord" (Leviticus 23:17).
  - C. **Leavened bread would be appropriate now. Christ, the pure leaven, was**

resurrected, and the lifting up to Eternal Life was available to all who would accept him.

III. There is special meaning to this Holy day just as there had been for Passover.

- A. After Jesus' forty day ministry, [**And now we sense why His post-mortal ministry lasted about 40 days**], He considered His disciples nearly ready for the great missionary work that lay before them. But certain vital steps remained.
- B. He commanded them not yet to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for "power from on high," i.e., the gift of the Holy Ghost, which would give them power to bear witness throughout Judea, and even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:5, 8). When was this promise realized?
- C. **The Holy Ghost was bestowed on Pentecost, the Greek name for the fiftieth day** the fiftieth day from the offering of that first harvest sheaf and of Christ's Resurrection. **So this significant event occurred on the Feast of the Firstfruits.**
- D. On this day, elders of Israel had come up, as commanded, to Jerusalem from many different and distant nations. They had assembled to keep this Feast. And on this day, the Holy Ghost was poured forth, as cloven tongues of fire. Under the influence of the Holy Ghost, the apostles stood and bore powerful witness that Jesus was the Messiah for whom their people had waited for centuries.
- E. Because of the Holy Ghost, **they were able to speak in tongues, in the tongues of those Jews who had come from many lands to celebrate the Feast of Firstfruits.**
- F. Because of the power of the Holy Ghost, the hearts of many were penetrated. And **that day nearly three thousand persons were baptized (Acts 2:41). And many of those there went back to their distant lands, bearing witness the Messiah had come.**
- G. Note that on this day Israel had been anciently commanded "...When ye reap the harvest of your land, ...neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger :'" (Lev. 23: 22). So from the beginning, the Lord had taught and prepared for His Gospel to be taken at this time to the spiritually poor and those "strangers" [**Gentiles**] outside of Israel.
- H. The first sheaf of barley offered fifty days earlier was symbolic of Christ as the very first fruit of the harvest from the dead. *But on this day, the time of the wider wheat harvest, the first converts obtained through the witness or the Spirit began to be gathered in. Thus began Christ's harvest of souls in the Meridian of Time. And again, the fulfillment of this prophetic feast took place upon the day it was celebrated. It truly became a "Feast of the Firstfruits of Christ's First Harvest."*
- I. We have now seen how the first set of Holy days Israel had been commanded to observe taught of Jesus' mission in the Meridian of Time. That first set of Holy Days bore witness of Christ's Crucifixion (Passover); of His Resurrection (The First Sheaf offering); and **of the beginning of His early harvest of souls (The Feast of Firstfruits).**

IV. From our prophets we learn that, in addition, **the apostles were also endowed with Power on High through temple ordinances.**

- A. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote "the power from on high" which the apostles were promised by Jesus (Luke 24:49) also had reference to temple endowments.

“But from latter-day revelation we learn that the Lord had something more in mind in issuing this instruction. In this dispensation, after the elders had received the gift of the Holy Ghost... the Lord began to reveal unto them that he had an endowment in store for the faithful (D& C 38:22; 43:16), “a blessing such as is not known among the children of men” (D&C 39:15). In June, 1833, he said; “I gave unto you a commandment that you should build a house, in the which house I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high; For this is the promise of the Father unto you; therefore I command you to tarry, *even as mine apostles at Jerusalem*” (D&C 95:8-9; 105:11-12, 18, 33). (emphasis added).

“Thus the apostles --- or any ministers or missionaries in any age --- are not fully qualified to go forth, preach the gospel, and build up the kingdom, unless they have the gift of the Holy Ghost, *and also are endowed with power from on high, meaning have received certain knowledge, powers, and special blessings, normally given only in the Lord’s Temple.*” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol.1, p. 859.) (Emphasis added).

He also said “... in the days of poverty, or when the number of true believers has been small, the Lord has used mountains, groves, and wilderness locations for temple purposes. Endowments, for instance, following the latter-day exodus, were first given on Ensign peak (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, pp. 231-257).”

Other LDS scholars have presented actual evidences that the early Christians did indeed have and did perform temple ordinances. (See Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, pp. 45-167; or Matthew Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, pp. 165-204).

V. The Power of the Holy Ghost and the Power of the Endowments changed the apostles from wavering servants to mighty servants.

- A. Peter, while seeking to have faith, had continually stumbled. Such as when he tried to walk on the tempestuous sea, and when he failed to stand with Christ during His great trial. All the other apostles had also faltered.
- B. **But now Peter and all the apostles had become apostles of power.** They no longer failed in their faith, but **walked in faith until they too all suffered death for their testimony of Christ.** (While John did not suffer a martyr’s death, he suffered lonely banishment, and likely many other persecutions).
- C. This powerful change in the apostles is a testimony of the truth of the ministry and resurrection of Jesus Christ, their Master. He had the power to change their lives, and he has the power to change the lives of anyone who will truly believe and seek to follow in His footsteps.

VI. **It has also been shown from the lives of early Latter-day Saint pioneers, that it was receiving temple endowments in the Nauvoo Temple prior to their Exodus that gave them**

the strength and faith to endure all they had to pass through in achieving their ultimate goal of a Promised Land, and to establish there a Latter-day Zion.

- A. As pointed out in the July 2011 Visiting Teaching message, “An estimated 6,000 Latter-day Saints received temple ordinances before the exodus from Nauvoo. President Brigham Young (1801-77) said, ‘Such has been the anxiety manifested by the saints to receive the ordinances [of the temple], and such the anxiety on our part to administer to them, that I have given myself up entirely to the work of the Lord in the Temple night and day, not taking more than four hours sleep, upon an average, per day, and going home but once a week.’ **The strength and power of temple covenants fortified the Saints as they left their city and temple for a journey into the unknown.**” (*The Ensign*, July 2011, p. 7) (Emphasis added)

Thus through the Gift of the Holy Ghost and Temple Ordinances, the ancient disciples were empowered to go forth and bear witness of Jesus the Christ.

We have received the same empowerment and the same responsibility in these Latter-days! We too are His witnesses.