

The Spiritual Implications of Wheat in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: A Study of Scripture, Liturgy, and Tradition

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Abstract:

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) possesses a rich theological tradition in which material elements serve as vehicles for spiritual truth. Among these, wheat occupies a distinctive place, appearing throughout Scripture, liturgy, and living tradition. Yet the full spiritual implications of wheat within this tradition have received limited scholarly attention. Purpose: This study investigates the spiritual implications of wheat in the EOTC, examining its significance across three interconnected dimensions: scriptural revelation, liturgical enactment, and living tradition. The research aims to articulate how wheat functions as a multivalent symbol of divine provision, ethical responsibility, and eschatological hope. Methods: The study employs a qualitative approach combining biblical exegesis of Ge'ez texts (including the broader Ethiopian canon) with liturgical theology and analysis of traditional practices. Primary sources include the Book of Enoch (1 Enoch), the Book of Jubilees, and documented liturgical practices, particularly the preparation and distribution of Nifro (boiled wheat) at funerals and memorial services. Findings: The investigation reveals that wheat in the EOTC functions as a threefold symbol. First, scripturally, it signifies God's covenantal provision (Deuteronomy 8:8) and becomes a test of righteousness through the warning against consuming the "finest of the wheat" while neglecting the poor (1 Enoch 36:26). Second, liturgically, Nifro enacts the theology of death and resurrection, transforming hard kernels into life-giving food that proclaims the hope of the General Resurrection (John 12:24). Third, traditionally, wheat connects the faithful to the covenant symbolized by the Tabot and anticipates the Heavenly Banquet. Conclusion: Wheat in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition embodies a theology that is simultaneously scriptural, ethical, and liturgical, a theology that can be seen, tasted, and shared. The grain encapsulates the Gospel message: death yields to greater life. Recommendation: Further research is recommended on the comparative study of Nifro with other Orthodox memorial traditions (koliva) and on the role of wheat in contemporary Ethiopian Orthodox diaspora communities.

Keywords:

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church; wheat symbolism; Nifro; Book of Enoch; liturgical theology

I. Introduction

The Staff of Life in the Land of Promise

Grain constitutes the foundational foodstuff upon which human civilization has depended since the Neolithic revolution. In the ancient Near Eastern context, wheat and barley represented not merely dietary staples but the very substance of life itself, the fruits of human labor working in cooperation with divine provision. The Deuteronomist tradition captures this theological understanding with precision: the Promised Land is described as "a land of wheat and

barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey" (Deuteronomy 8:8, New International Version). This seven-fold catalog of agricultural abundance functions as a covenantal signifier, the land's fertility is not autonomous but flows from divine faithful provision for the people (Bible Hub, 2023a). Each grain and fruit carries symbolic weight: wheat, the basic staple for daily bread, stands at the head of the list, establishing a pattern where physical sustenance becomes the vehicle for spiritual instruction (Bible Hub, 2023b).

Within the Ethiopian context, a significant hermeneutical adaptation occurs. While the cultural staple for daily sustenance is injera made from teff (*Eragrostis tef*), a gluten-free grain indigenous to the Ethiopian Highlands (Wikipedia, 2023a), the liturgical and symbolic role belongs distinctively to wheat. In Ge'ez, the classical liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, wheat is designated as ሥር ናይ (sərnay), appearing throughout the scriptures of the broader canon. This linguistic distinction matters: teff nourishes the body daily, but wheat, particularly in its prepared form as Nifro (boiled wheat), nourishes the soul through its ritual consumption at funerals, memorial services (tselo), and feast days of saints. The Ethiopian tradition thus performs a hermeneutical transposition—the "wheat of the land" promised in Deuteronomy becomes the wheat of the liturgy, transforming agricultural abundance into eschatological hope.

This study investigates the spiritual implications of wheat in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, demonstrating that its significance unfolds through three interconnected dimensions: the scriptural revelation of divine provision and judgment, the liturgical enactment of death and resurrection in the practice of Nifro, and the living tradition that connects the faithful to the covenant and the hope of eternal life.

II. Research Methods

The methodological approach employed in this study combines biblical exegesis with liturgical theology, attending particularly to the distinctive witness of the Ethiopian Orthodox canon. The exegetical dimension examines wheat imagery within the Ge'ez textual tradition, including not only the canonical books common to wider Christendom but also those texts preserved as authoritative within the Ethiopian tradition, most significantly, the Book of Enoch (1 Enoch) and the Book of Jubilees. These texts, preserve in Ge'ez manuscripts after being lost or fragmentary elsewhere, constitute essential sources for understanding Ethiopian Orthodox biblical interpretation (4 Enoch, 2014; Wikipedia, 2023b).

The liturgical-theological dimension investigates the practice of Nifro, examining its preparation, its ritual contexts (funerals, memorial services, and saintly commemorations), and the theological meanings ascribed to it within the living tradition of the Church. This requires attending to both published liturgical sources and the embodied practice of the faithful, recognizing that in Orthodox tradition, liturgy constitutes theology in its most authentic form, prayed belief (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). The study also draws upon comparative liturgical materials from the wider Eastern Orthodox tradition, particularly the practice of koliva, to illuminate both common heritage and distinctive Ethiopian developments (Wikipedia, 2023c; Wikiwand, 2023).

This investigation pursues three primary objectives: first, to articulate the scriptural foundations for wheat symbolism within the Ethiopian biblical canon, with particular attention to the unique witness of 1 Enoch; second, to describe and interpret the liturgical practice of

Nifro as a lived theology of death and resurrection; and third, to demonstrate how these scriptural and liturgical elements together constitute a coherent spiritual vision that connects the faithful to the covenant promises and the eschatological hope.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to several scholarly conversations. For Ethiopian Orthodox studies, it provides a focused examination of a liturgical practice ubiquitous yet often theologically under-examined. For biblical studies, it illuminates how communities formed by particular canonical traditions read Scripture through liturgical lenses. For liturgical theology, it offers a case study in how material elements (grain, water, fire) become vehicles for communicating the Gospel's deepest mysteries. Most fundamentally, this study seeks to honor the wisdom of the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition by attending carefully to what it teaches through both word and ritual action about the God who provides, judges, and raises the dead.

III. Discussion

3.1 The Scriptural Foundation: Wheat in the Ethiopian Biblical Canon

a. The Ge'ez Terminology for Wheat

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church preserves Scripture in Ge'ez, the classical liturgical language in which the complete text of 1 Enoch and other deuterocanonical books have been transmitted (4 Enoch, 2014). The primary Ge'ez term for wheat is ሥር ና ይ (sərnay), which appears throughout the scriptures as the general designation for wheat or grain. This term represents not merely a botanical category but carries theological weight as the signifier of God's basic provision and the harvest of the Promised Land (Translation Insights and Perspectives [TIPs], n.d.-a). As TIPs (n.d.-b) notes, wheat constituted "the staple food for the people of ancient Israel," such that divine judgment was expressed through breaking "the staff of bread" (Ezekiel 4:16, English Standard Version). The term sərnay thus functions within Ethiopian scripture as shorthand for divine sustenance itself, the material basis of life that flows from covenantal faithfulness.

b. The "Finest of the Wheat" and Divine Judgment (1 Enoch 36:26)

The most theologically significant use of wheat imagery in the Ethiopian canon appears in 1 Enoch 36:26, a verse preserved only in Ge'ez: አ ሌ ለ ክ ሙእ ለ ጉበ ልዑ ሥብሐ ሥር ና ይ ("Woe to you who devour the finest of the wheat") (TIPs, n.d.-a). The critical phrase ሥብሐ ለ ሥር ና ይ (səbhā lāsərnay), "the finest of the wheat", denotes not common grain but select, premium wheat, the choicest portion of the harvest reserved for special use (TIPs, n.d.-a). The verse continues with a second image of excess ("quaff wine from the mixing bowl") and concludes with the social crime: "while you tread on the lowly with you might" (TIPs, n.d.-a).

The spiritual implication, as articulated in recent scholarship on 1 Enoch and Ethiopian theology, is that wheat functions not merely as a symbol of blessing but as a test of righteousness. Wright's (2017) analysis of "social and economic injustice" in the Epistle of Enoch demonstrates that apocalyptic literature employs agricultural imagery precisely to expose the moral failure of the powerful who consume abundance while crushing the vulnerable. The "finest of the wheat" represents God's goodness that can be received either with justice (sharing with the lowly) or with pride (hoarding for self-indulgence). This distinction carries profound soteriological weight: consumption of the finest wheat becomes evidence either of covenant faithfulness or of covenant violation.

The connection to social ethics within Ethiopian Orthodox teaching is direct and enduring. As Asale (2020) demonstrates in his study of 1 Enoch's reception in Ethiopia, the Enochic tradition has shaped Ethiopian Christian consciousness regarding the poor for nearly two millennia. The "lowly" (ትሑታን) of Enoch 36:26 are the same anawim (poor/meek) who appear throughout the Psalms and prophetic literature, those whom the faithful are commanded to protect and provide for (McConville, 2017). Thus, Enoch 36:26 establishes a foundational principle: right worship of the God who provides the finest wheat requires right relationship with those who lack even common grain.

c. The Harvest of the Righteous

Old Testament imagery of the wheat harvest pervades the Ethiopian liturgical imagination. The Psalms frequently employ harvest language to describe the gathering of God's people: "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy" (Psalm 126:5, English Standard Version). The prophetic literature intensifies this imagery, portraying the final ingathering as both judgment and salvation. Within the Ethiopian hermeneutical tradition, as Lee's (2017) research on Andemta commentary reveals, traditional interpretation reads these harvest texts as referring simultaneously to historical ingathering (the return from exile) and eschatological gathering (the final resurrection).

The New Testament fulfillment of this imagery appears most clearly in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). In Ethiopian Orthodox interpretation, as reflected in the living commentary tradition, this parable reinforces the ecclesiological reality that the Church exists as a field where the righteous (wheat) grow alongside the wicked (tares) until the final judgment (Assefa, 2017). The parable's eschatological framework, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matthew 13:30, English Standard Version), echoes the Enochic warning: the finest wheat is destined for the barn, but only for those who have not trodden on the lowly. The Church thus understands itself as the eschatological wheat-field, called to patient endurance amid mixture, awaiting the Harvester who alone can separate with justice (Stuckenbruck, 2017).

3.2 The Liturgical Enactment: Nifro as a Sacrament of Death and Life

a. What is Nifro? A Physical Description

Nifro (ንፍሮ) is a traditional Ethiopian boiled grain dish that occupies a distinctive place in both the culinary and religious life of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Physically, Nifro consists of wheat kernels, and occasionally other grains such as barley or chickpeas that are boiled in water until softened, typically seasoned simply with salt (Zemedet Asfaw, 2011). Scientific research has established optimal boiling conditions for Nifro production: for soft wheat, 75.2°C for approximately 1.36 hours, and for hard wheat, 77.97°C for 1.79 hours, parameters that significantly affect the proximate composition and sensory qualities of the finished product (Ayele, 2024).

What distinguishes Nifro from ordinary Ethiopian grain dishes is its dual character. On one hand, it exists as a common snack food, prepared occasionally for everyday consumption alongside other grain-based dishes such as kolo (roasted grain) and kinche (cracked grain porridge) (Zemedet Asfaw, 2011). On the other hand, within the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, Nifro assumes a sacred role, transformed from mere sustenance into liturgical food that carries profound theological meaning. This dual character mirrors the broader Orthodox understanding that material creation, when consecrated, becomes a vehicle for divine grace.

b. The Occasions of Nifro: Weaving Through the Church Year

The primary liturgical context for Nifro is funerals and memorial services (tselo, zikir), where it is prepared, blessed, and shared with the community gathered to pray for the departed (Zemedede Asfaw, 2011). In this context, Nifro functions as a tangible expression of communal solidarity with the bereaved and intercessory prayer for the deceased. The preparation itself often involves the family of the departed, making the offering an act of loving labor offered for the repose of the soul.

Beyond funerals, Nifro appears on feasts of saints, where its distribution connects the living community with the "cloud of witnesses", the saints who have gone before and now intercede for the faithful. During major feasts such as Timket (Epiphany), Nifro is distributed more generally as a sign of celebration and communal blessing. This pattern of distribution throughout the church year weaves Nifro into the liturgical fabric of Ethiopian Orthodox life, marking both moments of sorrow (funerals) and joy (feasts) with the same elemental food.

3.3 The Spiritual Theology of Nifro: An Edible Sermon

At the heart of Nifro's spiritual significance lies the symbolism of death and resurrection, grounded in the Gospel of John: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24, English Standard Version). This agricultural metaphor becomes liturgical reality in the practice of Nifro. The boiled wheat represents the deceased, who has "fallen asleep" in death, planted like a kernel in the ground. The transformation effected by boiling, the hard, seemingly "dead" kernel becoming soft, palatable, life-giving food becomes a tangible promise of the General Resurrection (Ayele, 2024). Just as water and fire transform the wheat into nourishment, so death transforms the faithful into those who await new life.

The practice of Nifro finds its parallel in the wider Eastern Orthodox tradition of koliva, boiled wheat used for memorial services throughout the Orthodox world (Wikipedia, 2023; Wikiwand, 2023). Both traditions share the same foundational theology: the grain that dies in the earth becomes the grain that feeds the community, prefiguring the resurrection of the dead. The Ethiopian tradition, however, maintains distinctive features, the simplicity of salt as seasoning, the integration with local grains, and its place within Ethiopia's unique liturgical calendar.

Finally, the communal act of eating Nifro together constitutes an act of unity that binds the living community in prayer for the departed. As participants share the same food, they are reminded of their own mortality and their shared hope in the resurrection. In this way, Nifro functions as an "edible sermon", a liturgical action that proclaims the Gospel more eloquently than words alone could express.

3.4 The Living Tradition: Covenant, Provision, and Eschatology

a. Wheat and the Covenant with Israel

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church maintains a profound and distinctive connection to the Old Testament, a characteristic that scholars have long recognized as central to its identity. Ullendorff observed that Ethiopian Christianity preserves "one of the most remarkable areas of agreement with Old Testament forms of worship" (as cited in Wikipedia, 2024). This connection is not merely historical but theological: the covenantal promises made to Israel are understood as the spiritual inheritance of the Ethiopian faithful. The land promised to the patriarchs was described as "a land of wheat and barley" (Deuteronomy 8:8), establishing wheat as a tangible sign of divine blessing and covenant faithfulness.

Within this covenantal framework, the Tabot (Ge'ez: ታቦት) occupies the central place in Ethiopian Orthodox worship. The Tabot is a replica of the Ark of the Covenant, representing the very presence of God among His people (Wikipedia, 2024; Habtamu Teshome, 2023). Every Ethiopian Orthodox church must possess a Tabot, consecrated by a bishop, to be considered a true church (Habtamu Teshome, 2023). The Tabot is kept in the Holy of Holies (Qedduse Qeddusan), wrapped in ornate cloths and accessible only to ordained clergy, a practice that echoes the Old Testament prohibition against unauthorized approach to the Ark (Habtamu Teshome, 2023).

The theological relationship between wheat and the Tabot emerges when we consider what constitutes a fitting offering for the divine presence. In the Old Testament, the showbread (literally "bread of the presence") was placed before the Lord in the Tabernacle, made from the finest wheat flour (Leviticus 24:5-9). In the Ethiopian tradition, the Tabot itself is the surface upon which the Eucharistic elements, the bread and wine are placed during the liturgy (Habtamu Teshome, 2023). This practice embodies a profound theological statement: the "finest of the wheat" (ሥብሐ ለሥረ ናይ, *səbhā lāsərnay*) is offered upon the very symbol of God's covenantal presence. The Ark of the Old Covenant provides the foundation upon which the New Covenant sacrifice is offered, just as the finest wheat of the Promised Land becomes the bread of the Eucharist. Antohin (2024) describes this as a "domain of nested reference points" where covenant ideas are elaborated through symbolic pairings and devotional practices, creating a living tradition that keeps ancient knowledge current and meaningful.

b. The Eucharistic Echo

While the Eucharist uses bread (often wheat) and wine as its material elements, and Nifro serves a distinct liturgical function, the two practices echo one another theologically. The Eucharistic bread made from many grains ground together to form one loaf, represents the unity of the Body of Christ, the Church, formed from many members united in faith (1 Corinthians 10:17). Nifro, in its own way, expresses a similar unity. The boiled wheat kernels once separate and hard, are transformed together through water and fire into a shared food consumed by the community gathered in prayer.

In the context of funerals and memorial services, Nifro embodies a particularly poignant expression of unity. The departed—who have "fallen asleep" in Christ, remain part of the one Body, joined with the living in the communion of saints. When the community shares Nifro together, they affirm that death has not severed this bond. The same hope that animates the Eucharistic celebration, the anticipation of the coming Kingdom, animates the distribution of Nifro at the graveside. In the Ethiopian tradition, as Tefera (2015) demonstrates in his study of the Dersanä Şeyon (Homily on the Ark), the material symbols of the covenant (including the Tabot and the offerings made upon it) serve to connect the faithful across generations, creating continuity between the living, the departed, and the saints who have gone before.

c. Eschatological Hope: The Heavenly Banquet

The spiritual journey of wheat in Ethiopian Orthodox thought culminates in eschatological hope. Wheat, processed through threshing, grinding, and baking into finest bread, serves as a persistent biblical image of the Heavenly Banquet, the Messianic feast prepared for the righteous in the Kingdom of God. Isaiah prophesies that on Mount Zion, the Lord will prepare "a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines" (Isaiah 25:6). This feast is the fulfillment of the covenant promises, the ultimate expression of divine provision.

The judgment imagery from the Book of Enoch finds its resolution in this eschatological framework. Enoch 36:26 pronounces woe upon those who consume the finest of the wheat while treading on the lowly (Translation Insights and Perspectives, n.d.). This warning establishes wheat as a test of righteousness: those who hoard abundance while neglecting justice exclude themselves from the very blessings they consume. The separation of the "finest" from the worthless, the wheat from the chaff is the work of the final judgment, when the Harvester will gather the righteous into His barn (Matthew 13:30).

For the Ethiopian Orthodox faithful, the hope of the Heavenly Banquet informs every liturgical use of wheat. When Nifro is shared at a memorial service, it is a foretaste of the resurrection feast. When the Eucharist is celebrated upon the Tabot, it is an anticipation of the eternal worship of the New Jerusalem. The "finest of the wheat", whether as bread, as Nifro, or as the abundance of the Promised Land, ultimately signifies the fullness of God's provision, where the righteous will be satisfied with the goodness of the Lord's house forever? This eschatological vision, as Antohin (2024) argues, is not mere future expectation but a present reality enacted through devotional practice, keeping traditional knowledge alive and connecting each generation to the covenant promises that find their fulfillment in Christ.

3.5 The Connection between Wheat and Astronomy in Ethiopian Orthodox Tradition

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church preserves a profound integration of wheat symbolism with astronomical and calendrical systems, reflecting a theological vision in which cosmic order and agricultural abundance both testify to divine sovereignty.

a. The Bahre Hasab: Calendrical Astronomy and the Ordering of Time

The Bahre Hasab (ባሕረ ሐሳብ), meaning "Sea of Ideas," is the traditional computus system used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to determine religious festivals and feast days (Wikipedia, 2026). This system addresses "cycles of the sun, moon, stars, winds, and their duration," functioning as a comprehensive framework for understanding time as divinely ordered (Wikipedia, 2026). The system incorporates the Metonic cycle, a 19-year lunar cycle, which Pope Demetrios of Alexandria employed in establishing methods for determining the date of Easter (Fasika), demonstrating the Church's engagement with astronomical observation (Goshu, and Abdi, 2024).

Goshu and Ridwan (2026) demonstrate that the seven heavens cosmology preserved in Ethiopian tradition functions as a "structured metaphysical framework" articulating divine sovereignty and graded ontological reality, rather than merely a prescientific hypothesis. Similarly, Goshu (2025) has examined how the Book of Enoch preserves early astronomical thought that served as "a prelude to scientific observation," showing continuity between ancient celestial observation and contemporary astronomical understanding.

Wheat cultivation follows the rhythms prescribed by this calendrical system. The agricultural cycle of sowing and harvest aligns with specific feasts, reflecting the theological conviction that the same God who orders the heavens also ordains the seasons. The "Harvest Festival" (Be'ale Sewit), originally a Jewish thanksgiving for harvested crops, was observed fifty days after the sickle was first put to the grain. After Christ's redemptive work, this harvest festival was transfigured into Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, which Ethiopian tradition commemorates as the birth of the Church. The wheat harvest thus becomes a cosmic sign pointing to the gathering of the faithful into the one Body of Christ.

b. The Tabot: Cosmic Presence and Earthly Offering

The Tabot (ታቦት), a replica of the Ark of the Covenant, represents the very presence of God in Ethiopian Orthodox worship (Goshu, and Abdi, 2024). Every church must possess a consecrated Tabot to conduct the liturgy, and it is kept in the Holy of Holies (Qedduse Qeddusan), accessible only to ordained clergy (Habtamu Teshome, 2023). Edward Ullendorff observed that "the concept and function of the Tabot represent one of the most remarkable areas of agreement with Old Testament forms of worship" (as cited in Wikipedia, 2024).

In relation to wheat, the Tabot establishes a cosmic connection. The finest wheat offered in the Eucharist, placed upon the Tabot during the liturgy, represents an offering to the cosmic Sovereign who rules over both celestial bodies and earthly harvest. The Tabot itself, housed within the sacred space, participates in what Heldman (2012) terms Ethiopian Orthodox cosmology, wherein sacred space represents a transformed realm where heavenly and earthly realities converge. This cosmic worship includes the offering of wheat, the staple grain that sustains human life, as a sign of creation's participation in divine praise.

c. The Star of Bethlehem: Astronomical Witness to the Bread of Life

The narrative of Christ's birth provides a direct astronomical connection to wheat symbolism. The Magi followed a star, an astronomical phenomenon to find the infant Jesus, who would later declare, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). In Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, this creates a symbolic link: the star (astronomy) leads to the bread (wheat), signifying that the cosmos itself bears witness to the One who is humanity's true sustenance.

The feast of Timkat (Epiphany) celebrates the baptism of Christ, and during this festival the Tabot is carried in procession "reminiscent of 2 Samuel, chapter 6, in which King David leads the people dancing before the Ark" (Wikipedia, 2024). The wheat used throughout the liturgical year participates in this christological reality, connecting astronomical phenomena with sacramental nourishment.

d. Pentecost: The Harvest Feast Transformed

The Ethiopian Orthodox understanding of Pentecost exemplifies the integration of agricultural and cosmic symbolism. Originally a Jewish harvest festival celebrated fifty days after the grain harvest; Pentecost was transformed after Christ's resurrection into the feast of the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Ethiopian tradition explicitly connects these meanings: "Fifty days after the sickle had been put to the grain, comparable to fifty days after JESUS was hung on a cross, crucified and buried, fifty days after the promised Seed that had been buried in the ground sprouted to life" (Nigus, 2015). The wheat harvest thus becomes a type of Christ's death and resurrection, the Seed that falls into the earth and dies to bear much fruit (John 12:24).

e. Ethiopian Crosses: Cosmic Symbolism

The Ethiopian cross, as Evangelatou (2018) demonstrates, embodies a rich cosmic symbolism. Crosses "reflect and shape a broad range of ideas, from religious beliefs to interrelated socio-political values" and function as "the sacred matrix that encompasses the life of the world in both its microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions" (Evangelatou, 2018). In liturgical processions, the cross is carried alongside the Tabot and the wheat offered in the Eucharist, creating a unified visual theology in which the cross—understood as the axis around which the cosmos is ordered, stands at the center of both astronomical and agricultural meaning.

f. The Kalends, Computus, and Wheat

The Bahre Hasab system enables the Church to calculate key feasts including Neneveh (Nineveh), Lent (Abiy Tsom), Hosanna, and Fasika (Easter) (Goshu, and Abdi, 2024). These calculations incorporate the concept of Amete Alem, the years since creation, which Ethiopian tradition dates to 5500 BC (Wikipedia, 2026). This chronological framework places wheat cultivation within a sacred history that spans from creation to eschatological consummation.

Goshu and Ridwan (2026) further argue that ancient cosmological frameworks, including those preserved in Ethiopian tradition, share "meaningful structural parallelism" with contemporary astrophysical understanding, including atmospheric divisions, galactic hierarchies, and large-scale cosmic structures. The "finest of the wheat" (ሥብሐ ለሥር ናይ, *səbhā lāsərnay*) offered upon the Tabot participates in this cosmic chronology, linking the present offering to the original creation and the final harvest.

g. Sirius and the Agricultural Calendar

Anadualem and Goshu (2023) have investigated the connection between the star Sirius and the Ethiopian calendar, finding that 54.67% of respondents in their study believed the Ethiopian calendar had a connection with the filling of the Nile River. Their research demonstrates that "the appearance of the star in the Northern Hemisphere is a signal that winter is coming," recognized by 97.33% of respondents. This star-based seasonal marker would have informed agricultural practices including wheat cultivation, showing the practical integration of astronomical observation with the rhythm of planting and harvest. The mass of Sirius approximately, twice that of our Sun, and its brightness have made it a consistent celestial marker across civilizations.

h. Eschatological Harvest: The Heavenly Banquet

The connection between wheat and astronomy culminates in eschatological hope. Goshu (2025) demonstrates how the Book of Enoch preserves early astronomical traditions that inform Ethiopian Orthodox cosmology. The wheat that is sown in the ground and rises to new life becomes a parable of cosmic renewal. The Heavenly Banquet (Isaiah 25:6), a feast of finest wheat and aged wine, represents the consummation of both agricultural and astronomical orders. The same God who appoints the sun, moon, and stars (Psalm 19:1) and who gives the wheat for bread (Psalm 104:14) will ultimately gather His faithful into a harvest beyond all seasons.

Table 1. Summary of Wheat-Astronomy Connections

Connection	Astronomical Element	Wheat Symbolism
Bahre Hasab Calendar	Solar/lunar cycles, Metonic cycle	Sowing and harvest aligned with feasts
Bahre Hasab Calendar	Solar/lunar cycles, Metonic cycle	Sowing and harvest aligned with feasts
Sirius Observation	Star brightness, seasonal marker	Signals agricultural timing (Anadualem & Goshu, 2023)
Star of Bethlehem	Celestial phenomenon	Leads to the Bread of Life
Tabot as Cosmic Throne	God's rule over heavens	Finest wheat offered to cosmic Sovereign
Seven Heavens	Structured cosmological framework	Theological architecture of creation (Goshu &

		Ridwan, 2026)
Cross as Cosmic Axis	Order of the universe	Wheat's death/resurrection participates
Pentecost Harvest	Seasonal cycle	Gathering of faithful as cosmic harvest

i. Theological Reflection

The connection between wheat and astronomy in Ethiopian Orthodox tradition reveals a unified vision of creation in which the material and the celestial participate together in divine worship. The same God who appoints the sun, moon, and stars (Psalm 19:1) also gives the wheat for bread (Psalm 104:14). This integration challenges any dualism that would separate sacred from secular, heaven from earth. The Bahre Hasab calendar orders time according to celestial cycles, and within this ordered time, wheat is sown, harvested, and transformed into Nifro, an edible promise of resurrection. The star leads to the Bread of Life; the cross stands as the axis of cosmic order; the harvest anticipates the Heavenly Banquet. For the Ethiopian Orthodox faithful, wheat is never merely grain but a cosmic sign. It proclaims that all creation, from the smallest kernel to the most distant star exists to glorify the Creator and awaits the consummation when heaven and earth are united in the feast of the Kingdom.

IV. Conclusion

4.1 Synthesis of Findings

This investigation has traced the spiritual implications of wheat through the three interconnected dimensions of Ethiopian Orthodox faith. The journey begins in Scripture, where wheat first appears as God's provision, the staple of the Promised Land, a tangible sign of covenant blessing. Within the Ethiopian canon, this symbolism deepens in the Book of Enoch, where the "finest of the wheat" becomes a test of righteousness, exposing the spiritual danger of consuming abundance while neglecting justice for the lowly. Finally, the journey culminates in liturgy, where wheat transformed into Nifro becomes an edible proclamation of death and resurrection. These three dimensions, scriptural revelation, ethical warning, and liturgical enactment, form a unified theological vision in which the material grain bears the weight of humanity's deepest hopes and highest obligations.

4.2 The Uniqueness of the Ethiopian Orthodox Perspective

What distinguishes the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is the richness with which these dimensions are integrated. The broader biblical canon, including the complete Book of Enoch preserved in Ge'ez, provides a scriptural foundation for understanding wheat as both blessing and judgment. The unique practice of Nifro transforms this theology into tangible experience; boiled wheat that is seen, tasted, and shared at the graveside becomes a sensory confirmation of resurrection hope. This is theology made accessible: not abstract doctrine but food placed in the hand, reminding the faithful that the God who provided wheat in the wilderness also promises life beyond death.

4.3 Final Reflection: A Kernel of Faith

The grain of wheat contains within its small form the entire Gospel. Fallen into the earth, it dies, yet from this death springs forth new life, multiplied beyond measure. So too with the faithful: the call to discipleship is a call to die to self, to be planted like wheat in the soil of humility, trusting that God will bring forth a harvest of righteousness. And so too with death itself: the departed are like kernels planted in the ground, waiting the spring of the General

Resurrection. In Ethiopian Orthodox spirituality, wheat is never merely wheat. It is the promise of the Promised Land, the warning against injustice, the taste of resurrection, and the foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet. A simple grain, yet in its simplicity, it proclaims the whole mystery of faith: that death is not the end, and that in God's hands, every ending becomes a beginning.

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