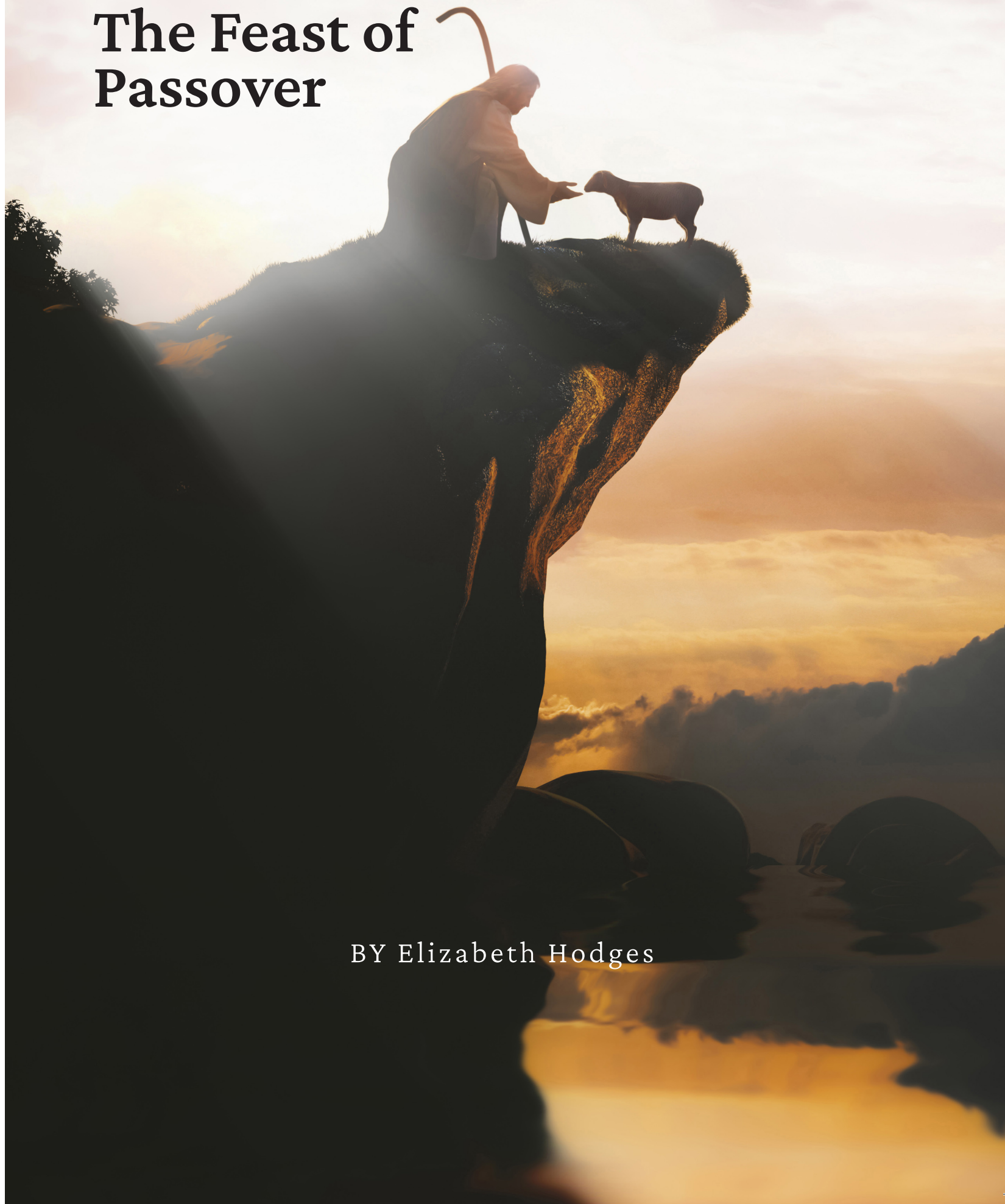


MARCH

The Feast of Passover

BY Elizabeth Hodges



John 1:29

Remember! Over and over in Scripture we are reminded to “remember.” In the Old Testament God instituted seven feasts (Leviticus 23) for the Jewish people so they would remember and pass on these “remembrances” to the next generations.

Three of the seven feasts required Jewish males to travel to Jerusalem for celebration each year: the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). If distance prevented Jewish males from attending all three, they tried to attend the most important one, the Passover. Important because this feast pointed toward Calvary where the Lamb of God was slain.

In the book of Exodus, the events of the ten plagues and subsequent exodus of the Israelites are so significant for Israel’s identity as an emerging nation that the month they came out of Egypt became the first month of their

religious year. God set aside sacred periods that included holy days and festivals—rest from daily life activities and time to remember with the focus of worshiping Yahweh. (The Jews also operated under a civil calendar. Should we consider having our own “remembering calendar?”)

Specific Features – Exodus 12

The sacrificial lamb was selected on the tenth day of the first month, Abib (March/April). It must be a one-year-old male, free of any blemishes or defects. (A kid goat could be used instead if a lamb was not available.) It was then kept separated from the flock until the fourteenth day when it was slain at twilight. Such specific instructions ensured the Passover lamb was fit for this sacred sacrifice.

This lamb was sufficient for one household or could be shared with a neighbor. The laws requiring its preparation were as such: it was roasted, not boiled, and should not be eaten raw, as that was a prac-

tice of the neighboring pagan nations. The Law required it be prepared whole, including its head and unbroken legs. Any leftover portions were to be burned, leaving nothing behind.

The blood of this lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel (the space above a doorway) of the house where the meal was eaten. The blood indicated the household members had followed the Lord's instructions and were consecrated to Him. Thus, the occupants of this house would be "passed over" while the Lord destroyed the firstborn in the rest of Egypt, thus the feast's name, Passover. For the Israelites, the blood was a reminder that a life had to be sacrificed for them to live.

The house was meticulously cleaned eliminating any trace of leaven. For the Passover meal, only unleavened bread was permitted. According to Exodus 12:19, this bread was eaten for seven days before the tenth plague was unleashed.

Those who chose to eat leavened bread demonstrated disdain for what the Lord had done in establishing the nation of Israel and faced the consequences of banishment or even the death penalty.

The meal would be eaten with bitter herbs, a reminder of their years in slavery (Exodus 12:11). The Israelites were to be ready to travel.

The first Passover was a family affair where each household sacrificed a lamb. In Numbers 28:16-25, the priests received specific instructions for preparing the Passover. These detailed instructions were provided just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, highlighting their importance (Numbers 28:2). The lambs would be offered as communal sacrifices, consumed by both the priests and those bringing the offerings, in the presence of God in the Israelite camp and later at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Special Observances

Luke 2:41-52 records the only

mention of Jesus' boyhood, which includes a trip to Jerusalem for Passover. Jesus stayed in the Temple, asking and answering questions that amazed the teachers with His understanding.

During the pilgrimage home, Mary and Joseph could not find Jesus, and they spent three days locating Him. When found, Jesus asks them, "*Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*" (verse 49). Another translation says, "*I had to be in my Father's house.*" This incident is pivotal as Jesus' first self-witness to His deity. He was 12, so this would be the last Passover before His adulthood.

John the Baptist recognized Jesus as Messiah and said, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29).

John 2 begins with the miracle in Cana of Galilee, where Jesus turns the water to wine, which was "*the first of his signs...and manifested his glory*" (verse 11).

John 2:13-23 records Jesus

going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. With a whip in hand, He cleanses the Temple of the moneychangers by overturning their tables (John 2:16). And in the following verse, "*His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me'*" (verse 17; Psalm 69:9). When questioned by the Jews, Jesus replied, "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*" (verse 19). He was referring to His body, establishing Him as the new center of worship (John 4:24). The Jews assumed He was referring to the Temple itself. The disciples later remembered this encounter when Jesus was raised from the dead.

John 6:4 records the Passover one year before Jesus' crucifixion. By this time Messianic hopes ran high. Jesus is in Galilee and feeds the 5,000 with the lad's lunch. All four gospels record Passion Week and Jesus' last Passover (Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:1-26; Luke 22:7-20; and John 13).

The Sanhedrin plotted Jesus' death sometime between sunset on Tuesday and Wednesday. They wanted Jesus arrested when a crowd was not present. Judas became that connection.

Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' head with her alabaster jar, which Judas thought was a waste. Jesus interpreted her act as a worshipful gift since she was anointing Him for His burial. Had she glimpsed His impending death through her worshipful communion with Jesus?

"Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed" (Luke 22:7). Jesus and the disciples were staying in Bethany, but the Passover meal had to be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem. Jesus sent Peter and John to Jerusalem to make the preparations. Food for the meal included unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, sauce of crushed fruit, and the lamb. They were instructed to look for a man carrying a water

pitcher, which was unusual as women typically handled this task. They were to follow him, and when he entered a house, they were to ask, *"The Teacher asks, 'Where is my guest room in which I may eat the Passover lamb with my disciples?'"* (Mark 14:14). A large, furnished room awaited them. According to Jewish custom, anyone in Jerusalem with a spare room would, upon request, give it to a pilgrim celebrating Passover. It seems Jesus had already made arrangements with the owner.

Jesus knew his hour had come (Luke 22:14). He told the disciples, *"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"* (verse 15). Jesus took the cup and gave thanks, saying, *"Take this, and divide it among yourselves: for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come"* (Luke 22:17-18).

Jesus again took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it saying, *"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me"* (verse 19). After eating,

After this Matthew tells us that Jesus went to Gethsemane, and His disciples followed Him. There Jesus agonized in prayer (Matthew 26:36-46). God's plan from eternity past was coming to pass.

Symbolism Fulfilled

Beginning in Genesis 3, the only way to approach holy God was through a blood sacrifice. After Adam and Eve sinned, they sewed fig leaves together for clothing. Because that was not sufficient, God killed an animal and clothed them with its skin.

“Using the language of Augustine, what was ‘concealed’ in the Old Testament is ‘revealed’ in full color in the New Testament. The authoritative revelation of God in the Old Testament opens like a flower in full bloom in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.”

*(Matthew Price, Fusion Family,
Sept/Oct. 2024)*

As the Jews brought in their sacrificial Passover lambs, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem while the crowd shouted, *“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”* (Mark 11:9). The lambs were pastured in Bethlehem until taken into Jerusalem to be slaughtered. The Lamb of God was born in a Bethlehem stable 33 years earlier. Jesus and His disciples were staying with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethlehem when they came to Jerusalem to celebrate what would be the last Passover.

Now in Jerusalem, the religious leaders tried to question and trap Jesus, but their efforts were in vain. Those aware of Jesus' location were instructed to inform them, and Judas delivered the plan.

After Judas' betrayal and the mock trials, the Jewish leaders appealed to Pilate for Jesus' crucifixion. Pilate said, *“I find no fault in Him”* (John 19:4). Yet to appease the Jewish mob, he had Jesus scourged, beaten, and crucified.

Isaiah prophesied, *“the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all....he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter”* (53: 6-7). Then in verse 11, “By

his knowledge, shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”

Not only was Jesus crucified at the third hour, but His blood also spilled on the ground satisfying God’s standard. At the ninth hour, the Roman guards watched Jesus die as the Passover lambs were slaughtered at the Temple.

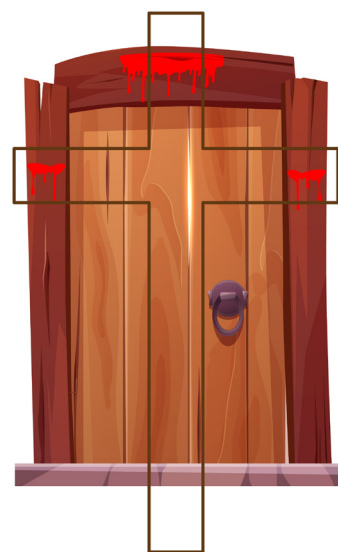
The lambs were roasted on a spit shaped like a crossbar, roasted whole, with no bones broken (Numbers 9:12), and eaten completely. After Jesus’ death, the Jews did not want the three bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath. They asked Pilate to have their legs broken (John 19:31). *“But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs”* (John 19:33).

Since it was the day of preparation for their Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus sought Pilate’s permission to bury the body of Jesus. According to Jewish custom, His body was wrapped in linen cloths with spices. Jesus was in the tomb on the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest (John 19:38-42).

On Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, Jesus arose! This was also the first day of the Feast of First Fruits. How appropriate! God’s timing is always perfect! We join John the Baptist and say, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29), *mine and yours. O, what a Savior!*

About the Writer:

Elizabeth Hodges lives in Hendersonville, TN with Eddie, her husband of 48 years. She retired as director of WNAC after 30 years in education. She continues to serve in various ministries and as a substitute teacher.



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