



"The Bible is the rope God throws us in order to ensure that we stay connected while the rescue is in progress."

—J.I. Packer

23-Mar-12

Rehearsing God's Plan

This weekend marks the beginning of a new sacred year; in fact, this [Sabbath](#) is the first day of the year on the Hebrew calendar. [God](#) tells [Moses](#) in [Exodus 12:2](#), "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you." The next chapter confirms that this particular month is Abib ([Exodus 13:4](#)), which is Hebrew for "budding" or "sprouting," identifying the time of year as the beginning of spring. The Modern Hebrew equivalent is *aviv*, making the coastal city of Tel Aviv "Spring Hill" in English.

The beginning of another year means that we will observe another round of God's holy days, the seven high days between the first day of the [Feast of Unleavened Bread](#) in the early spring and the eighth day of the [Feast of Tabernacles](#) a half-year away in the autumn (see Leviticus 23). These seven appointed times of holy convocation are by no means mere spiritualized celebrations of ancient harvest festivals, as modern critical historians are fond of asserting. (They say this because of their evolutionary biases that force them to conclude that the religion of the [Old Testament](#) is nothing more than the previous Canaanite religion transformed by the peculiarities of Hebrew culture hardened into monotheism by the rigors of the wilderness.

Clearly, they also have a bias against any recognition of God Himself, since He is the One who commanded Israel to worship Him in the ways demonstrated in Scripture. No, to them, Israelite religion separated from its Canaanite roots in the distant past and developed "naturally" over centuries until it was codified by the priestly caste in Holy Writ.) To the contrary, God's holy days are a carefully crafted series of memorials that tell a story.

That story is God's magnificent plan of salvation, told in a set of parable-like vignettes, which His people rehearse each year as a reminder of what God is doing among mankind. As the Bible shows, certain holy days commemorate major events in the history of Israel, and these events stand as types of spiritual realities brought about by God. While it may sound strange to our ears, some of [the holy days](#) are memorials of *future* events—pre-memorials, we could call them. God reveals enough in His Word, especially in the [book of Revelation](#), for us to feel certain about what events they prefigure.

Although [Passover](#) is not a holy day with a holy convocation like the other festivals, it plays a major role in the story of God's plan, explaining the first, vital step. [Exodus 12:1-13](#), 21-27 explains that the Old Testament ceremony of killing, draining the blood, roasting, and eating a male lamb without blemish is a yearly reminder of the Death Angel "passing over" the Israelites in Egypt because of the blood on their doorposts and lintels. Thus, they were spared the plague of the firstborn and redeemed—bought back—from their slavery. The Passover service, then, is a picture of redemption by the blood of a perfect sacrifice.

Jesus, of course, is that perfect Sacrifice. He lived among us for more than 33 years and never once sinned; He was spiritually perfect. And since He was also our Creator, His unjust, cruel death, in which His blood was drained from Him upon the ground, was more than sufficient to cover all [sin](#) and redeem all humanity from its captivity to sin and this world's ruler, [Satan](#) the Devil. The New Testament picks up on the theme of redemption, recording the spiritual antitype of the historical event that took place roughly 3,500 years ago in the land of Goshen. Today, the Passover service concentrates on Christian service (in the footwashing; see [John 13:1-17](#)), Christ's body (in the broken bread; see [Luke 22:19](#)), and His shed blood, which ratifies God's New Covenant with His people (in the wine; see [Luke 22:20](#)).

The day after the Passover begins the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, which [Exodus 12:14-20](#) and other passages show to commemorate Israel's flight from Egypt into the wilderness. It took the many thousands of Israelites, as well as their livestock, an entire week to journey to and through the Red Sea, where they were finally free from the clutches of their former slave masters. They left in such a hurry that they had no time to allow their bread to rise, so they had to eat unleavened bread, which the Bible calls "the bread of [affliction](#)" ([Deuteronomy 16:3](#)). Thus, in commemoration of this momentous occasion, for the week of this Feast, the Israelites were commanded to clean their homes of yeast, which the Bible always paints in a negative light as an agent of corruption, and eat unleavened bread.

In [I Corinthians 5:6-8](#), the apostle Paul points out the spiritual application of this festival. It is a time of remembering that we are on a spiritual wilderness journey, and instead of coming out of a physical, oppressive nation, we are fleeing from the corruption of sin. With God's help, we are putting off the sins and habits of our evil nature and putting on the character of our Savior [Jesus Christ](#). Each year, then, we remember that our job is to quit living Satan's way and engrain God's way of [holiness](#) and righteousness into our characters.

Pentecost is the next holy day on the calendar, seven weeks after Unleavened Bread. It is called the Feast of Harvest, giving us a giant clue that it depicts, not just a harvest of grain (barley is ripe at the beginning of the seven-week [count to Pentecost](#) and wheat at its end), but of people. This is the first harvest festival and a smaller one than the Feast of Tabernacles, so it represents a small, early harvest of God's people. It also contains a wave offering of [two leavened loaves](#) of bread, symbolizing God's acceptance of once-sinful people in two groups. We believe that these loaves represent those whom God brought to salvation before Christ and those converted during the church age, which will continue until He returns.

The next four holy days—Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles, and the Last Day—are celebrated in the fall. The events that these days look forward to are conveniently summarized in the narrative of the prophecies of Revelation 19 and 20. Revelation 19 is all about the return of Jesus Christ, which is

announced with great blasts of a trumpet (see [Matthew 24:31](#)). The *Feast of Trumpets*, therefore, covers His [second coming](#), His rewarding of the saints, and His defeating of all opposition to His rule.

Revelation 20 contains the fulfillments of the last three holy days: *Atonement*, when Satan is bound, removing his evil influence over all people for the majority of the coming Millennium; the *Feast of Tabernacles*, when Christ reigns with the resurrected saints for a thousand years and the earth blossoms like a rose (see Isaiah 35); and the *Last Day*, when the great majority of humanity will have the opportunity to live under the gracious judgment of God, accept salvation, and live for eternity (see [Isaiah 65:17-25](#)).

This is the time of year, as the apostle Paul says on another matter, to think on these things.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Passover and Hope](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Passover is a beacon of hope in an otherwise hopeless milieu. The book of Job, initially a seeming extended treatise of hopelessness, turns into Job's speculation about a possible resurrection, realizing from his prior experience that God enjoys the company of men and wants men to be like Him. Hope can be defined as "confident, enduring expectation," and the heart of hope is faith in God. The strength of our hope depends upon how deeply we know God. Abraham, after 50 years of experience trusting God, knew He would provide despite the visible circumstances. Jesus provided hope to His disciples at His last Passover, exuding confidence and hope, despite His knowledge of what was immediately ahead. In Hebrews, we are counseled to emulate Jesus, who endured due to the joy before Him. We can have rock-solid hope that God will provide despite the intensity of our trials.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Sin, Christians, and the Fear of God](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

As everyone knows, Scripture takes a very dim and stern view of sin because it is failure to live up to God's standard and destroys relationships, especially our relationship with God. After identifying the types and levels of sin, John Ritenbaugh suggests that the fear of God provides us the necessary motivation to overcome our iniquities.

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