

# A Week to Reflect

By PAUL J. SCHARF

This is the week between Christmas and New Year's Day and, through the years, I have learned how valuable this time at the end of the year really is. It allows us to evaluate and to look forward. While we can never truly plan the future (Jas. 4:13-14), attempting to prepare for it can be a wonderfully enriching experience.

This year's calendar worked out perfectly. We observed Christmas last week, and we've already had the final Sunday of the year. That gave us these days to work on the last details for 2020 and plan for 2021. If your position allows you this luxury, I would strongly encourage you to try it. If you've already missed it, don't despair. There's still time to begin a tradition of preparing for the new year. As I explain how I look at the year ahead, I hope it might encourage you to consider your own planning for 2021.

I naturally think of the year in terms of holidays, seasons, themes, emphases and events that provide structure, richness and meaning. One reason 2020 was hard on me is that so many of my plans were interrupted, and every day from March to July tended to blend in with the rest. But as I grow in my responsibilities with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, I find that my calendar flows directly with the way in which I intuitively divide the year. And looking at the big picture first helps me fill in the gaps with details.

The first quarter of this year will be devoted to studying and preparing to present educational Passover Seder demonstrations in the weeks leading up to Easter. Being forced to cancel this was one of the biggest disappointments for me in 2020.

These months also bring the Refresh Conference at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, IA—where I will be exhibiting this year for the first time—as well as a men's conference held here in the Midwest called Men for Christ.

To my thinking, the next phase stretches from spring to early fall, and it is marked by the bulk of our patriotic holidays, including Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day. This is a great time to contemplate America's Christian heritage, and I especially love to preach and teach on Biblical prophecy during the summer months. Creationism and apologetics are also fitting subjects, as the beauty of God's creation envelops us.

An opportunity to teach at a Bible camp presents another milestone that helps to define this time of the year, along with other gatherings—especially FOIGM's National Prophecy Conference, held in Winona Lake, IN, in mid-July. In fact, there can be numerous activities that serve to outline the year—including Prophecy Up Close and Thank God for Israel events, along with other trips and special occasions that arise.

September and October usher in another major conference season, as there are several local meetings that I try to attend. My annual trip to the Shepherds 360 Church Leaders Conference in Cary, NC, makes these months very full.

For me, September through November are also the *church history* phase of the year. I love teaching on the Reformation, the Thanksgiving Pilgrims and the Geneva Bible. I relish the prospect of reviewing these topics beginning in the summer, and always anticipate new opportunities to discuss them in the fall.

December, of course, causes us to meditate upon Advent and Christmas—and then it is “the very end of the year” (Deut. 11:12), and time to prepare for a new year once again.

We have all experienced the sensation of wishing that we had a little more time to finish our tasks before the end of the year. One lesson I have learned is that I am the most effective when I can prepare ahead for the final weeks (or, really, the last three months) of the year. This allows me to enter into that fall and holiday season with confidence and focus on implementing the things that I need to do—and enjoying them. I am not there yet, but I hope to keep progressing! Planning and preparation are the keys.

As we plan, however, we must be realistic and understand that our plans will not always come to fruition. In the year following my most extensive planning effort, life took several major unexpected turns. Almost none of my plans produced the intended results. That is why we must always add the words “if the Lord wills” (Jas. 4:15) to our proposals. Still, I remember how satisfying that week of reflection at the end of the year really was, and I believe such planning to be a worthy exercise in and of itself.

This year of 2020 was, by definition, the year of missed opportunities. Personally, I have always hated to miss important things. Sometimes I will skip an event on purpose—thinking I do not have the time or resources to attend. If the event had any meaning to me at all, I usually end up regretting my decision.

I pray that 2021—for whatever challenges it offers—will be a year of fulfillment. In fact, I trust that it will be too good to miss! So, let’s plan on it, and start to prepare.

***Paul J. Scharf** (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit [sermonaudio.com/pscharf](http://sermonaudio.com/pscharf) or [foi.org/scharf](http://foi.org/scharf), or email [pscharf@foi.org](mailto:pscharf@foi.org).*

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