

Jezreel: God Scatters, God Sows

By Joe Slater

The name Jezreel was shared by a city, a plain, and a valley. Israel's wicked King Ahab and his treacherous wife, Jezebel, had a royal residence in the city of Jezreel, which was located on the plain. And Jezreel was the location of Naboth's vineyard, which Ahab acquired when Jezebel had Naboth murdered.

Evidently Jezreel was good for agriculture, for the name itself means "God scatters" or "God sows." Scattering may be good or bad. In ancient times, a man sowed his grain field by scattering seed over its surface (think of Jesus' parable of the sower). That's good. But God warned His people in Leviticus 26:33 that if they persisted in disobedience to His commands, he would scatter them among the nations. That kind of scattering is anything but good!

God told the prophet Hosea to name his firstborn son Jezreel because He was about to "bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel." (Hosea 1:4.) True to His word, the Lord would scatter His wayward children among the Gentiles as He allowed the Assyrians to carry them away as captives.

Wouldn't it be depressing if that were the end of the story? But it isn't! In His infinite mercy and grace, God would restore His people to their homeland. He would send rain from the heavens, and "the earth will answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil; they shall answer Jezreel (God sows). Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!'" (Hosea

2:22-23.)

God scatters. Whether that scattering is productive (as in sowing seed) or destructive (as in casting away) depends entirely on whether we are faithful to Him.

— Justin, TX

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58.)

GOOD NEWS SHARED

By Joe Dale Wilson

Jesus teaches us to "go into all the world" with the purpose of teaching the Gospel of Christ. (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16.) He does not tell how we are to go or how we are to preach the Gospel. He gave two specific commands: to go and to preach the Gospel. We can go by boat, by foot, by automobile, by plane or in many other ways. We can go by social media, we can go personally, or we help by sending someone else. We can teach or preach on the air, in print, or with a personal Bible study. To go is a personal responsibility. We should want others to be saved.

My Aunt Evelyn Killian has had me to send the book, "Muscle and a Shovel," to other people. Recently she loaned out her personal copy to some people who attend services at a congregation of the Lord's people. They had attended the church's worship services for years and participated in the church's activities. Unbeknownst to her was how and for what reason these people had been baptized. After reading the book they called one of

the elders and were baptized for the remission of sins. Here is a little elderly lady who lives in a chair or bed and a wheelchair who made a difference in people's lives.

Can we follow her steps to touch the lives of others?

Many of us have better opportunities than my aunt has, and yet are not doing what she has done. She reminds me of a lady I baptized several years ago. She answered an ad we ran in the paper about a correspondence course. We had some people to call upon her in the rest home and I followed that up with a Bible study. She told me she was a Baptist but had become concerned after studying her Bible. We studied a good while and I asked her one day, "Have you read about the Baptist Church in the Bible?" Her answer was, "No." I showed her from Scripture that the church of the New Testament was simply called "the church" or "body of Christ" or "kingdom." The churches of Christ do not want to be a denomination or another denomination. We want

simply to be the church that Jesus established on the day of Pentecost. The word "denomination" is not mentioned in Scripture and the Lord did not establish a denomination, but the church. After three studies she asked me if she could be baptized. Her family objected to us taking her to the church building to a baptism and so we found a bathtub in the rest home and baptized this paralyzed, ninety-two year young lady. Months later after I had moved far away, her family sent for me to preach her funeral.

The sad thing is that everyone we know will die; but will they die having heard the Gospel? It is our responsibility to teach the lost. Are we doing it?

Has Aunt Evelyn put us on notice that we can do more to touch people's souls with the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

— Vernon, TX

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 4:17.)

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

By Danny Tunnell

In our country, since Roe V. Wade legalized abortion in 1973, more than 60 million children have been killed in their mother's womb. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that states must allow same-sex marriage.

How should a Christian view the direction our society is going?

We live in a society where mass shootings have become more and more common; a society that celebrates death in video games, on TV shows, in movies, in musical lyrics; a society that wants to remove any sense of morality, and is not subject to God's higher authority.

The Christian needs to look at everything through the lens of God's Word. From that Word he knows there is a God who created all things. He doesn't accept what the evolutionists are saying.

The Christian is not to be conformed to this world, but is transformed by the renewal of his mind. (Romans 12:2.)

The Christian understands the source of society's problems. He believes in the existence and reality of sin and evil. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23.) As long as man keeps rebelling against God, he can expect more war, violence, and injustice. There really is a devil, and he is constantly tempting and seeking to destroy. He aggressively opposes God and His people.

Our society needs to see itself as being subject to God's law. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." (Galatians 6:7,8.)

Our society's misguided direction has reached Christians on a personal level. We read accounts on a regular basis. A Christian parent objected to an immoral book her child was assigned to read, and the child's teacher refused to budge. A pro-life pregnancy center was providing tender care for expectant mothers. A state law forced the center to display a sign promoting abortion.

Somewhere along the line, Christians must stand up and say, "We've had enough! This has to stop!"

While it is true that we are to live in subjection to our governing authorities (Romans 13:1), this does not mean that we have to accept laws that say an unborn child has no human rights, and no worth; that the child may be deemed an inconvenience and a burden to society, and therefore can be legally destroyed. Just because we are subject to our governing authorities does not mean we have to support unbridled sexual license.

The society in which we live is not going to express the "Christian view," but Christ's followers not only need to express it, they *must* express it.

— Miami, OK

THE POWER TO OVERCOME

By Dalton Key

The decadence of our day reminds us of the sordid conditions, the "perilous times," described by Paul in 2 Timothy 3. Among the apostle's warnings, note these ominous words: "But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:13.) From all appearances, evil men and imposters are, even now, alive and active and intent upon deceiving all souls within their ability to deceive.

We may as well admit the obvious: things are getting morally and spiritually worse nearly everywhere you look. As God's children living in a benighted world fraught with ever-increasing levels of depravity, we seem to be sharing an unwanted kinship with Lot, of Old Testament days, who while living in Sodom, was "oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds). (2 Peter 2:7,8.)

Lot's soul was tormented "from day to day" in "seeing and hearing." And he didn't even have access to the internet!

Despite today's worsening spiritual and moral climate, we do have reason for hope and genuine optimism. Trials and tribulations are not novel. There was sin in the Garden of Eden. There was sin in the days of Noah. There will be sin around us until the end of time. The world has never been inclined toward God and godly behavior. But the good news is found in heaven's promise: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33.) "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4.)

And remember fellow "sojourners and pilgrims," we're not yet home! (1 Peter 2:11.)

THE BLESSINGS OF GOOD FELLOWSHIP

By Milton Smith

We often read of incidents in the Bible that involved the sending forth of certain men for different reasons. One of the things that intrigues me is the fact that it was a rare occurrence when a person went alone. When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent *two* of his disciples to the Lord to inquire if he was, indeed, the promised Messiah. On another occasion, Jesus sent two of his disciples to fetch the donkey that he would shortly use to make His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. When Jesus appointed the seventy, he sent them out "two and two." When Tabitha died, the disciples heard that Peter was nearby and sent "two men" to find him. Most will recall that Joshua sent two men to spy out the Promised Land. It seems that the Bible strongly emphasizes the need for human companionship - even if that companionship consisted of only one other person.

After Paul's conversion, we are told that he "assayed to join himself to the disciples" at Jerusalem. He obviously desired their fellowship! Shortly after the establishment of the church, we are told that the early disciples "continued steadfastly" in "fellowship." When we read through the book of Acts and Paul's epistles, the blessed fellowship shared by the early church is clearly present. Those oft-persecuted men and women found great solace and comfort in the fellowship they shared with each other. All of God's children need good Christian fellowship. This is why membership at a congregation is so important. We need each other! And how blessed it is to gather together with those of "like precious faith" during times of public worship. Those who choose to go without this wonderful fellowship are cheating only themselves. God didn't create men to be alone; this is why God made sure that Adam had a special companion in the Garden. I'm reminded of this clever little poem that speaks of the sadness of being alone:

I had a little tea party, this afternoon at three;

T'was very small - three guests in all,

Just "I, myself and me."

Myself ate all the sandwiches, while I drank the tea;

T'was also I who ate the pie, and passed the cake to me.

Do yourself a favor: come and be a part of the wonderful fellowship we share together during regular services of worship!

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23-25.)

A LITTLE LEARNING

By Dalton Key

In many cases, and concerning many subjects, a dash of knowledge may leave us more confused than complete ignorance. Consider the well-worn words of Alexander Pope: "A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring; there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again." Solomon must have realized this very danger as he advised, "A wise man will hear and increase learning." Peter likewise admonishes us to abound and grow in knowledge. (2 Peter 1:5,8; 3:18.)

The following tale is much older than I am yet still continues to make the point: A small boy was once asked by his Bible School teacher to tell, in his own words, the parable of the Good Samaritan. He answered, "There was this good Samaritan going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among thorns they sprang up and choked him and left him half dead. And he said, 'I will arise,' and he arose and came to a tree and he got hung on the limb and he hung there for forty days and forty nights, and the ravens did feed him. Delilah came along with a pair of scissors and cut off his hair and he fell on stony ground. He said, 'I will arise,' and he came to a wall and Jezebel was sitting on the wall and she mocked him and he said, 'Throw her down,' and they threw her down. He said, 'Throw her down seventy times seven,' and they threw her down seventy times seven and great was the fall thereof and of the fragments that remained they picked up twelve baskets full. And whose wife will she be in the resurrection!"

Too many half-hearted students of Scripture are nearly as confused with their smattering of Bible knowledge as was this misguided boy! Some know just enough about the Bible to know that God is a God of love and mercy, and yet knowing nothing of His justice and judgment, swallow the false teaching of Universalism, the doctrine which holds that God will eventually save everyone. Others know a few passages on the importance of faith, and yet know nothing about the Bible's teaching concerning obedience, thus making themselves vulnerable targets for those espousing the "faith only" error. Examples such as these are both legion and evident.

Faithful disciples will never be satisfied with a mere smattering of Bible knowledge but will show an eagerness, diligence, and open-mindedness to search out and accept ALL of what the Bible says on any subject! Paul was content to declare nothing short of the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), and we, as students of God's Book of Books should be content with learning nothing less ourselves.

Don't forget! Mark your calendars! Old Paths Family Retreat is coming up soon, May 31 - June 2 on the site of Flint Hills Christian Camp, just north of Sedan, Kansas.

We hope to see many of you there!



WHEN SHOULD I CONFESS MY SINS TO OTHERS?

By Danny Boggs

It's not easy to admit when we are wrong. But if we can get comfortable with confessing our sins to God, James 5:16 might still unnerve us: "Confess your sins to one another . . ." When should you confess your sins to other people?

If people know you have sinned against them, confessing your sin to them is the right thing to do. Jesus said so in Matthew 5:23-24. Here someone knows that you have done something sinful to him, and you know that he feels that way. What should you do? Admit that you have done it and seek forgiveness from him. God doesn't even want your worship until you try your best to work it out.

In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus painted a scenario that begins with one person wronging another. Imagine yourself being the wrongdoer. If your brother tells you your fault, what should you do? Confess! If you won't do it, Jesus wants him to bring another person or two. What should you do? It shouldn't have gotten to that point. But if it does, confess! Never let yourself stay on the wrong end of this situation.

Some people try to pantomime the Bible's requirements by coming in front of the whole church and

admitting to an unspecified sin against an unnamed person instead of owning up to it personally with the one who was wronged. Still others will go to the other person and say something like, "If I have sinned . . . I am sorry." Neither measures up to the Biblical description of confession.

Even if your sin was not aimed at people, confessing to them can be the right thing to do. The wanderer in James 5:19-20 may be slighting God specifically and fellow Christians only collaterally. When concerned brethren help you come to your senses about your broken relationship with God, you'll realize how you broke it with your brethren, too. You'll want to confess your sin to them.

Should you ever confess your sins to people who don't know about them? If people are being hurt unawares or will eventually be hurt by what you have done, they need to hear it from you. We can put fellow Christians into more difficult situations by leaving them in the dark. What if someone who is not a Christian tells one of your fellow Christians about your sin before you do? You would want your brother or sister to be able to tell that person about your repentance and God's forgiveness

One purpose of confession is to make sure that absolutely everyone who knows about the sin knows about the repentance. This can call for confession to the whole church. It helps with the harm done by your influence. It helps to keep other people from thinking, "Well, if she can get away with it, I can get away with it." Your sin was bad enough. If it becomes the springboard for someone else's sin, it's even worse. (Matthew 18:6.)

Some Christians try to manage their sin. It doesn't work. Repentance is the need, but it's hard. "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another." Why? "That you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." (James 5:16.) Such confession gives a caring Christian the opportunity to help bear a burden. (Galatians 6:1-2.) By confessing specific sins to fellow Christians, you can strengthen your will to do right. The one who hears the confession might say, "I've been there. Here's something the Bible says that can help. Here's what I did about it. Let's tackle it together."

Confess your sins to the people they hurt and to the people who will be helped

— Neosho, MO

FROM THE ARCHIVES . . . THE BIBLE: BOOK OF BOOKS

By Bobby Key

The wise man said, "Of making many books there is no end." (Ecclesiastes 12:12.) If this was true in his day when books were slowly produced by hand on papers, and later on parchments of skin, how much more is it true of our day? Thousands upon thousands of new titles were produced in this country last year, not even including all the reference books, textbooks, tracts, catalogs, and promotional booklets printed. Yet in the midst of the flood of books currently for sale, there is one book that has always towered above the rest as the world's best seller, the book that has long been recognized as the best of the best.

What is this book of which we speak? The Bible, the all-time book of books. It is loved and respected by millions (billions?) of people all over the world.

The Bible is inspired of God. Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21.) God is the originator and creator of

all things. He has given us many gifts, including life itself. However, few gifts from God are more precious to man than the Bible.

The Bible is the book into which God has breathed His will and revealed His desires for man. The apostle Paul wrote, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17.)

One must believe and obey the Bible to be saved. An infidel once said, "There is one thing that mars the pleasure of my life. I am afraid that the Bible may be true; and if the Bible is true, then I am lost, and will be lost forever."

"The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever . . . I rejoice in Your word as one who finds great treasure . . ." (Psalm 119:160, 162.)

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12.) "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God . . ." (1 Peter 4:11.)

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