

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

2 Kings 8:1-10:36

Key Verse: 10:30

“The Lord said to Jehu, ‘Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.’”

Today's passage tells mainly how the Lord judged Ahab's house through Jehu, a king of Northern Israel. It was a judgment against Baal worship. To carry out this judgment, Jehu killed many people. This is not easy to understand in our modern context. However, we must consider this passage from the author's viewpoint. He emphasizes that the word of the Lord, through the prophet Elijah, was fulfilled through Jehu. It was precisely God's doing. So we must learn something about God's character. We can also learn from Jehu how to fulfill the mission of God successfully. Baal worship is still going on today. We must deal with it both personally and nationally. Let's learn how, so that God may bless us and our nation.

I. Kings of Aram and Judah (8:1-29)

Beginning in chapter 8, Elisha no longer appears as the main figure in the book of 2 Kings. Rather, he is found to be working behind the scenes. He prophesied a famine, and helped the Shunammite woman to escape it. He prophesied that Hazael would be king of Aram, and anointed Jehu king of Israel. Perhaps he was becoming old, and his days were almost at an end.

First, restoration of the Shunammite woman's land (8:1-6). Verse 1 says, "Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, 'Go away with your family and stay for a while wherever you can, because the Lord has decreed a famine in the land that will last seven years.'" This famine was God's judgment against the sins of idolatry and pride in Israel. (Lev 26:19-20; Dt 28:23-24) It would last seven years, twice as long as the drought of Elijah's times. (Lk 4:25) Though his people were stubborn in their idolatry, God did not compromise with them or give up on them. The more they resisted him, the stronger God's loving discipline came upon them.

The famine was only in Israel, not in Philistia, though they were neighbors. Elisha warned the Shunammite woman, who feared the Lord, to leave Israel for seven years to avoid the famine. She and her family did so, moving to Philistia. By

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

heeding the prophet's warning, they avoided the terrible famine. It is good to heed God's warnings. Jesus warned the early Christians to flee Jerusalem when they saw signs of the end of the age (Mt 24:16). Those who did so were spared. Those who take Jesus' warnings seriously can avoid judgment, and even prosper in the time of hardship.

After seven years, the woman came back to her hometown. By that time, her house and land had been confiscated, perhaps the king. She could have complained that obedience to God's servant was a losing business. However, she did not. She was not bitter. She simply went to the king to beg for her house and land. At the time, the king was listening to Gehazi tell about all the great things Elisha had done. Perhaps the king was seeking wisdom to solve national problems. Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha brought the woman's dead son back to life, she came to the king. Gehazi said, "This is the woman...." The king assigned an official to her case, and told him, "Give back everything that belonged to her, including all the income from her land from the day she left the country until now." Not only did she get her land, but all the earnings it had produced during the seven years she was gone. God rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb 11:6b). Even in a time of famine, they can prosper. The Lord knows how to protect and bless his people, even during judgment against idol worship (2 Pe 2:9). In this time of economic famine, God still protects and blesses his children.

Second, Elisha prophesied that Hazael would become king of Aram (7-15).

Elisha went to Damascus to anoint Hazael king of Aram. This task, along with anointing Jehu and Elisha, had originally been entrusted to Elijah (1 Ki 19:15). However, Elijah anointed only one of them: Elisha, his successor. Then Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind. So, now, it was up to Elisha to fulfill the remaining tasks. It was not easy to anoint Hazael, because Elisha had to go to the capital of an enemy nation, whose present king was eager to kill him. Then he had to anoint a successor to the living king. Yet Elisha considered his life worth nothing, unless he carried out his mission from God (Ac 20:24).

At that time, Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, was very ill. Once he had been a powerful, mighty king. But now he was old, sick and about to die. So he was humble and consulted Elisha, the man of God, sending a great gift through Hazael, his servant. Elisha prophesied that Ben-Hadad would recover. However, the Lord revealed to him that Ben-Hadad would die in another way. Then Elisha stared at Hazael with a fixed gaze until he felt ashamed. Elisha began to weep. Why? It was because Hazael would destroy many Israelites as the Lord's instrument of punishment. It was very painful for Elisha to realize this. Elisha's prophecy was

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

fulfilled later (10:32-33; 13:3-7). But at the time, Hazael did not think he could do such a cruel thing. He did not know himself. When he gained power, he did all the evil Elisha prophesied. Elisha's tearfully honest prophecy convinced Hazael that he would be king of Aram. He should have been patient. But he took matters into his own hands and assassinated Ben-Hadad in a cruel way. This is how worldly kings seize power. Nevertheless, by anointing Hazael, the Lord revealed his sovereign rule over Aram. God is the Sovereign Ruler of all nations. God is the one who appoints rulers and deposes them.

Third, the reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah in Judah (16-29). Verses 16-24 concern the reign of Jehoram, and verses 25-29 the reign of Ahaziah. Jehoram became one of the most evil kings of Judah. Through him, Baal worship invaded Judah. God could have destroyed the nation. But he did not do so. Why? Look at verse 19. "Nevertheless, for the sake of his servant David, the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever." The Lord was faithful to his promise to David. The Lord would maintain the line of David's descendants until he sent the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

When Jehoram abandoned the Lord, Edom and Libnah rebelled against Judah. Edom had been ruled by Judah for 150 years, from the time of King David. But Edom became independent in the time of Jehoram. Later, the Edomites became the worst enemies to the people of Judah (Oba 10). Libnah's revolt may have been associated with that of the Philistines and Arabs (2 Chr 21:16-17). When Jehoram forsook the Lord, he suffered on a national level, through the rebellions of Edom and Libnah. He also suffered personally. He was afflicted with an incurable disease that caused his bowels to come out in great pain, and he died (2 Chr 21:18). Ahaziah succeeded him as king. He reigned in Jerusalem for only one year. He walked in the ways of the house of Ahab and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. It was because he was related by marriage to Ahab's family: his mother was Athaliah. Ahaziah went with Joram son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth Gilead. When Joram was injured, he returned to Jezreel, and Ahaziah followed him. There, they would both be killed by Jehu (9:27).

Although Jehoram and Ahaziah were kings of Judah, they did evil in the eyes of the Lord. It was due to the bad influence of Athaliah. She was a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and an ardent Baal worshiper. She became the wife of Jehoram, and the mother of Ahaziah. She virtually destroyed two kings and pushed an entire kingdom to the brink of ruin. Marriage is very important. Who we marry determines the direction of our spiritual life. Those who marry godly people can

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

live godly lives. Those who marry ungodly people will confront disaster. If you want to marry, marry a godly person.

II. The Lord Judges the house of Ahab (9:1-10:36)

We remember Ahab and Jezebel from the study of 1 Kings. Under Jezebel's wicked influence, Ahab instituted Baal worship in Northern Israel and killed many of the Lord's prophets. At that time, God did not seem to do anything. Elijah complained to the Lord, saying, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." (1 Ki 19:14) Then the Lord revealed to Elijah his plan to root out Baal worship and preserve his remnant. The work begun by Elijah would be fulfilled by others. The Lord told Elijah to anoint Hazael king of Aram, Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha to succeed him as a prophet. (1 Ki 19:15-16) In the meantime, Ahab's wickedness increased. He took Naboth's vineyard through a conspiracy organized by Jezebel. He killed an innocent man in order to take his vineyard. Then Elijah proclaimed God's word to Ahab, saying, "I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel--slave or free." And concerning Jezebel, Elijah prophesied, "Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." (1 Ki 19:21-23) When Ahab heard these words he humbled himself and repented. God was so gracious that he delayed judgment. Nevertheless, God's judgment was inevitable. When the time came, God carried out his judgment with speed and finality through Jehu.

First, Jehu was anointed as king of Israel (9:1-13). Look at verses 1-3. The prophet Elisha summoned a young prophet and sent him to Ramoth Gilead to anoint Jehu as king of Israel. Why did Elisha not go himself? Perhaps because he was well known, and this mission required discretion. Or it may have been because he was getting old and was unable to run all the way to Ramoth Gilead. But the main reason was that he wanted to train young prophets to serve rulers with the word of God. The job of a prophet is very risky. The man who anointed Jehu would need to run away immediately without any reward. The young prophet accepted the mission. He called Jehu out from among his fellow military officers to meet him in an inner room. He anointed Jehu as king and delivered the message of the Lord. Look at verses 7-10. "You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the Lord's servants shed by Jezebel. The whole house of Ahab will perish. I will cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel--slave or free. I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

Ahijah. As for Jezebel, dogs will devour her on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and no one will bury her." The time had come for the Lord to bring judgment against Ahab's house for all the sins he and Jezebel had committed. The judgment would be complete. The Lord chose Jehu as his instrument of judgment. As we will see, he was cold and thorough. He was the right person to fulfill God's will in this matter.

At the time, there seemed to be a generally irreverent attitude toward the Lord and his servants in Israel. However, Jehu accepted the Lord's anointing and took the message to heart. He decided to obey it thoroughly. When he returned to his fellow officers, they asked what had happened. (11) He did not share the full message with them, only that the Lord had anointed him king over Israel. Amazingly, they accepted this, blew the trumpet, and shouted, "Jehu is king!" It was the beginning of a coup d'etat.

Second, Jehu's zeal for the Lord (9:14-10:36). Jehu acted swiftly and prudently. He wasted no time. First, he killed Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah (9:14-29). Then he had Jezebel killed (9:30-37). Next, he destroyed Ahab's entire family (10:1-17). And finally, he destroyed all the ministers of Baal (10:20-28). Chapter 10 ends with the Lord's evaluation of Jehu and some general comments about his reign (29-36).

Look at 9:14-16. After being wounded in battle at Ramoth Gilead, Joram king of Israel returned to Jezreel for rest and recuperation. He was followed by Ahaziah king of Judah who wanted to visit him. At that very time, Jehu and his troops went to Jezreel in order to kill Joram. Jehu was in a hurry and drove like a madman. According to Mother Barry, there is a southern expression, "He drives like Jehu." King Joram sent messengers to Jehu to ascertain what he was doing. They should have come back and reported to their king. But they were induced to fall in line behind Jehu. Joram realized that something was wrong, so he personally went to meet Jehu and asked if he had come in peace. "How can there be peace," Jehu replied, "as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?" (22) Joram tried to escape. But Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between the shoulders. The arrow pierced his heart and he slumped down in his chariot. (24) Jehu remembered the word of the Lord's judgment against Ahab for the murder of Naboth. He quoted Elijah, saying, "'I will surely make you pay for it on this plot of ground,' declares the Lord." (26) Joram died on the plot of ground that had belonged to Naboth. Elijah's prophecy was fulfilled exactly. Ahaziah king of Judah was also killed by Jehu (27).

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

Then Jehu entered Jezreel, where Jezebel was. When she heard about it, she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. (30) She tried to look intimidating as a queen mother. She wanted to die with dignity. She even threatened Jehu, "Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?" She implied that just as Zimri had died right after assassinating his master, Jehu would also suffer a fatal calamity. (1 Ki 16:15) However, Jehu was unaffected. He called out, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs trembled and then they threw Jezebel down to the ground. She died and her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot. Some hungry dogs came along. They did not recognize Jezebel as a queen. They just ate her flesh until only her skull, hands and feet remained. This fulfilled the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah: "On the plot of ground at Jezreel, dogs will devour Jezebel's flesh." Jezebel had been the origin of all evil in the house of Ahab. She brought Baal worship to Israel. She killed the Lord's prophets. She masterminded Naboth's murder. She led her husband and children to do evil. She was indeed cursed. In the Bible, her name became synonymous with all prostitutes. (Rev 2:20)

In 10:1-17 Jehu killed the sons of Ahab living in Samaria. Ahab had many sons, seventy in all! Jehu sent letters to the officials of Samaria. They had been raising Ahab's children in their own homes. Jehu challenged them to fight him in battle. But they were fearful and had no loyalty to Ahab. They were willing to do anything Jehu asked. So he asked them to kill the seventy sons of Ahab, and to send their heads to him in Jezreel. They did so. Then Jehu piled the former princes' heads on both sides of the city gate and said to the people, "Know then, that not a word the Lord has spoken against the house of Ahab will fail. The Lord has done what he promised through his servant Elijah." Then Jehu killed everyone in Jezreel who remained of Ahab's house--his chief men, close friends and priests--leaving no survivor. (11)

On his way to Samaria, Jehu met some relatives of Ahaziah, king of Judah. There were 42 in all. Jehu killed them also. Then he met Jehonadab son of Recab. Jehonadab hated Baal worship and pagan culture. He was a strictly legalistic person. At his direction, his descendants did not drink wine for 300 years. (Jer 35:1-10) He had the same spirit as Jehu. He was glad to see Jehu destroy the house of Ahab. So he came out to welcome him. Jehonadab was not a prophet, priest, or Levite. But he lived a holy life in a dark time. Realizing his genuine heart for the Lord, Jehu welcomed him to work together with him. We need to work together with others to promote pure and holy living in dark times. Jehu was encouraged that there was someone who could appreciate his ministry. He said to Jehonadab,

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

"Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord." (16) Then he destroyed all who were left of Ahabs' family in Samaria according to the Lord's word through Elijah.

Here we can see the secret of Jehu's success in carrying out his mission. It was zeal for the Lord. If Jehu had a weak mind or a humanistic way of thinking, he would have failed. But he had great zeal for the Lord. This enabled him to accomplish the difficult task. One's motive is important. Some people have great zeal to gain recognition or self-glory. But Jehu had zeal for the Lord. He wanted to do right in God's sight, even though it was dangerous. So he carried out his mission diligently and thoroughly. God used those who have zeal for him, including Elijah, Elisha and St. Paul. Paul said in Romans 12:11, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." We must have zeal for the Lord, and never be complacent, lazy or half-hearted. What kind of zeal do you have? Many are crazy for making money, or for pleasure, including all kinds of games and sports. That is not zeal for the Lord. We need holy zeal for the Lord. Let's repent and ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with zeal for the Lord!

Look at 10:18-28. At that time, Baal worship was a national religion. Many prophets of Baal were working throughout the land. It was difficult to find and kill them all. But Jehu conceived a clever plan. He pretended that he would serve Baal even more than Ahab did. He publicly announced that he would hold a great sacrifice to Baal. He asked his people to summon all the prophets of Baal, all his ministers and all his priests. If anyone was missing, he would die. Then all the ministers of Baal came. He gave them robes in order to distinguish them from others. Also he made sure that there were no servants of the Lord among them. Then he killed all of the ministers of Baal with no one escaping. He removed the sacred stone from the temple of Baal and burned it. He turned Baal's temple into a latrine. In this way all the Baal worshipers were killed. Baal worship was completely purged from Israel.

Verses 29-36 are the Lord's evaluation and other general comments about Jehu's reign. Look at verse 30. "The Lord said to Jehu, 'Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.'" This is the only record of God's praise to any of the kings of northern Israel. Humanly speaking, Jehu was bloody, merciless, and cruel like a madman. Also, he was a conspirator and traitor and murderer. But the Lord said, "You have done well." It was because he carried out the Lord's judgment completely. Jehu did what the Lord had in mind thoroughly. So God rewarded him by giving his descendants the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

However, verses 29 and 31 show Jehu's weakness. Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the Lord, the God of Israel with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam--worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, for political purposes. Jehu destroyed Baal worship with great zeal, but he did not positively worship God. He was not like David. David loved the Lord, and the word of the Lord. David worshiped the Lord with all his heart. Jehu had zeal, but he lacked the love of God. When Jehu didn't love God or keep his word wholeheartedly, the Lord began to reduce the size of Israel. (32-33) Nevertheless, Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria for twenty-eight years. Then his son Jehoahaz succeeded him as king.

Third, the Lord will judge Baal worship in our time. In this passage, the Lord's words of judgment against Ahab and Jezebel are repeated many times. (9:7-10,26,36-37; 10:10,17) These prophetic judgments seemed to be wishful thinking when they were issued. However, they were fulfilled exactly as the Lord had said. None of God's words dropped to the ground. God's word is trustworthy. We cannot ignore God's word. The words of God will be fulfilled without fail. Jesus promised that he will come again in power and great glory as King and Judge. We must take this promise and warning to heart.

Baal worship is increasingly evident in our times. Its most dangerous and prominent feature was sexual immorality involving numerous male and female prostitutes. So many people in our times are complete slaves to sexual immorality, including homosexual offenders. In order to enjoy sexual pleasure without responsibility, the murder of unborn children is justified by law. Since 1973, more than 50 million unborn babies have been sacrificed to the gods of pleasure and convenience. These babies cry out to the Lord for justice. The Lord has been calling America to repent through many events, including terrorist attacks, natural disasters and economic catastrophe. God wants to root out Baal worship from our hearts and from our land. We must repent our sins and seek to live holy lives by God's mercy daily. Otherwise, we will suddenly be destroyed like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

We learn God's character in this passage. God is holy. God called his people to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. He called them to love him with all their hearts and to worship him only. When they began to worship idols, including Baal, God's holy anger burned and he decided to bring judgment upon them to root out the idolatry from their nation and from their hearts. God used Jehu like a surgeon's scalpel to cut out the cancer of Baal worship and to restore the spiritual vitality of his nation.

The LORD Judges Idolatry Through Jehu

God, who is holy, hates sin. God's punishes sin with absolute justice even though it requires violent bloodshed. This was revealed in the cross of Jesus. God punished his one and only Son, to the full measure, for our sins. Jesus had a crown of thorns pressed into his head. Jesus was flogged without mercy until his blood flowed. Jesus was pierced in his hands and feet with nails and hung on a cross. This is the punishment that we deserve. Most of all, Jesus cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus suffered the pain and misery of hell because of our sins. God deals with man's sins very seriously. We must know this about God. However, we see another side of God in the cross of Jesus. It is God's love. God loves sinners. God loves sinners so much that he sacrificed his own Son for us. In short, God hates sin but loves sinners.

We can learn something about carrying out God's mission from Jehu's zeal for the Lord. This zeal made him courageous, diligent and thorough. It is good to learn this from him. However, Jehu makes a great contrast with the prophet Elisha. Jehu did not give life. He did not shepherd anyone. On the other hand, when Elisha prayed to God, a woman's dead son came back to life. Elisha carried out his ministry with a life-giving spirit and a great shepherd's heart, like Jesus. God gives us Christians the mission of sharing the gospel of life with the people of our times (Ro 1:5). God will judge the sins of our people and of each of us personally. However, God does not call us to hate and destroy other people, but to love and serve others with the mind of Jesus. Jehu's zeal can make us effective and successful. But more than that, we need to have the love of God in our hearts. Then we can carry out our mission of preaching the gospel. Let's ask the Lord to give us his zeal, and his love, and to use us to drive out sexual immorality from our land through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.