

The first of the year is a time when many reflect on recent history and try to make sense of all that has gone on. Consider this -- as we look back at the past year, or even the past ten years, would you say it has been a positive time or a negative time as far as the direction our society is heading? If recently published surveys are any indication, I think most would echo the sentiment that we're not headed in the right direction. Our culture has certainly seen better days. But the problems that concern us today aren't unique to the present day, as we'll find out in today's sermon. Go back with me to the northern kingdom of Israel, in the 8th century B.C. It was a time of rampant evil in the kingdom. The rulers of Israel, Ahab and Jezebel, had implemented widespread practice of evil, and persecuted God's prophets such as Elijah, who dared to stand up for the truth. If anyone had to guess, it sure looked like the leaders of Israel would only continue along this trajectory deeper and deeper into evil. And then in stepped this character named Jehu.

The first mention of Jehu in Scripture is found in 1 Kings 19:16. This comes right after a time when Elijah ran for his life from Ahab and Jezebel, and then had the famous encounter with Yahweh at Mount Horeb, where Yahweh passed by in front of Elijah, speaking not in the wind, nor in the fire, nor in the earthquake, but in the sound of a low whisper. Yahweh reassured Elijah that He was still at work in Israel, and commissioned Elijah for the task of anointing Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel, Hazael as king over Aram, and Elisha the son of Shaphet as Elijah's successor as prophet. Now, due to some later repentance on Ahab's part, the anointing of Jehu was delayed, so it was during the ministry of the prophet Elisha that Jehu became king. We find this in 2 Kings chapter 9, when the prophet Elisha sends one of the young prophets anoint Jehu and commission him for the task.

Beginning reading in 2 Kings 9:6 through verse 10; this is the word of God.

"He poured the oil on his head and said to him, "Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'I have anointed you king over the people of Yahweh, even over Israel. 'You shall strike the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of Yahweh, at the hand of Jezebel. 'For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male person both bond and free in Israel. 'I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her.'"

This is Jehu's commission: he is to be the instrument God uses for bringing judgment upon the evil house of Ahab. Now while there will be a violent military coup resulting in the overthrow and death of the reigning king of Israel, who at this time is Joram the son of Ahab, it must be remembered that this isn't a belligerent revolution on the part of Jehu. This is at the bidding and will of God.

We'll first look at four instances where Jehu seems to aware of God's active work in Israel, and more specifically, his own mission as part of God's plan. Immediately after being declared king, Jehu led his soldiers to Jezreel, where King Joram was recovering from wounds received in battle against King Hazael of Aram. As the

Lord had ordained it, Ahaziah, king of Judah and nephew of Joram, was also in Jezreel at the time.

Starting in 2 Kings 9:21, we read: *“Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out to meet Jehu and found him in the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. When Joram saw Jehu, he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” And he answered, “What peace, so long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?””*

The first instance we see of Jehu’s sensitivity to what Yahweh was doing in Israel was his recognition that Yahweh is displeased with the wickedness of Jezebel, and that there would be no peace in Israel as long as that wickedness persists.

The first order of business was to deal with evil king Joram, Ahab and Jezebel’s son. Jehu assassinated Joram, and Joram died right there on the property that had been owned by Naboth. Remember that Joram’s parents, Ahab and Jezebel, had seized the property from Naboth and had conspired to have Naboth murdered. The writer of 2 Kings records that Jehu recognized this as proper repayment upon the house of Ahab for that sin. Resuming in verse 25: *“Then Jehu said to Bidkar his officer, “Take him up and cast him into the property of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, for I remember when you and I were riding together after Ahab his father, that Yahweh laid this oracle against him: ‘Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons,’ says Yahweh, ‘and I will repay you in this property,’ says Yahweh. Now then, take and cast him into the property, according to the word of Yahweh.”*

Next, King Ahaziah of Judah fled but was pursued and shot dead. Jehu then entered Jezreel and came to the royal palace of Jezebel, where her attendants were more than willing to throw her down to the ground where she died. Following a victory banquet, Jehu gave command to have her buried as she was a king’s daughter, as she had been a princess of the foreign land of Sidon. But by this time the hungry wild dogs have already found her. The third instance of Jehu’s recognition of God at work is in verse 36: *“Therefore they returned and told him. And he said, “This is the word of Yahweh, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘In the property of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel.’”*

What a disgusting sermon topic so far, right?! It’s all bloodshed and gore and more bloodshed and gore. And this isn’t even the end of it. As chapter 10 opens, we find that Ahab had other sons and grandsons living in Samaria, and with Joram dead, one of them was actually now the heir to the throne. So Jehu got the bodyguards of Ahab’s sons and grandsons to annihilate all of them, and they complied out of fear and delivered seventy heads to Jehu at Jezreel overnight. When the people of Jezreel awoke to find the heads of the royal offspring outside their city, they were surely alarmed. But here we find the fourth instance where Jehu recognizes God’s ongoing work in Israel, and that what was transpiring was far greater than the work of one man. Starting at verse 9 of chapter 10, *“In the morning Jehu went out and stood and said to all the people, “You are innocent; behold, I conspired against my master and killed him, but who killed all these? Know*

then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of Yahweh, which Yahweh spoke concerning the house of Ahab, for Yahweh has done what He spoke through His servant Elijah.”

After this, verses 11 through 14 describe how Jehu completed the task of destroying all the remaining members of the royal family in Jezreel, and then upon leaving Jezreel for Samaria, Jehu encountered some relatives of dead King Ahaziah of Judah, the grandson of Ahab. All 42 of them were killed, and the bloody but divinely commissioned task then was thoroughly completed. But Jehu’s wasn’t through. Unlike the previous four instances, when after Jehu completed a portion of the mission he rightly ascribed the glory to God for what had happened, this next case was a little different. Starting in verse 15, *“Now when he had departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him; and he greeted him and said to him, “Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart?” And Jehonadab answered, “It is.” Jehu said, “If it is, give me your hand.” And he gave him his hand, and he took him up to him into the chariot. He said, “Come with me and see MY zeal for Yahweh.” So he made him ride in his chariot. When he came to Samaria, he killed all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of Yahweh which He spoke to Elijah.”*

Now we must sidetrack a little and consider the significance of Jehonadab. He was the leader of a group of very conservative followers of Yahweh who maintained a “throwback” lifestyle, clinging to what once was and longing for the day when Israel would once again be zealous for Yahweh and restored to the glorious former days such as those during the reign of King David. Historians believe they had adopted a nomadic, rural lifestyle. They abstained from wine and commercial farming.

After seeing Yahweh’s work being done at the hand of Jehu, and the prophecies of Elijah being fulfilled, Jehonadab probably was drawn to Jehu in hope that Jehu was the man he and his followers were waiting for, a man who had the power to restore the order in Israel.

But as for Jehu, after meeting Jehonadab, he seems different. Instead of crediting the success to the infallible word of Yahweh as we saw him do four times before, he seemed to have something to prove. He wanted the traditionalist religious leader Jehonadab in his camp, and then he put his zeal for Yahweh on show. This would have spoken loudly to Jehonadab (and anyone else that was paying attention) that as king, Jehu was the guy they could count on to bring Israel back to its foundations; back to Yahweh God!

Verses 18-28 describe how Jehu and Jehonadab together deceived the prophets of Baal to all gather together for the National Day of Baal, where Jehu promised to worship Baal even more than Ahab did. (And that’s really saying something, when we remember that Ahab and Jezebel introduced this foreign idol to Israel and instituted the public worship of Baal.)

But much like the showdown on Mount Carmel years before, during Ahab’s reign, rather than a huge national event for the worship of Baal, there was instead a mass slaughter of

Baal worshipers, with none surviving. After Jehu and Jehonadab were through wiping out the Baal worshipers, Jehu then tore down the temple of Baal and converted it to a public toilet, basically the ultimate act of desecration. The writer of 2 Kings sums it up concisely in verse 28 with *“Thus Jehu eradicated Baal out of Israel.”*

At this point, it seems there’s good reason to be pleased with how things have turned out. The evil empire of Ahab has been destroyed. Jehu, in his zeal for Yahweh, has carried out the decree of Yahweh to a “T” and as a little extra bonus, he’s joined with Jehonadab, a well-respected Yahweh worshiper, to destroy Baal worship in Israel as well! What’s not to like? Well, if only the story ended at verse 28! As far as Jehu was concerned, if this had been his autobiography, he would surely have ended it at verse 28 because it signified “mission accomplished.” His goals had been achieved. But unfortunately for him, the writer of Kings didn’t stop there.

Verse 29 is a shocker.

“However, as for the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin, from these Jehu did not depart, even the golden calves that were at Bethel and that were at Dan.

How can this be, when he did seem to be SO fiercely opposed to idol worship and zealous to restore the worship of Yahweh? How is it that someone that seemed so in tune with the work God was doing, and who seemed to be such a passionate reformer, ended up not turning away from the golden calves?

Unfortunately, it seems that Jehu may not have been quite the zealous reformer he first appeared to be. Instead, he may have been just a skilled politician. Here’s why.

The golden calves of Jeroboam were pretty much THE national symbol of the northern kingdom. Jeroboam, the first king after the kingdom was divided, had created them in order to secure his nation. We find this account back in 1 Kings 12, starting at verse 26 and reading through verse 31: *“Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. “If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.” He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi.”*

From this point forward, the calves became one of the defining elements of the northern kingdom’s religion, as all kings after him, Jehu included, held to this false worship for the sake of political security. But there was something else that had recently transpired that also may have been a threat to northern kingdom nationalism: Baal worship. Baal was a

Canaanite deity, introduced to Israel by Ahab and Jezebel. The presence of Baal in Israel had to have ruffled the feathers of the northern kingdom patriots, Jehu included. If a nationalistic movement to return to the roots of the northern kingdom was to happen, Baal would have to go!

And so it seems likely that this political motivation was the real drive behind Jehu's actions.

Back to 2 Kings 10, continuing from verse 30. *Yahweh said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in executing what is right in My eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in My heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel."* (verse 31) *But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of Yahweh, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel sin.* (verse 32) *In those days Yahweh began to cut off portions from Israel; and Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel.*

Though Jehu receives a limited physical reward, the longest dynasty of any king of the northern kingdom, his primary failing is recorded in verse 31. Despite the good he accomplished, he actually neglected what was really his primary duty.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 contains a command for all the kings who would reign over Israel, and there is no evidence that Jehu or any of the other kings of the northern kingdom ever obeyed it: *"Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. "It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel."*

So with this added perspective we can more clearly see Jehu's failure. What God really required of him first and foremost was that he walk in the law of Yahweh with all his heart. Outward actions and lip service were not enough. Remember this: **even the right things, if done for the wrong reasons, are not truly righteous actions.**

Though he seemed to at least be aware of God being at work in the current events, and for a time even gave the appearance of being an obedient servant of God, he was really serving his own ends. He proved himself as a slick politician, by saying the right words, winning support and endorsement, and then ultimately failing to deliver because he really had another agenda. (We've never heard of that happening in this day and age, have we?!) But he wasn't proven to be the genuine man of God he first appeared to be.

Parents, you may be reminded at this point of a child whose obedience looks genuine as long as what the child wants to do matches what you commanded, but as soon as what the child wants to do doesn't match what you said, the child disobeys. And at that point you realize that it was not obedience at all. So it was with Jehu.

This is why Jehu's reform only went halfway, and ultimately it comes down to the fact that it wasn't really reform at all. If you're taking notes, write this down -- true reformation involves not just converting from heinous sin, but from any sin. Or as theologian Matthew Henry said, "Not just sins that are destructive to the secular interest, but from those that support and befriend it." Jehu had no problem with getting rid of evildoers that were in the way of establishing his kingdom. He was eager to eradicate foreign idols that compromised Israel's national interest; but the worship of the calves of Jeroboam was in the national interest, in order to prevent the return of the ten tribes to Jerusalem, so they remained. And thus, despite what he did accomplish, Jehu went down in history not as a reformer but as yet another in a line of disobedient, spiritually unfaithful kings.

We may be reminded at this point of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about such half-hearted individuals. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" This is the sad truth about Jehu. Though he gave outward appearance of being righteous, it's pretty clear that inwardly he had no real faith in Yahweh or a desire to do what Yahweh commanded. And that's what really mattered.

Now what about us in the 21st century? Like Israel in the 8th century B.C., the general spiritual condition here in North America these days doesn't look good. Evil continues to increase, only under different names today. Canaanite religious practices including Baal worship were among of the primary abominations then. Now, one of the primary abominations of the day goes by the name "abortion". Like Jehonadab and the Rechabites, from time to time we get our hopes up that things are finally starting to come together to rid our land of this abomination when a leader takes office that pledges to right what's wrong and fight abortion. We may even get excited when he invites us to come along and see his zeal, and we respond with support and endorsement -- like Jehonadab did. Some progress may even be made in the direction of ridding our land of the abominable practice of murdering unborn children. But then all too often, we start to find out that politicians are using the issue of abortion as a political bargaining chip, or a means of appealing to a particular voting bloc, without truly sharing in the conviction that the murder of unborn children is an abomination in a similar fashion as the worship and rituals of Baal and the other foreign gods was in Jehu's day. As Jehu's primary concern with eliminating Baal was not for the glory of God preeminent but rather for the political convenience of Jehu preeminent; so it seems to be the case far too often today in the political sphere.

With this realization, our response can be to be very disappointed in those in power, and feel like they have let us down. And they have, yet to some extent it may not be quite so much of a surprise after all. As Jehonadab had to realize, looking to anyone other than the Lord for deliverance in the battle against evil is a sure path to disappointment. Jehu

looked like the deliverer of Israel when he was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, and exterminating the prophets of Baal. Despite Jehu's impure motives, God was still at work. But for Jehonadab, Jehu was not who his hope should have been in. It was not Jehu, but rather God, who was really directing things. Both Jehu and Hazael king of Aram, despite their motives, were still instruments of God's work, though in completely different aspects. And so we can see as application for today as well that it's not in the politicians of the day where we should trust, but rather in the God who directs the actions of men, even directing the course of men whose hearts are opposed to obeying the commands of God.

However, there's a second point that I think we can also discern from this passage and apply to today as well. This second point is that we must never settle for compromise when it comes to reformation. Partial reformation is not enough. We can't just win a few battles, make things more comfortable for ourselves, and then declare "mission accomplished." Reformation isn't an easy or a painless task. It's one thing to just eliminate the ugly sins that make us uncomfortable; yes, even to eliminate gross abominations that leave blood on a nation's hands. But even more difficult is to also go after those pet sins that actually make us quite happy. If we want true reformation, though, we have to be willing to turn from all sin – and obey. This where it gets a little more personal. It's relatively easy, not to mention exciting, to think of reformation taking place on a national level. But when it involves change at the personal level, then it can get painful, right? But if we are going to see widespread change in our culture, it's not going to happen by political victory or executive proclamation. It won't happen by revolution. It will happen only by a work of the Holy Spirit.

I've recently been reading the narrative by Jonathan Edwards on the revival of religion which took place in Northampton in 1740 through 42, and it started from humble beginnings. The Holy Spirit moved in people's hearts. They were convicted of their own sin and responded by seeking to return to God, from whom they had departed. From senior citizens to young children alike, the first thing on anyone's lips was the work of God among them. Churches were filled. The streets and public squares were even filled with people crying aloud, mourning their sin, and then singing aloud, praising God for the forgiveness of sin! People gave up their quarrels and came together in a spirit of unity. Old grudges were confessed and past wrongs forgiven. People were zealous for the Lord -- not like the half-hearted zeal of Jehu as long as it served his purpose, but rather truly zealous for the Lord, willing to sacrifice their desires and their pride and instead be pruned and conformed by the Holy Spirit. But remember, it came not by political edict or by any movement or revolution, but by the Holy Spirit moving and people responding.

THIS is true revival, and this revival led to public reformation. It didn't begin in the public square, by any human effort or by government intervention. It began as a work of the Holy Spirit. THIS is what we pray will happen again. But THIS personal reformation is what must happen first if we are to experience a cultural reformation.

But I would be remiss if I did not clarify one more thing. In our power alone, we are totally unable to cause reformation to happen. If we could muster up all the zeal in the

world and commit our very lives for the cause, we still would fall short and go down in history much like Jehu did. Isaiah 64:6 reminds us that *“All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.”* No matter how hard we try, we still don’t have the ability ourselves to even make ourselves righteous, let alone make our nation righteous. As sinful creatures, even our best falls short. The answer isn’t more zeal or more purpose or more deeds. The only answer is Christ. Recall the Scripture reading before the sermon – *“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* There’s only One who can win this spiritual battle.

Victory won’t happen even if we try our hardest. Victory won’t happen just because the right men get in office. I’m reminded of a recent song by PCA musical artist Derek Webb, who penned a short song a couple of years ago called “A Savior on Capitol Hill”. Addressing the constant temptation to look to the wrong places for deliverance, he sings this lyric: “all of our problems gonna disappear / when we can whisper right in that President’s ear.”

No, we can’t look to Capitol Hill for salvation. We must look to the One whose finished work on the Cross won our salvation. His death and resurrection defeated the spiritual forces of wickedness. In Him alone we have righteousness. And if our cause is His cause, and our hope is in Him, we can say as the Psalmist did that *“It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in princes.”* Though all others will disappoint and deceive, hope in God, and none other. The battle belongs to Him, and He is the victor.

“How (Not) To Reform a Nation”

2 Kings 9-10

I. The Commission

II. Jehu’s Sensitivity to God’s Work

- a. 2 Kings 9:21 – There can be no peace as long as w_____ persists.
- b. 2 Kings 9:26 – Judgment on Ahab’s family for the murder of N_____.
- c. 2 Kings 9:36 – Word spoken by Elijah concerning the downfall of J_____.
- d. 2 Kings 10:10 – “_____ has done what he spoke through [Elijah].”

III. Jehu’s “Zeal”

IV. Jehu’s True Motives Revealed

“Even the r_____ things, if done for the w_____ reasons, are not truly r_____ actions.”

“Not just sins that are d_____ to the secular interest, but from those that s_____ and b_____ it.”

V. What About Today? (Application)