

## Choose Wisely, Jehu: Zeal without Love, 2 Kings 9-10, 8/27/23

If you have kids in sports or you have played sports yourself inevitably you will see some unfortunate little kid get confused and score on his own net or endzone. And you feel bad for the little guy, he's running fast and all excited... "finally this is my moment" and all the parents are yelling "no, no, wrong way" but all he hears is "go! Go! All the way!" Ever happen to any of you or your kid? Of course, it's not a lack of zeal that's the problem. It's misguided zeal that's the problem. Today in our final message in Choose Wisely, looking at the kings Israel, we are going to meet a king whose problem is not zeal. He's got enough zeal to go around. In fact, it's not even quite misguided zeal per se... but there is a problem with his zeal that will take some time to unfold in our story, and as we will discover, we too may suffer from the same problem with our zeal. And so today we are going to learn something about comforting about God's zeal, something critical missing about our zeal, and ultimately where to turn to find it. Turn with me to 2 Kings 9 where we will meet Jehu. Now let me warn you, the **story of Jehu**[Title Slide] is incredibly violent, we may even say disturbing at times. And the author doesn't sugarcoat any of it, it's meant to confront us. We read the Bible, but the Bible also reads us.

The story takes places within the larger narrative of the Prophet Elisha during the days of the divided kingdom in 842BC. At this point in the ministry of Elisha, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was led by a succession of evil kings in the line of Ahab and Jezebel. Their reigns were marked by unmitigated idolatry, especially worship of Baal, which included all kinds of heinous sex acts as well as the practice of child sacrifice, and injustice against the poor and powerless. And for decades, it may have seemed that God was either powerless or indifferent to evil and injustice...until chapter 9.

The chapter opens abruptly when Elisha sends a young prophet in training with a message from God to a General in the Israel army named Jehu. There was no time to waste and so the prophet was to quickly find Jehu deliver the message and run back as fast as possible. And the message he gives to Jehu is this, **v.6 "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anoint you king over the Lord's people Israel. 7 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.'**

**8 The whole house of Ahab will perish. I will cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. 9 I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baashason of Ahijah.**

**10 As for Jezebel, dogs will devour her on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and no one will bury her."** Then he opened the door and ran back to Elisha. The message could not be any clearer about his mission: **#1 Jehu will lead a coup against Ahab's royal line and become king. #2 Jehu is to act as God's zealous avenger against evil.** With Jehu and his army behind him, the story immediately unfolds in four bloody acts of vengeance like a Rambo or John Wick film. We are going to do a brief flyby...

### **Act #1 Vengeance against King Joram (2 Kings 9:14-29)**

Jehu and his army take off toward King Joram of Israel. From his tower, King Joram sees a dust cloud of racing chariots coming toward him. And so he sends out messengers to him but the messengers don't come back. **V.21 They met him at the plot of ground that had belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite.** The mention of this location is critical to the story as we will see in a moment.

**<sup>22</sup> When Joram saw Jehu he asked, "Have you come in peace, Jehu?" "How can there be peace," Jehu replied, "as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?"**

**<sup>24</sup> Then Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between the shoulders. The arrow pierced his heart and he slumped down in his chariot.**

**<sup>25</sup> Jehu said to Bidkar, his chariot officer, "Pick him up and throw him on the field that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember how you and I were riding together in chariots behind Ahab his father when the Lord spoke this prophecy against him:**

**<sup>26</sup> 'Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, declares the Lord, and I will surely make you pay for it on this plot of ground, declares the Lord.'** What's going on here with this reference to Naboth and the significance of this location? In 1 Kings 21 we read about a man named Naboth who was a godly man with a vineyard. While minding his own business, King Ahab and Jezebel plot to steal this man's land, abusing their authority by unjustly slandering Naboth, having him stoned to death and then annexing his land for themselves...by the way, here we are thousands of years later and some powerful world leaders are still using the same schemes. Ahab, Jezebel and Joram think they got away with it. But now, years later, King Joram is realizing to his dread, that God sees everything, and no one is getting away with anything. He will now die in the very same field Naboth was unjustly murdered in.

### **Act #2 Vengeance against Queen Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30-37)**

Even if you have never read the Bible, you can probably assume Jezebel is bad news just by her name, which she ruined for all women in the future. Jezebel became a byword, synonymous with a lying, seducing, scheming evil woman, this is the original Jezebel. **<sup>30</sup> Then Jehu went to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard about it, she put on eye makeup, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. <sup>31</sup> As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, "Have you come in peace, you Zimri, you murderer of your master?"**

**<sup>32</sup> He looked up at the window and called out, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked down at him. <sup>33</sup> "Throw her down!" Jehu said. So they threw her down, and some of her blood spattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot.** And just as predicted in the prophecy at Jehu's anointing, we come to find that the dogs come and devour her body, nothing is left but a few bones. And just like that Jezebel's 30-year reign of terror comes to violent, disgraceful end.

For the sake of time, let me just mention **Act #3 Vengeance against Ahab's Royal Line (2 Kings 10:1-17)**. You can probably predict what is going to happen...if you say heads are going to roll...well indeed heads do roll. Jehu hunts down the entire royal family of Ahab and all those loyal to the house of Ahab, and has their heads cut off and stacked along the city gate. Anyone getting uncomfortable and disturbed by all this yet? Well it's not over.

Lastly, **Act #4 Vengeance against the Priests of Baal (2 Kings 10:18-28)**.

Jehu had secured the kingship and eradicated the house of Ahab, but he wasn't finished. Because while Ahab's line was judged, the idolatrous religion that Jezebel imported to Israel, Baal worship, was still thriving. And so King Jehu, in a way that would make Machiavelli proud, throws a huge party in the temple of Baal in Samaria for all the priests of Baal, pretending to be in support. And while the music is playing and everyone is dancing and feasting and taking selfies and posting on Instagram, he calls in 80 armed assassins to strike every last one of them down. *V.25 The guards and officers threw the bodies out and then entered the inner shrine of the temple of Baal. <sup>26</sup> They brought the sacred stone out of the temple of Baal and burned it.*

*<sup>27</sup> They demolished the sacred stone of Baal and tore down the temple of Baal, and people have used it for a latrine to this day.* Wow. I couldn't help but wonder if this is the origin story of those tasteless Calvin bumper stickers that some of my fellow Eagles fans have on their car to taunt Cowboys fans? I digress.

So what does God want us to learn from this shockingly violent story of King Jehu? Three things, First we learn **something comforting about God's zeal**...although it may not seem that way at first. Each week of our series we've been assessing whether each king did good or evil in the eyes of God. What is your assessment of King Jehu up to this point? Is it unsettling to you? If it's not at all unsettling, you might have some psycho-pathic tendencies. It ought to be. But here's what might be even more disturbing to you: God's assessment of these acts in *<sup>30</sup> 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."* In no uncertain terms God says to Jehu the words we look to hear from God, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

From a modern viewpoint, it may seem unsettling that God would reward such violence, until we think about it a little more. While this passage may be unsettling in its violence, I hope it's also comforting that we worship a God who is not impotent nor is he ambivalent to injustice and evil. *Isaiah 42:13 the LORD will go out like a mighty man. He will stir up zeal like a man of war. He will raise a war cry. Yes, he will shout aloud. He will triumph over his enemies.*

**God's zeal against evil is sure.** I want to live in a world where that is true, and if you aren't living in Barbieland, so do you. Because what that means is no one is ultimately getting away with anything. It means that Putin's unjustified war and propaganda to blind his own people to the truth. God sees and His zeal against evil is sure. The sex trafficking and human slavery happening in our world, and our own country today in dark corners among the powerful who think that no one sees. God sees and His zeal against evil is sure. Those taking advantage of the

poor and under-resourced communities with payday loans and other financial schemes. Those who are causing children and teens to stumble with twisted gender ideology, and the so-called gender-affirming therapists placing confused children on cross-gender hormones, and the doctors irreparably mutilating them and making millions off these ongoing, life-long procedures. God sees and his justice is sure. We may escape the judgment of men, but we cannot escape the judgment of God. If not here, then certainly hereafter (read the Book of Revelation), every sin, not repented of and covered by the blood of Jesus, will meet the zealous justice of God at the end of days. So friend, when you encounter injustice, evil and violence in the world that makes your stomach turn...find your footing, find your comfort in the omnipotent zeal of the Lord.

Secondly, from this passage we learn **something missing from our zeal**. Let me start by saying there is much to be commended in Jehu's zeal. It is men and women of righteous zeal whom God has used to fight back evil, reform and cultivate a thriving world. King David facing down giants, The Apostle Paul bringing the gospel to the gentiles, Amy Carmichael the great missionary to India, Corrie Ten Boom, William Wilberforce, MLK Jr. the list goes on. Give me 10 Christian men and women with righteous zeal over 1000 passive, content Christians who like the church in Laodicea from Rev. 3, are neither hot nor cold but lukewarm. That's a sermon for another day. However, there is a warning here for us in our zeal as well because Jehu's assessment isn't over. ***<sup>28</sup> So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel. <sup>29</sup> However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit—the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.*** And because of his sin, we read that God began to shrink his kingdom and his reforms tragically had little lasting impact.

Is this shocking to anyone else? How is it that Jehu could be so filled with zeal against the idol worship of Baal and yet turn a blind eye, even make peace with the idol worship of the golden calves? The reason has everything to do with the difference between what I will call **imported idolatry and homegrown idolatry**. The idolatry of Baal was a foreign invasion of ideologies, cultures and practices brought in by Jezebel. It was imported idolatry. However, the worship of the golden calves was homegrown. It was man-made, Jewish religion and part of the culture and identity of the Northern Kingdom. Both were evil and broke the first commandment. But Jehu tolerated the homegrown idolatry but hated the imported idolatry. Why? ***2 Kings 10 <sup>31</sup> Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart.*** What was missing from Jehu's zeal was love for God with his whole heart. Do you see it? He loved his country. He loved justice. He even loved his morality...but he lacked in love for God and when we do, something will always be missing in our zeal.

**[Blank Slide]** If we are honest with ourselves, we are prone to the same tendency of half-hearted zeal, half-hearted love of God. We might be zealous about certain moral, cultural, political issues today and yet just as tempted toward, or even blind to our own homegrown idolatries in our heart. Some non-controversial examples: Maybe you are zealous about fighting against the LGBT+ agenda and you take to social media or join political movements to address it... and yet you are committing heterosexual sin sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or you have a pornography addiction, or an inappropriate relationship at work. Or you might be

zealous against abortion and supporting prolife movement and programs and yet you may be completely blind to the idol of greed, amassing more and more possessions, obsessed with your bottom line, seeking security in your wealth and the power and prestige it provides with little concern for the poor. Or you are zealous about racial equality and providing opportunities for disadvantaged communities but you alienate, refuse to forgive or even speak to family members or fellow Christians at church that may not share all your views or convictions. I find the same temptations in my heart to be intolerant of certain sins and yet tolerate others in my life. And we may have to ask ourselves, am I passionate about this because of my love for God or my love for politics, or my love for my culture or my love of myself. God wants our whole heart zealous for him, not rivals. God is looking for men and women of zeal, but zeal for himself, motivated by love! *2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.* So what do we do about this? The diagnosis and solution to this problem with our zeal is in Revelation 2 when God addresses the church in Ephesus. He commends them on their zeal for the truth, the work ethic...their apologetics defending the faith... *4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.* Repent! So here's how we pray about this, "Lord, in my zeal, am I tolerating sin in my heart that you want me to repent of to make you first in my life?"

[Blank Slide] Jehu was missing something in his zeal, and he didn't love God with all his heart....and you and I are going to face the same issue. Because the Bible says that the heart is desperately wicked and we are prone to tolerating all kinds of sins. The heart is an idol factory, and the line between good and evil runs down the center of every human heart. See we need a solution to not only the evil in the world, but the evil in our own divided hearts. Now one solution is for God to wipe us all out with zeal for justice like he did in the story. And that would indeed be just and yet we would say, that sounds intolerant...where's the love? We don't want that. Or he can just say, O well, I'll pretend it doesn't exist and that you are fine, I'm fine, we're all fine, let's sing kumbaya. That would seem loving and tolerant, and yet it wouldn't be just, and would lead to the complete unmitigated destruction of society if left unchecked. *The solution is that God provided a better and final King*- one who had perfect zeal for God's justice and kept the law of God with all his heart and perfect love sent to give mercy and grace to sinners like us: Jesus Christ. Not only is Jesus the perfect embodiment of God's justice and love. But only in *one location in the universe does God's zeal for justice and love flow together toward us- the Cross* where Jesus was sacrificed for us. On the cross we see the zeal of God against evil where Jesus bore the sins of the world. And on the cross we see the love of God for humanity, the place where we are forgiven and set free because Jesus paid it all.

Give opportunity for you today to pray, I'm going to come down to pray about some areas of half-hearted love for God and tolerance of sin in my life. I want you to come down with me for this last song and after.