

“Don’t Be a Jehu”

by Paul Hammons

One of the darkest times in the history of God’s people came under the rule of Ahab and Jezebel. It became so bad that God finally raised up a king specifically for the purpose of destroying their influence from the kingdom.

That’s the story we read about in 2 Kings 10-11, when God called Jehu to avenge all the innocent blood shed by Ahab’s family and all the idolatry they had introduced into the land of Israel.

As it turns out, Jehu was overwhelmingly successful in that job, partly because he was convicted that Ahab’s descendants were absolutely deserving of destruction. He had seen firsthand all the corruption under Ahab, and at one point even told his aid,

“For remember, when you and I rode side by side behind Ahab his father, how the Lord made this pronouncement against him: ‘As surely as I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons—declares the Lord—I will repay you on this plot of ground.’ - 2 Ki 9:22–26

Jehu did what God wanted - in fact he was committed to it. As he was hunting down all Ahab’s sons and eradicating the prophets of Baal from the land, we read him tell Jehonadab:

“Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.” So he had him ride in his chariot. And when he came to Samaria, he struck down all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, till he had wiped them out, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke to Elijah. - 2 Ki 10:15–17.

But it turns out that Jehu’s zeal wasn’t really for the Lord. Jehu was excited to do God’s will when it served his interest - when it made him king.

But what happened when Jehu was called to do the real work of fully restoring Israel to the law? Scripture tells us that Jehu’s zeal only lasted while he was doing the things that fit his own plans for the kingdom. When it came to fulfilling God’s plans of restoration, Jehu was either unwilling, unable, or disinterested.

"Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin—that is, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan. ... But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin. - 2 Kings 10:28-31

It's easy to serve God when God calls you to do the thing that brings you praise and power and prominence. It's a different thing to serve God when God calls you to simply obey His will, even if it means telling the people around you to change course, reject hundreds of years of false teaching and lawless behavior, and return to the word of God.

As a result, Israel got rid of its worst offenses, but never truly returned to God. They treated the worst symptoms, but they did not address the disease. And that's the history of church restoration movements. They so often deal with the worst excesses that have developed in religious culture but fail to address the root problems of apostasy that allowed those corrupt systems to develop in the first place.

Israel couldn't simply reform its practices because its practices had never been according to God's law. And so even after Jehu removed the Baal worship from the land, Israel was still worshiping with an unauthorized priesthood with unauthorized idols in unauthorized locations.

The religious world is filled with Jehus. There are very few men like Jehoiada (2 Kings 11), who stepped up in the face of an evil ruler to restore the rightful king in Judah and remove idolatry from Judah - much like Jehu was called to do. But unlike Jehu, Jehoiada started by calling the people into a covenant with God, to be His people, devoted to His will. THEN they went about the work of purging idolatry. (2 Kings 11:17-20)

All true restoration has to begin not with "How can we fix what we're doing?" but with "What does the Lord's plan look like, and how can we follow that pattern alone?"