

Sermon 51, Royal Zeal for Yahweh: Politically Driven Reformation and Its Limits, 2 Kings 10

Proposition: In this text, we see God’s vengeance, God’s chastening, God’s mercy, and God’s hatred of idolatry — and that those attributes aren’t always displayed in the way we think they ought to be!

Exegetical Outline

- I. Jehu Purges Ahab-Supporters in Samaria and Jezreel, vv. 1-11
- II. Jehu Purges Suspicious Judeans, vv. 12-14
- III. Jehu Purges Baal-Worshippers, vv. 15-27
- IV. God’s Verdict on Jehu, vv. 28-31
- V. God’s Chastening of Israel, vv. 32-33
- VI. Concluding Information on Jehu, vv. 34-36

Homiletical Outline

- I. God Takes Vengeance on Ahab’s Line, vv. 1-11
- II. God’s Agent Acts Unscrupulously, vv. 12-14
- III. God’s Agent Jehu: More Zealous for Politics than for Religion, vv. 15-27, 29
- IV. God’s Mercy on Jehu, a Man Partly After His Own Heart, vv. 28-31
- V. God’s Chastening of Israel, vv. 32-33
- VI. Concluding Information on Jehu, vv. 34-36

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come tonight to the second part of the story of Jehu’s rise to power. Last week we saw how quickly his coup took shape, as he rode at top speed back to Jezreel as soon as he had been anointed by the prophet, only to slaughter the kings of Israel and Judah the moment he arrived. He then dealt with Jezebel in a gruesome and highly memorable fashion. Tonight, the purges continue. This chapter is a breath of fresh air to those who hate Baal and his works and desire to see the LORD alone exalted. But at the same time, many of Jehu’s actions trouble us. Is this text simply an extended account of a bloody coup? Or is it actually edifying? Does it reveal our God to us? The answer is absolutely yes. This text is an edifying text because it tells us more about what our God is like. In tonight’s text the vengeance, chastening, hatred of idolatry, and mercy of our God are on full display. We see those attributes clearly in this text — and we just as clearly see that our God doesn’t always behave as we expect Him to. Our God is not a tame lion and His agents are not always particularly sanctified and Spirit-filled. But that doesn’t change who He is. He’s not safe, but He’s good.

I. God Takes Vengeance on Ahab's Line, vv. 1-11

The first place we see God's goodness is in His vengeance on evil. Rather than letting Ahab get away with his dastardly deeds, God sent Elijah to confront him and to offer him mercy. More than once, God gave Ahab the opportunity to turn away from sin. Ahab even externally repented for a while, and God was excited about it, pulling Elijah aside and pointing it out to him. Because of that repentance, God postponed His vengeance to the days of Ahab's sons. But now those days have arrived; now our God takes a reckoning. He punishes Ahab's descendants just as Ahab slaughtered Naboth and his descendants. Through His agent Jehu, God slaughters every last descendant of Ahab (the perfect number, 70) in Jezreel and Samaria. And as Jehu is not shy about pointing out, this is the fulfillment of the word of the Lord. He promised to cut off Ahab's line, and so He did.

But what about God's command that children not be put to death for the sins of their fathers? Were Ahab's sons really deserving of death? There are a couple of considerations here that we need to think about. First, that text is talking about civil justice. Human courts are not allowed to attain particular lines, not in the US at all and in England and Wales not since 1814 (the passage of the Corruption of Blood Act). God taking vengeance is omniscient and not bound by the rules of evidence or other constraints that civil courts must reckon with. He has full power of the lives of all creatures. Secondly, this is a small-scale reenactment of Adam's sin, which plunged the whole human race into guilt and corruption and thus ultimately into death. Adam's line is subject to capital punishment with no exceptions. Ahab's line was subjected to the same penalty. Were they all as wicked as Ahab? The question is immaterial. God has the right to take vengeance on those who sin against Him. In fact, He has the duty to punish sin. And Ahab's line, for purposes of God's punishment, was tainted by Ahab's sin and thus in need of killing.

Do you recognize God as a God of vengeance? Do you know Him as a terrible and fearsome God, one who renders wrath to His adversaries and repayment to His enemies? Brothers and sisters, God announced in the Ten Commandments that He is a jealous God and that He visits iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him. Remember, too (not to get too far afield here) that that description of His character is found in the Fourth Commandment. Those who fail to keep the Sabbath day holy are in imminent danger of finding God's wrath and vengeance against their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. It's so true, friends! You don't have to live in the church very long to find that in general, parents who don't teach their children to honor the Sabbath day don't have children grow up to be regular and faithful worshippers of God. If you spend the childhood and teen years teaching your kids that sports and more important than worship, then guess what your children will believe when they become adults?

So beware of sin. Beware of selling yourself to sin like Ahab did. You are asking for vengeance from God Almighty not just on yourself but on your children.

Where do we see God's vengeance most clearly? In a pile of heads outside the gates of Jezreel? No. We see it on the hill called Golgotha outside Jerusalem. Brothers and sisters, God's

vengeance on sin is displayed most clearly at the cross of Jesus Christ. That's how much He hates sin. That's what sin does to people who practice it, and to the children of people who practice it. All around us, in the ghettos and the tough neighborhoods of this planet, we can see how sin affects the children of sinners. But rather than simply letting our sins multiply and harm our children indefinitely, God sacrificed His own Son for sin. Jesus died because you sinned. It's rather the opposite of the substitution seen in our text this evening, isn't it? Ahab's seventy sons died because of their affiliation with wicked Ahab. We, the 144,000, live because of our affiliation with God's righteous Son.

God takes vengeance on sin. That's what His word says, and as Jehu points out in v. 10, God's word will always be fulfilled. But He has given us a way of escape, a way of salvation, in His Son who died and is alive forevermore.

II. God's Agent Acts Unscrupulously, vv. 12-14

Well, Jehu leaves for Samaria and he meets some brothers of Ahaziah of Judah. The story they tell is remarkably fishy. They are deep in Israelite territory, yet they haven't heard about the deaths of Jehoram and Ahaziah? Yes, those deaths might have been no more than three or four days old. But surely news traveled fast enough that they could have found it out? Besides, this Beth-Eked of the Shepherds is far off the beaten track. This looks a whole lot more like a commando raid and than like a friendly visit. And anyway, anyone who claims friendship with Jehoram ben Ahab is suspect already. Besides, the word "greet" sounds an awful lot like the word "avenge" in Hebrew, and some modern scholars actually say that that's what the text should read: "We are coming to avenge the sons of the king and the sons of the queen mother." (On the other hand, these folks would need to be incredibly simple-minded to say such a thing to Jehu if they had any idea who he was!) Yes, these Judeans were asking for it. Either they were just plain ignorant, or too simple-minded for their own good, or possibly they were highly deceptive commandos. Jehu captures and slaughters them all, apparently believing that it is better to be safe than sorry.

Now, God had commissioned Jehu to wipe out the house of Ahab. But to wipe out the house of David — that's a different story. It was not exactly part of Jehu's job to slaughter these people, who may have been fairly harmless (though their behavior was certainly suspicious enough — and anyway, the brothers of a man you murdered a few days ago are hardly likely to want to be your pals). Jehu at best acted unscrupulously here, and his behavior looks rather like homicidal paranoia.

What does this teach us about God? Simply that God is fully capable of using corrupt agents. I've mentioned before the song "God can only use a soldier He can trust." Yet here God is using a soldier that the most simple-minded human being would be reluctant to trust. Brothers and sisters, God is not limited to using good people to bring about His purposes in the world. He makes use of bad people too. That doesn't mean that everything those people do is somehow made right by their status as heavenly agents, any more than cops or Federal agents are always right because they are agents. But it does mean that God is able to use more people than we

think, including people we wouldn't use, to do what He thinks best in this world. In short, don't trust God's agent; trust God and only God!

III. God's Agent Jehu: More Zealous for Politics than for Religion, vv. 15-27, 29

Well, we continue to see Jehu at work — this time hosting a Baal-worshippers' party and slaughtering them all. Now, this was certainly commanded in the word of God. Deuteronomy 13 demands that if a whole city goes after other gods, that whole city should be slaughtered. So Jehu's action here is correct under the terms of God's covenant with Israel. And certainly, Jehu wanted to show his zeal for Yahweh to Jehonadab the son of Rekab. Some interpreters note that Rekab sounds just like "rekhev," chariot, and conclude that this Jehonadab was something of an arms dealer. That is possible, but it goes beyond what the text clearly communicates. Jehonadab was certainly someone who wanted to follow God and whose descendants lived a lifestyle dedicated to following God; see Jeremiah 35, where his descendants are still around 250 years after this time period.

Jehu destroys Ahab's biggest public works project — the huge temple of Baal in Samaria that had been the symbol of Ahab's pursuit of other gods. He kills all the worshippers of Baal. He destroys the sacred images and pillars. It's all part of his temples-to-toilets program, as Dale Ralph Davis says. Yet this same Jehu, a man allegedly zealous for Yahweh, goes on to maintain Jeroboam's accursed calf-worshipping policy. So was he as opposed to idolatry as one could wish? Clearly not. He was politically savvy — he reigned 28 years. But his zeal was, it seems, more zeal for Jehu than zeal for Yahweh.

Brothers and sisters, are you ever zealous for God mostly for your own benefit — so that you can look good in front of your friends? So that you can feel good about yourself? Are you more zealous for politics than for Christ? More anxious to root up the idols of the people you don't like than to root out the idols of your own heart?

It's easy to want to think "Boy, I'm not like Jehu." And indeed, you're probably not guilty of stationing 80 commandos outside a house of worship and ordering them to cut down everyone inside. But if you care more about politics than about Christ, you are like Jehu. If you care more about making your own life successful and comfortable than you do about obeying God, then you are like Jehu.

IV. God's Mercy on Jehu, a Man Partly After His Own Heart, vv. 28-31

Yet brothers and sisters, God had mercy on Jehu. Notice, for instance, that Jehu did to the house of Ahab everything that was in God's heart. It was in God's heart to cut off Ahab's line, bond and free, male and female, everyone that was linked to him in any way. That is the reality of our avenging God. And yet Jehu was just like Jeroboam and every other king of the Northern Kingdom: more interested in political success than in obedience to God. Nonetheless, God had mercy on Jehu, giving him a long reign and a successful (for Israel) dynasty. Four generations of Jehu-ites would sit on the throne. Why? Because Jehu was perfect? No. Because God was merciful, both to Jehu and to His people. Rather than subjecting them to the kind of chaos and brutality that accompanied the long civil war between Omri and Tibni, God let them have a

relatively stable period of prosperity. He didn't destroy Israel right away, even though Israel had willingly submitted to Ahab and Jezebel.

Do you rely on God's mercy? Do you hope in His goodness? And do you see how much He hates the false gods that lead His people astray? God hated Baal so much that He was merciful to Jehu, who wiped out Baalism, even though Jehu was not exactly Moses or David. God is simultaneously one who perfectly hates sin and has mercy on sinners. The whole set-up of these four verses makes that abundantly clear. Jehu did good — but he did evil too. Jehu did good — but he did evil too. That's the pattern in these verses, as if to make it abundantly clear that Jehu was the recipient of God's mercy but also the agent of God's wrath.

V. God's Chastening of Israel, vv. 32-33

Well, after all that exciting action, the text wraps up with a sobering notice. In those days, God started to cut off pieces of Israel. What does this tell us about our God? That He chastens. Israel was still His people, and God disciplines His people to help them bear more fruit. He chastens them to help them be more obedient to Himself. Every branch that bears fruit He prunes; every son He love He chastens.

So if you're losing "territory" — if some part of your life or of your stuff is being cut off, what should you make of it? You should recognize it as God's chastening. He's not punishing you; He is disciplining you to help you live a more fruitful, obedient life. That was the goal with this chastening of Israel. And that's the goal when He chastens you.

VI. Concluding Information on Jehu, vv. 34-36

Jehu reigned 28 years — not bad at all. Learn from him to be more zealous for God than you are for politics, power, and comfort. Learn from him that God is a jealous and avenging God, one who is avenging and wrathful. Learn from him that the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. Learn from him that your God is merciful. Brothers and sisters, we serve the God of Jehu. Let's serve Him better than Jehu did. Amen.