

DANGER! UNBRIDLED ZEAL

2 Kings 9:16, 21-22; 10:15-19, 30-32

We think of zeal as being whatever drives people in their lives. You've heard the term workaholic which is a label for someone who is driven by their job or profession. Some people are into football games and it all they want to talk about. They watch games on TV, read about the teams, dress up in special clothing and travel hundreds of miles to attend games. They are passionate about it. The things you are driven by will likely become the way others think about and define or identify you.

I knew a person who was constantly talking about the evils of legalizing beverage alcohol. If he had a chance to share his opinion about anything, then the topic would be about the dangers of drinking and could quote any number of Bible verses regarding the detrimental effects of alcohol abuse. There are many Christians who are absorbed by end-time prophecies and they will have all the details about the progress Israel is making to rebuild the temple. Everything that happens in the world (good or bad) is related to the Second Coming of Christ.

Some times we might even label those with unbridled zeal as fanatics. Is there a danger of being fanatical? It is rather easy to see the danger if a person is fanatical about doing something that is harmful such as flying an airplane into a building. Someone who is into the occult and worship of the devil might try to destroy churches or kill Christians. What about the other side of the issue? Is there a danger to being fanatical even for a good cause? Can you think of examples of situations where too much zeal for a good cause can be detrimental? Examples: A church that is against the intrusion of the homosexual agenda in our culture might demonstrate at funerals with signs claiming that the death was proof that God disapproved of sexual perversion. Someone who is overly zealous about "right to life" might burn down an abortion clinic.

In the Biblical historical account of the kings of Israel, we find a person who is really zealous about carrying out instruction from the prophet who anointed him to be king (2 Kings 9:7-10). We will look at selected verses in chapters 9 and 10 to see what we can learn about overly intense zeal.

What Is the Basis of Your Zeal? - 9:16, 21-22

¹⁶Then Jehu rode in a chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram was lying there. Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to see Joram.

²¹Then Joram said, "Get ready." And they made his chariot ready. 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.

²²When 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?" 2 Kings 9:16,21-22 (NASB95)

Israel was fighting Aram (or Syria) to protect disputed land from being captured and during the battle at Ramoth-gilead King Joram was wounded. He left the battle field and went to the summer palace in Jezreel while the defense of the territory was left in the hands of the army. Jehu was the captain or leader in charge of the operation at Ramoth-gilead. This is where the prophet sent by Elisha found him and anointed him as king. You may recall that this was a charge given to Elijah during his encounter with God on Mt. Horeb. He was to anoint Jehu as king over Israel. This was apparently passed on to Elisha who assigned one of his assistants to do the job.

Jehu did not waste any time in carrying out the assignment to "strike the house of Ahab" to avenge the death of God's prophets at the hand of Jezebel. He set out for Jezreel with a group

of soldiers. Apparently he was intent on executing king Joram as the first step in eliminating the house of Ahab. Joram's watchmen saw the group approaching and Joram told them to send out messengers to meet them and find out who they were and why they were approaching. There was concern that this might be a group of Arameans or bad news from the battle. Both times the messengers were to ask "is it peace?" Each time Jehu told the messenger that was not of any concern to him and that he should just follow Jehu and his men to Jezreel. The watchman finally figured that it was Jehu because of the way he drove his chariot and reported this to the king. Joram and his nephew Ahaziah the king of Judah then went to meet Jehu since they thought he had news of the battle with Aram.

By the time the two kings and Jehu met they were at the property of Naboth whom Ahab and Jezebel had conspired to have him killed so Ahab could take his property. Joram asked the same question that the two horsemen had asked (is it peace) but got a completely different answer from Jehu than he had given before. His answer (which essentially raised the question of "how could there be peace when pagan worship and witchcraft were being practiced?") was a direct challenge to the king and to the influence his mother Jezebel had on the nation.

Joram recognized this as a serious threat to his life and he immediately turned his chariot around and tried to get away. It was too late. Jehu shot him through the heart with an arrow and had one of his soldier throw the body out on the property his father had stolen from Naboth. Ahaziah also took off, but Jehu ordered his men to shoot him also. This is where the unbridled zeal of Jehu came into the picture. There was no mention of any judgment against Ahaziah in the prophecy of the prophet who anointed Jehu as king or even in the original prophecy of Elijah against Ahab and Jezebel. This was something that he did out of his own callousness.

Jehu continued on his mission to strike the house of Ahab. He set out to find Jezebel. She apparently had heard what had happened and she was waiting in an upstairs room in her house when Jehu arrived. Jehu then told her attendants to throw her from the window and when she was on the ground (probably already dead from the fall) Jehu ran his horse and chariot over her body. Then he went to have lunch. While he was having lunch, wild dogs came up and destroyed the body of Jezebel. This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah against Jezebel.

Jehu continued his mission of striking the house of Ahab by having all seventy of Ahab's sons who were in Samaria killed and ordered that their heads be delivered to him in Jezreel. Executing Ahab's sons was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah in 1 Kings 21. We see his continued callousness in action in the beheading and piling up their heads outside of the city in Jezreel. His overzealousness was still active when he proceeded to kill all those in Jezreel that had any connection to the court of Ahab.

Jehu was capable of manipulating the people. He called all the people of Jezreel together and claimed responsibility for executing Joram and that no one would try to blame them for his death. He then implied that he had nothing to do with the brutal deaths of the seventy sons of Ahab. He asked the question "who killed these?" He did not tell them that he had ordered it to be done. He did not stop there in acting on his own initiative. Another example is when he happened upon 42 of Ahaziah's relatives that were going to Samaria to visit Ahab and Jezebel's sons. These had come from Judah and did not know that those they were going to visit had already been killed. Jehu had all these killed too since he did not see that he was accountable to anyone.

How Do You Stay Accountable? - 10:15-17

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. ¹⁶ He said, "Come with me and see my zeal for the LORD." So he made him ride in his chariot. ¹⁷ When he came to Samaria, he killed all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke to Elijah. 2 Kings 10:15-17 (NASB95)

Rechabites were a devout family that was known for their piety. They were descendant of Moses' father-in-law. Jehonadab was highly respected as being a righteous man. He had heard about the purge of the family of Ahab and the ungodly influence of Jezebel and he agreed that such a cleansing was needed. Jehu knew that having association with such a highly respected man was to his advantage. That is why Jehu insisted that Jehonadab go with him to Samaria.

The invitation was simply for Jehonadab to come along as a witness as Jehu carried out his zeal for the job he was doing for the Lord. In this phase of the purge, Jehu went about killing all those who were a part of Ahab's family who resided in Samaria. Some commentators think that this purge also included all who were part of the civil and religious order of things that were connected to the reign of Ahab. The scripture commentary on this is that what Jehu did was "according to the word of the Lord which He spoke to Elijah." We can find this word in 1 Kings 21:21 which reads "behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free." I would assume that those who were "free" would be his blood relatives and those who were described as "bond" would be those who were being paid to serve in the civil and religious organizations.

Do Right Outcomes Justify Wrong Methods? - 10:18-19

¹⁸ Then Jehu gathered all the people and said to them, "Ahab served Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much. ¹⁹ "Now, summon all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers and all his priests; let no one be missing, for I have a great sacrifice for Baal; whoever is missing shall not live." But Jehu did it in cunning, so that he might destroy the worshipers of Baal. 2 Kings 10:18-19 (NASB95)

Those devoted to Baal worship were the prophets, priests, and worshipers. They were not as numerous as they had once been during the time that Ahab and Jezebel were in power. The influence of Elijah and Elisha had helped to reduce the number of those who were followers of Baal. When Jehu announced that a special ceremony was to take place to honor Baal, these followers of Baal were encouraged that they might gain additional impact under this new king. It is not surprising that they showed up for the celebration. They had no idea of what Jehu's religious beliefs were and did not suspect that this might be a trap.

Jamieson and others see what Jehu did to be harmony with the Mosaic law, and appropriate for a constitutional king of Israel. They argue, however, that it was not done from religious, but purely political motives, because he believed that the existence and interests of the Baal worshipers were devoted to the dynasty of Ahab and would be a threat to his reign as king. Apparently, Jehu hoped that by their extermination he would gain the support of the far larger and more influential group who worshiped God in Israel. Jehonadab's agreement was most likely given in the belief of Jehu being motivated solely by the principles of piety and zeal.

Although what Jehu did was not included in the commission he received from the prophet, D. A. Carson observed that Jehu's massacre completed the destruction of Baal worship in Israel which Elijah had begun. The king was God's instrument of judgment. There is not any comment in the Scriptures with regard to the fact that Jehu used deception to lure the Baal worshipers to the temple where his men would kill them. The deception was acknowledged but not disparaged.

Regarding the deception, Matthew Henry made the following observations:

The worship of Baal was the crying sin of the house of Ahab: that root of this idolatry was plucked up, but multitudes yet remained that were infected with it, and would be in danger of infecting others. The law of God was express, that they were to be put to death; but they were so numerous, and so dispersed throughout all parts of the kingdom, and perhaps so alarmed with Jehu's beginnings, that it would be a hard matter to find them all out and an endless task to prosecute and execute them one by one. Jehu's project therefore is to cut them all off together.

By a wile, by a fraud, he brought them together to the temple of Baal. He pretended he would worship Baal more than ever Ahab had done. This seems to have been spoken purposely to deceive the worshipers of Baal, and then it cannot be justified. The truth of God needs not any man's lie.

In modern times, the police will use deception to round up criminals by inviting them to a party or send them mail that says they have won a prize and they need to come to a location to claim their prize. When the criminals arrive, they are arrested. Of course, you have heard about "sting" operations which are deceptive in nature. Is Matthew Henry right in his assessment that such deception cannot be justified? Maybe the next passage will give some insight.

When Does Passion Fall Short? 10:30-32

³⁰The LORD 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." ³¹But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel sin. ³²In those days the LORD began to cut off *portions* from Israel; and Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: 2 Kings 10:30-32 (NASB95)

At first glance, the commendation of Jehu given by God would cause us to think that God was pleased with everything Jehu had done. He carried out what was right in God's eyes and he did to the house of Ahab all that God wanted done. Notice that the passage does NOT say that everything Jehu did was right in God's eyes, nor does it say that all Jehu did was according to what was God's intent. The bottom line was that Jehu did everything God wanted done PLUS many other things that he did on his own initiative. He did not receive any commendation for that which he did on his own. While we do not see a condemnation of the "extras" Jehu did in this passage we find it in the writings of Hosea (1:4b). "I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel."

Perhaps the criticism of Jehu's excesses was implied in the limitation of the reign of the family of Jehu to only four generations. It would appear that God allowed the unbridled zeal to happen even though it was not part of His plan. In the end, there is a price to pay for not walking in the ways of the Lord with all your heart. We see this "price to pay" coming up again with the loss of part of Israel's territory to Aram because Jehu allowed and, perhaps, even entered into the practice of bowing down to the calf images that Jeroboam initiated when Israel broke away following the death of Solomon.

Things we can learn from this account would include the need for us to be faithful and zealous to do what we know God has called us to do. When we are engaged in carrying out these things, we need to make sure that we use only God's way to do God's work and that we do not go beyond what we are called to do in our zeal.