

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



August 14, 2011

The Zeal of Jehu

Zeal for God is always commendable, but the example of one Old Testament king shows us that zeal can become one-dimensional, ultimately hurting the Lord's cause.

“Then he [Jehu] said, ‘Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.’ So they had him ride in his chariot. And when he came to Samaria, he killed all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed them, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke to Elijah” (2 Kgs. 10:16-17).

Jehu was an army commander in the northern kingdom of Israel who was directed by God to bring an end to the house of Ahab. Jezebel's efforts to wipe out the worship of Jehovah and replace it with Baal worship had nearly succeeded, and Jehu was God's instrument to clean up the mess. But this would not be your typical garden-variety coup, for the house of Ahab ruled not only in Israel (King Jehoram, Ahab's son), but also in Judah (King Ahaziah, Ahab's grandson). Ahab's influence was deeply entrenched in both kingdoms, and eradicating it would be a difficult task.

Executing this task would require someone with a ruthless determination to shed a lot of blood, and Jehu was the right man for the job. He killed Jehoram and Ahaziah, then hunted down and dis-

patched all the remaining descendants of Ahab. But he didn't stop there. Using a clever ruse, he lured all the priests of Baal and their worshippers to a special gathering, and had them all killed in a great slaughter. He demolished their temple and tore down their idols. Jehu's zeal for the Lord accomplished God's intended result: “Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel” (v. 28).

Jehu went on to rule Israel as king for 28 years. He deserves credit for saving God's people from an ignoble end. But his reign as king revealed two defects in his zeal for the Lord that hold lessons for us today.

First, Jehu's zeal for God was selective. He destroyed Baal worship, but he left other problems untouched. “Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin” (v. 31). “The sins of Jeroboam” refers to the alternate worship that Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, set up when he rebelled against the house of David. Giving up those sins would require sur-

rendering his crown and submitting to the authority of the Davidic line. Like all the kings of Israel before and after him, Jehu chose to maintain the status quo and preserve his position of power.

Second, Jehu's zeal for God was entirely negative. It was expressed solely by attacking the sins of others. There was no effort to promote a positive program of service among the people.

There are men of God today whose zeal for the Lord is very much like that of Jehu. They attack sin with the fury of an Old Testament crusader, smiting their enemies unmercifully, and often for good Biblical reasons. But their targets are often limited to high profile issues or personalities, while they leave other problems untouched (especially if it involves their circle of friends). And for all their hatred of sin, they struggle to offer a positive alternative of building up the people of God.

Zeal for the Lord is a good thing, but it must be balanced with a spirit of fairness and compassion, knowing that there is more to serving God than just attacking sin.

– David King