

# When Good Men Turn Wicked

By Al Felder

*“<sup>24</sup>But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and commiteth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. <sup>26</sup>When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die.” (Ezekiel 18:24, 26)*

No matter how many times we read passages in the Bible that speak of people becoming unfaithful to God, the tragic reality never really sinks in until we see it happen to someone close to us. That person may be a parent, sibling, close relative, or just a dear brother or sister in Christ. The closeness of the relationship that we may have with the person only adds to the pain we feel when someone turns from God. Just as the prophets of old wept and lamented over the unfaithfulness of Israel, we too feel the pain and anguish that comes with such experiences. The sad reality of life is that good men can turn wicked. Any man or woman who at one time was a great example of faithfulness for others can lose his or her way and become an example of what we shouldn't be. As we examine this topic, however, I believe that there are some warning signs that can be found in the lives of the men and women we read about in the Bible. For just a little while, we would like to consider one such individual and look at some signs in his life.

*“<sup>1</sup>And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramothgilead: <sup>2</sup>And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehosaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber; <sup>3</sup>Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door and flee, and tarry not. <sup>4</sup>So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramothgilead. <sup>5</sup>And when he came, behold, the captains of the host were sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain. <sup>6</sup>And he arose, and went into the house; and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel. <sup>7</sup>And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel.” (2 Kings 9:1-7)*

Many of you may recall the story of Jehu. At the very least, I know that the names of Ahab and Jezebel are familiar to many. Ahab, of course, was a wicked king who ruled over Israel and Jezebel was his wife. There are many events that happened during the reign of Ahab, but one is central to the story of Jehu.

Ahab desired the vineyard of Naboth. There was a problem, however, because Naboth was not willing to sell. Ahab went home to his castle, threw himself on his bed, and pouted. Jezebel determined that she would secure the vineyard for her husband and developed a plan to have Naboth killed. Once Naboth was dead, Jezebel told Ahab to go and claim his vineyard.

This, along with many of their other deeds, caused God to pronounce judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel. By the time of our text, Ahab is dead, but his wife Jezebel is still alive and their son Joram is ruler of Israel. The time had finally come for judgment to be pronounced upon the house of Ahab, and Jehu was the man whom God had selected to carry out this judgment.

After he was anointed king and given his mission, Jehu quickly set out to accomplish the task that God had given him. He rode with great haste toward Jezreel where Joram was resting in his palace after being wounded while fighting with the Syrians. The watchman on the tower saw a company approaching and he informed the king. Joram, thinking that it may be news of the battle, sent a horseman to meet the approaching company.

The horseman asked Jehu if all was well and Jehu responded by saying, "What difference is it to you? Come with me." After that, the horseman joined him. Joram sends another horseman, and he too begins to follow Jehu. By this time, the watchman recognized Jehu and told Joram who it was approaching.

Joram sets out to meet Jehu and he takes his nephew Ahaziah, who was the ruler of Judah. When the two companies met each other, they were in the very vineyard that Ahab had taken from Naboth. Joram asks Jehu if all is well and Jehu responds by saying, "Can anything be well as long as your mother Jezebel lives with all of her wickedness?" Upon hearing these words, Joram turned to flee and cried out to his nephew to do the same. Jehu drew his bow and struck Joram in the heart with an arrow and he died. Jehu ordered his body to be thrown in the same field in which Naboth's was thrown.

Ahaziah attempted to flee, but Jehu pursued after him. He was eventually caught and killed. The king of Judah, who was the son of Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, was carried back to Jerusalem and buried there.

Jehu rode into the city of Jezreel. As he approached the palace Jezebel began to mock him from a window. Jehu called out to those in the palace and said, "Who is on my side?" Three eunuchs looked out to him and said, "We are." Jehu told them to throw Jezebel out the window and they did. The wicked queen fell to her death, and was eaten by wild dogs just as God had said.

Jehu also slew all the sons of Ahab. He sent letters to the rulers of the city in which they dwelled, and informed them to cut off their heads or be prepared to fight against him. The rulers were afraid of Jehu so they executed all of Ahab's sons and sent the heads to Jehu. Every member of the house of Ahab was killed as well as those who were loyal to Ahab.

Finally, Jehu rounded up all of the worshipers of Baal. Once he had them all together he killed them all. He destroyed the temple of Baal along with all of the images. By the time he was finished, he had completely destroyed Baal worship in Israel.

Jehu had great zeal in fulfilling the commands of the Lord. *“And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.”* (2 Kings 10:30) As a reward for his faithfulness God allowed four generations of Jehu’s descendants to rule over Israel. In fact, his line was the last to rule before the Assyrians came and took Israel into captivity.

Everything looked good at this time. Jehu was a man who had great zeal for the Lord, and he had led the charge against great wickedness. Then we read the next verse. *“But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.”* (2 Kings 10:31) Although Jehu rid Israel of Baal worship, he engaged in other forms of idolatry. A man who at one time showed so much promise became wicked and led Israel into further sin.

What a tragedy! It is certainly disappointing to learn about Jehu’s unfaithfulness to God and although we read it again and again, the story never seems to prepare us emotionally for the loss of men or women who were once faithful. If we look closely, however, I do believe that we can find some warning signs in the life of Jehu. There are three things that we need to watch for lest we or someone we love end up like Jehu.

One of the first signs of Jehu’s future unfaithfulness to God was his boastfulness. Jehu met Jehonadab while he was carrying out the Lord’s will. *“And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.”* (2 Kings 10:16) Jehu was eager to have someone recognize his good deeds and praise him for it.

The man who parades his good deeds for others to see is lacking one of the most basic elements to remaining faithful, and that is humility. The Pharisees considered themselves to be very zealous for the law of God; but they sounded a trumpet before them when they gave their alms, and loved to pray standing at the corner of the streets where all could see. We become guilty of the same boastfulness today when we seek to make sure that others know the good that we have done.

Jesus spoke against this very thing during His earthly ministry. *“Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”* (Matthew 6:2) He made it clear that those who seek the praise of men receive their reward.

As people, we often desire the attention and appreciation of those around us. There are times that we desire for others to notice the hard work and dedication we have put into a task,

and that in and of itself is not wrong. When others notice our good and commend us for it that is fine. We cross the line when we begin to tell of our own deeds in order to make sure that others notice what we have done. Once we start down this path our motivation for doing good is no longer to please God, it is to please our own desire of receiving recognition. Eventually, this fatal flaw will lead us away from God as our desire to please men increases, and our desire to please God diminishes. These two desires are incompatible with one another and only one can remain.

A second sign of Jehu's future unfaithfulness to God was his deceit. *"And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much."* (2 Kings 10:18) In his efforts to rid the land of Baal worship, Jehu lied in order to get all of the Baal worshipers together. He assured them that he was their friend and that he too was a worshiper of Baal. He invited them to the temple to worship, and engaged in the actual practice of idolatry with them. Once the ceremony was completed, and he was sure that all of the Baal worshipers were present, Jehu had his men kill them all.

What a contrast in this instance between Jehu and Elijah. Elijah too had been given a task from God to confront the worshipers of Baal. There was no deceit or mischief in Elijah's actions. He offered a simple challenge upon Mount Carmel to prove Who IS the True and Living God, and he slew 400 prophets of Baal.

The Bible speaks very clearly on lying as well as other forms of sin. *"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds."* (Colossians 3:9) Upon obeying the gospel of Christ, we are made a new creature. All of the old sinful habits that we once had are to be cast aside and removed from our life.

There is never a time in living the Christian life that we can adopt the false morality of the world to do evil that good may come. Unfortunately, just as we see it in the life of Jehu, this character flaw can become a reality in our life and cause us to depart from the truth. Sometimes we as God's people can become guilty of trying to do the right thing the wrong way. Our ultimate goal may be good, but the tactics that we use to get there are dishonest and wicked in the sight of God.

The fact of the matter is that God has given us a pattern to follow. *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* (2 Timothy 3:16) The Church is not to do things the way that the world does them. As God's people we need to let our yeas be yeas and our nays be nays. There is never a good reason for deceit to be found in us. Nor should we seek to use any tactics that are sinful. We need to be transparent and seek to handle every situation according to God's word with a goal of bringing glory and honor to Him.

Finally, Jehu was quick to reform others, but he failed to reform himself. *"Howbeit, from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan."* (2 Kings 10:29)

Jehu may have rid Israel of Baal worship, but he did not seem to have a problem with worshipping the two golden calves made by Jeroboam who was the first king of Israel after the kingdoms divided.

A sad reality of Jehu's zeal for God is that it only burned bright when it served his purpose. Today, Christianity becomes nothing more than a religion of convenience when the only changes we are willing to make are the ones that suit us. *"<sup>23</sup>For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: <sup>24</sup>For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and forgetteth what manner of man he was."* (James 1:23, 24) The word of God provides us with an opportunity to truly reflect upon ourselves. It can point out our flaws as well as our virtues. As we live this life, we are to continually examine ourselves in order to see how we can more faithfully serve the Lord.

Also under this point, men like Jehu can easily tear down, but they are unable to build anything up. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1) Yes there are times that we must correct others, but there is never a time that we are not to consider ourselves. Jehu was set on tearing down wickedness, but he lost sight of himself and the need to build others up.

In closing, let us learn well the lessons of Jehu. Let us have a zeal for the Lord, but let that zeal have a right motive and work in ways that God will approve.