**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**2 KINGS-013. IMPURE ZEAL by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"18. And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much. 19. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal. 20. And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed it. 21. And Jehu sent through all Israel: and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not. And they came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was full from one end to another. 22. And he said unto him that was over the vestry, Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal. And he brought them forth vestments. 23. And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the Lord, but the worshippers of Baal only. 24. And when they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings, Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him. 25. And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal. 26. And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them. 27. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. 28. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel. 29. 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 Beth-el, and that were in Dan. 30. 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. 31. 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 10:18-31*

The details of this story of bloodshed need little elucidation. Jehu had driven furiously to some purpose. Secrecy and swiftness joined to unhesitating severity had crushed the dynasty of Ahab, which fell unlamented and unsupported, as if lightning-struck. The nobler elements had gathered to Jehu, as represented by the Rechabite, Jehonadab, evidently a Jehovah worshipper, and closely associated with the fierce soldier in this chapter. Jehu first secured his position, and then smote the Baal worship as heavily and conclusively as he had done the royal family. He struck once, and struck no more; for the single blow pulverised.

The audacious pretext of an intention to outdo the fallen dynasty in Baal worship must have sounded strange to those who knew how his massacre of Ahab's house had been represented by him as fulfilling Jehovah's purpose, but it was not too gross to be believed. So we can fancy the joyous revival of hope with which from every corner of the land the Baal priests, prophets, and worshippers, recovered from their fright, came flocking to the great temple in Samaria, till it was like a cup filled with wine from brim to brim. The worship cannot have numbered many adherents if one temple could hold the bulk of them. Probably it had never been more than a court fashion, and, now that Jezebel was dead, had lost ground. A token of royal favour was given to each of the crowd, in the gift of a vestment from the royal wardrobe. Then Jehu himself, accompanied by the ascetic Jehonadab, entered the court of the temple, a strangely assorted pair, and a couple of very distinguished converts. The Baal priests would thrill with gratified pride when these two came to worship. The usual precautions against the intrusion of non-worshippers were taken at Jehu's command, but with a sinister meaning, undreamed of by the eager searchers. That was a sifting for destruction, not for preservation. So they all passed into the inner court to offer sacrifice.

The story gives a double picture in verse 24. Within are the jubilant worshippers; without, the grim company of their executioners, waiting the signal to draw their swords and burst in on the unarmed mob. Jehu carried his deception so far that he himself offered the burnt offering, with Jehonadab standing by, and then withdrew, followed, no doubt, by grateful acclamations. A step or two brought him to the eighty men without. Two stern words, Go, smite them, are enough. They storm in, and the songs of the temple are turned to howlings in that day. The defenceless, surprised crowd, huddled together in the dimly lighted shrine, were massacred to a man. The innermost sanctuary was then wrecked, corpses and statues thrown pell-mell into the outer courts or beyond the precincts, fires lit to burn the abominations, and busy hands, always more ready for pillage and destruction than for good work, pulled down the temple, the ruins of which were turned to base uses. The writer, picturing the wild scene, sums up with a touch of exultation: Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel--where note the emphatic prominence of the three names of the king, the god, and the nation. That is the vindication of the terrible deed.

Now the main interest of this passage lies in its disclosure of the strangely mingled character of Jehu, and in the fact that his bloody severity was approved by God, and rewarded by the continuance of his dynasty for a longer time than any other on the throne of Israel.

Jehu was influenced by zeal for the Lord, however much smoke mingled with the flame. He acted under the conviction that he was God's instrument, and at each new deed of blood asserted his fulfilment of prophecy. His profession to Jehonadab (ver. 16) was not hypocrisy nor ostentation. The Rechabite sheikh was evidently a man of mark, and apparently one of the leaders of those who had not bowed the knee to Baal; and Jehu's disclosure of his animating motive was meant to secure the alliance of that party through one of its chiefs. No doubt many elements of selfishness and many stains mingled with Jehu's zeal. It was much on the same level as the fanaticism of the immediate successors of Mohammed; but, low as it was, look at its power. Jehu swept like a whirlwind, or like leaping fire among stubble, from Ramoth to Jezreel, from Jezreel to Samaria, and nothing stood before his fierce onset. Promptitude, decision, secrecy,--the qualities which carry enterprises to success--marked his character; partly, no doubt, from natural temperament, for God chooses right instruments, but from temperament heightened and invigorated by the conviction of being the instrument whom God had chosen. We may learn how even a very imperfect form of this conviction gives irresistible force to a man, annihilates fear, draws the teeth of danger, and gathers up all one's faculties to a point which can pierce any opposition. We may all recognise that God has sent us on His errands; and if we cherish that conviction, we shall put away from us slothfulness and fear, and out of weakness shall be made strong.

But Jehu sets forth the possible imperfections of zeal for the Lord. We may defer for a moment the consideration of the morality of his slaughter of the royal house and the Baal worshippers, and point to the taint of selfishness and to the leaven of deceit in his enthusiasm. We have not to analyse it. That is God's work. But clearly the object which he had in view was not merely fulfilment of prophecy, but securing the throne; and there was more passion, as well as selfish policy, in his massacres, than befitted a minister of the divine justice, who should let no anger disturb the solemnity of his terrible task. Such dangers ever attend the path of the great men who feel themselves to be sent by God. In our humbler lives they dog our steps, and religious fervour needs ever to keep careful watch on itself, lest it should degenerate unconsciously into self-will, and should allow the muddy stream of earth-born passion to darken its crystal waters.

Many a great name in the annals of the Church has fallen before that temptation. We all need to remember that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, and to take heed lest we should be guided by our own stormy impatience of contradiction, and by a determination to have our own way, while we think ourselves the humble instruments of a divine purpose. There was a Zelotes in the Apostolate; but the coarse, sanguinary zeal of his party must have needed much purifying before it learned what manner of spirit the zeal of a true disciple was of.

Another point of interest is the divine emphatic approval of Jehu's bloody acts (ver. 30). The massacre of the Baal worshippers is not included in the acts which God declares to have been according to all that was in Mine heart, and it may be argued that it was not part of Jehu's commission. Certainly the accompanying deceit was not right in God's eyes, but the slaughter in Baal's temple was the natural sequel of the civil revolution, and is most probably included in the deeds approved.

Perhaps Elisha brought Jehu the message in verse 30. If so, what a contrast between the two instruments of God's purposes! At all events, Jehovah's approval was distinctly given. What then? There need be no hesitation in recognising the progressive character of Scripture morality, as well as the growth of the revelation of the divine character, of which the morality of each epoch is the reflection. The full revelation of the God of love had to be preceded by the clear revelation of the God of righteousness; and whilst the Old Testament does make known the love of God in many a gracious act and word, it especially teaches His righteous condemnation of sin, without which His love were mere facile indulgence and impunity. The slaughter of that wicked house of Ahab and of the Baal priests was the act of divine justice, and the question is simply whether that justice was entitled to slay them. To that question believers in a divine providence can give but one answer. The destruction of Baal worship and the annihilation of its stronghold in Ahab's family were sufficient reasons, as even we can see, for such a deed. To bring in Jehu into the problem is unnecessary. He was the sword, but God's was the hand that struck. It is not for men to arraign the Lord of life and death for His methods and times of sending death to evil-doers. Granted that the long-suffering which is not willing that any should perish speaks more powerfully to our hearts than the justice which smites with death, the later and more blessed revelation is possible and precious only on the foundation of the former. Nor will a loose-braced generation like ours, which affects to be horrified at the thought of the wrath of God, and recoils from the contemplation of His judgments, ever reach the innermost secrets of the tenderness of His love.

From the merely human point of view, we may say that revolutions are not made with rose-water, and that, at all crises in a nation's history, when some ancient evil is to be thrown off, and some powerful system is to be crushed, there will be violence, at which easy-going people, who have never passed through like times, will hold up their hands in horror and with cheap censure. No doubt we have a higher law than Jehu knew, and Christ has put His own gentle commandment of love in the place of what was said to them of old time. But let us, while we obey it for ourselves, and abjure violence and blood, judge the men of old according to that which they had, and not according to that which they had not. Jehu's bloody deeds are not held up for admiration. His obedience is what is praised and rewarded. Well for us if we obey our better law as faithfully!

The last point in the story is the imperfection of the obedience of Jehu. He contented himself with rooting out Baal, but left the calves. That shows the impurity of his zeal, which flamed only against what it was for his advantage to destroy, and left the more popular and older idolatry undisturbed. Obedience has to be all in all, or not at all. We may not compound for sins we are inclined to, by zeal against those we have no mind to. Our consciences are apt to have insensitive spots in them, like witch-marks. We often think it enough to remove the grosser evils, and leave the less, but white ants will eat up a carcass faster than a lion. Putting away Baal is of little use if we keep the calves at Dan and Beth-el. Nothing but walking in the law of the Lord with all the heart will secure our walking safely. Unite my heart to fear Thy name needs to be our daily prayer. One foot on sea and one on shore is not the attitude in which steadfastness or progress is possible.