

JEHU

His Leadership and Legacy

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (9/27/6)

BY CLAUDE F. MARIOTTINI

JEHU, THE SON OF NIMSHI, was the 10th king of Israel.¹ He reigned 28 years (843-815 B.C.).² He came to the throne of the Northern Kingdom with prophetic approval in order to overthrow the dynasty of Omri. Jehu appears as the son of Nimshi in 1 Kings 19:16 and 2 Kings 9:20 and as the son of Jehoshaphat in 2 Kings 9:2,14. Historians have suggested that Nimshi was Jehu's grandfather. In his youth Jehu was a chariot officer in Ahab's army. He was one of the two witnesses who heard the prophetic sentence against Ahab and his house (2 Kings 9:25-26; see 1 Kings 21:17-19,28-29).

God selected Jehu to be Israel's king. Although God revealed His will to Elijah, Elisha was the one to fulfill it. Jehu became king at a crucial time in Israel's history. The events

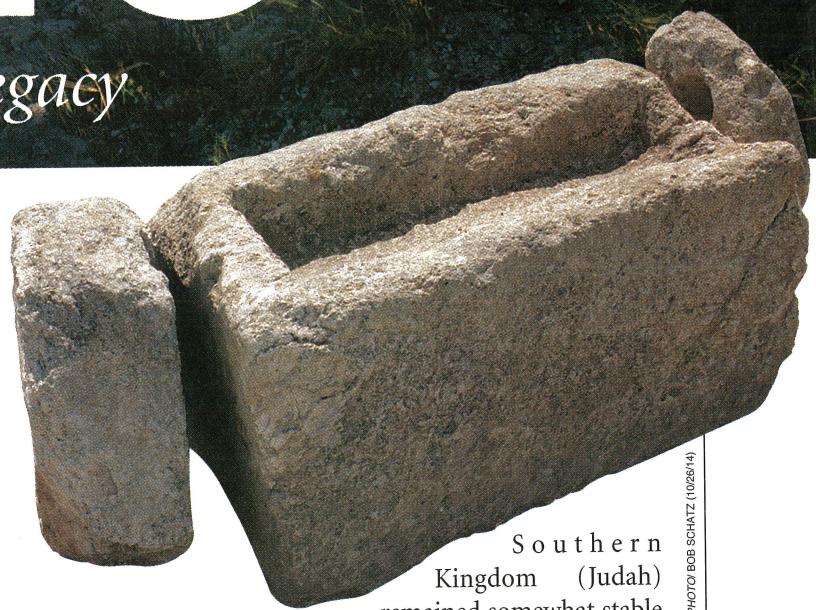
Above: City wall and citadel of Ahab around his palace at Samaria. Jehu ordered the deaths of Ahab's sons.

Right: Ahab's stables at Megiddo, from the 9th century B.C. Jehu was a chariot officer in Ahab's army.

preceding his accession to the throne provide the proper background for understanding his anointing and the bloodshed that followed his coronation.

Political Confusion in Israel

When the United Kingdom divided after Solomon's death, Judah and Israel went their different ways. Internal instability plagued the Northern Kingdom (Israel). The



Southern Kingdom (Judah) remained somewhat stable because the Davidic dynasty survived throughout its history. However, Israel's throne changed occupants many times, often by violence, in its first 50 years. Omri's ascending Israel's throne brought national stability and prosperity.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (10/26/14)

LESSON REFERENCE

ETBS: 2 Kings 8-10

Prior to Omri's rise to power, though, Israel experienced much political unrest (see 16:8-22). Elah, the son of Baasha, reigned two years in Israel (877-876 B.C.). Elah was an incompetent king who did not have the support of his people. While Israel's army was fighting the Philistines (v. 16), Elah was in one of his officer's house and was "drinking himself drunk" (v. 9, NASB). Zimri, one of Elah's chariot captains, came in and killed him.

Zimri became Israel's next king (876 B.C.) and reigned for only seven days. Zimri killed the royal family and assumed Israel's throne (vv. 11-12). When news of the royal family's death reached Israel's army, the troops proclaimed their commander, Omri, as king of Israel. Facing political revolt, Zimri took his own life by burning down the palace while he remained inside. After Zimri's death, Israel was divided between two pretenders to the throne, Tibni, the son of Ginath, and Omri (vv. 21-22). History says nothing about Omri's family, which may indicate he probably was a non-Israelite who served the king as an army commander.

The Reign of Omri

Omri's first priority as king was to consolidate his kingdom. One of Omri's major political decisions was to establish an alliance with Ithobaal, king of Tyre. The marriage of Ahab, Omri's son, to Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre sealed this alliance (v. 31). The treaty brought considerable trade with Tyre and economic prosperity to Israel. Many people in Israel benefitted from the active commerce between Israel and Phoenicia. Omri also made an alliance with Judah. The

The valley of Jezreel, which separated Galilee from Samaria in the Old Testament era. In Jezreel, Jehu killed King Joram plus his household and friends before setting out for Samaria.

marriage of Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat sealed this alliance (2 Kings 8:18).

Internally, Omri established a new capital for Israel (1 Kings 16:24). Omri bought a site from Shemer for two talents of silver and named it Samaria (v. 24). Thus Samaria became royal property, and Omri had total control over the new capital city.

Omri introduced a taxation system to fund royal projects in Samaria and throughout Israel and to maintain the government and its large military complex. Israel's economic condition created a class of rich people who controlled the means of production and the nation's wealth. The situation for the poor became worse. In Elisha's day, many poor people mortgaged their land and sold their children and themselves to pay their debts and taxes (see 2 Kings 4:1). The oppressive economic policies of the Omrides brought much dissatisfaction with the policies of Omri and Ahab and created a desire for change.

The Religious Crisis in Israel

The issue that forced the community to conspire against the house of Omri and Ahab was the religious crisis in Israel brought about by Jezebel's missionary program. Jezebel worshiped Baal Melqart and Asherah, the god and goddess of fertility. When Jezebel came to live in Samaria, she brought her religious beliefs with her. Working as husband and wife, Ahab and Jezebel built a temple for Baal in Samaria (1 Kings 16:32). They also built an asherah (v. 33), which was a wooden pole that symbolized the fertility goddess Asherah, Baal's consort. In addition, Jezebel brought in 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, all paid by the court (18:19). As part of her effort to establish Baal as Israel's official religion, Jezebel persecuted

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID ROGERS/OUTREPAIRS (27719)

and killed many prophets and followers of Yahweh (v. 4).

God commissioned Elijah to oppose Jezebel's religious aspirations. Elijah began his ministry proclaiming a drought (17:1). Baal worshipers held that their god controlled the rain. The announcement of the drought intended to show that Yahweh was the true God and the One who controlled the rain.

To promote the religion of Israel, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest on Mount Carmel (chap. 18). The purpose of this contest was twofold. First, Elijah wanted to demonstrate who the true God was.

Left: This Phoenician Cuneiform tablet describes the mythology of the Baal cycle.

Below: Arrowheads from Iron Age III. Using a bow and arrow, Jehu shot King Joram in the Jezreel Valley.

his successor. Elijah returned to Israel to carry out God's wishes, but he was able to carry out only the third of God's commands. Elisha was left to carry out the other two.³

Jehu's Anointing

Jehu's anointing took place while he was with the army at Ramoth Gilead and was preparing for war with Hazael, king of Syria (2 Kings 9:1-13).

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BOB SCHATZ/ MUSEUM AT APHRODITE TEMPLE (27/14/16)

Second, he wanted the people to choose to follow either Yahweh or Baal. When Yahweh powerfully demonstrated that He was able to answer His prophet's prayer, the people recognized Yahweh as the true God (v. 39). Elijah then killed the prophets of Baal (v. 40).

When Jezebel heard what Elijah had done to the prophets of Baal, she threatened to kill Elijah. The prophet hid himself on Mount Horeb (or Sinai). On Horeb, God revealed Himself to Elijah and gave him a plan to overthrow Omri's dynasty (19:15-18): Elijah was to anoint Hazael as Syria's king and Jehu as Israel's king. Further, he was to appoint Elisha as

At that time, Elisha gave orders to one of his servants to anoint Jehu as king. Elisha's messenger came to Jehu, took him aside, poured oil on his head, and anointed him king of Israel (v. 6). This action further identified Israel as God's people, in contradistinction to those who worshiped Baal.

Then in the name of Elisha, the messenger gave Jehu the order to utterly destroy the house of Ahab, thus to avenge the innocent blood shed by Ahab and Jezebel. After the prophet left, Jehu told his fellow officers what had just happened. The officers hastily spread their garments for Jehu to stand on, blew the trumpets, and proclaimed: "Jehu is king!" (v. 13).

Jehu began to carry out his mission immediately. He set off, together with a group of his horsemen, to Jezreel, where Joram (also known as Jehoram), a grandson of Ahab, king of Israel, was recovering from a battle wound (vv. 17-24). When Joram's watchman reported that Jehu was driving his chariot "furiously," Joram sent messengers to Jehu, asking, "Do you come in peace?" (v. 17, NIV). When the messengers did not return, Joram, together with his cousin Ahaziah, king of Judah, went to meet Jehu. When Joram asked, "Have you come in peace, Jehu?" (v. 22, NIV) Jehu responded by denouncing the sins of Jezebel. Joram responded: "Treachery, Ahaziah!" (v. 23, NIV). When Joram turned to escape, Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram in the back. Joram died in his own chariot. Jehu commanded his aide to take Joram's body and throw it in Naboth's field. This action fulfilled Elijah's oracle concerning the death of Ahab's house.

Jehu then proceeded to kill Judah's King Ahaziah (vv. 27-29). When Ahaziah saw that Jehu had killed Joram, Ahaziah fled, but Jehu's men caught up with him and wounded him (v. 27). Ahaziah again escaped, but he died in Megiddo of his wounds. Aides took Ahaziah's body to Jerusalem and buried him in the tomb of the kings.

The Death of Ahab's Family

After killing Joram and Ahaziah, Jehu went to Jezreel to deal with Jezebel, the queen-mother. Jezebel, when told what had happened, prepared to meet her death with dignity: she painted her eyes, arranged her hair, and put on her royal garments. She exhibited her defiance in the face of death with her insulting words to Jehu: "Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?" (v. 31, NIV). Jezebel's words refer to the murderous actions of Zimri who usurped the



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (26/34A/8)

throne by killing the family of Baasha. Without answering, Jehu asked palace officials to throw Jezebel down from the window. Jezebel was dead. Later, when his men went to bury Jezebel, they only found her skull, her feet, and her hands—dogs had eaten the rest. Upon hearing what happened, Jehu recalled the Lord's words to Elijah that dogs would eat Jezebel's

body in Jezreel (vv. 36-37; see 1 Kings 21:23).

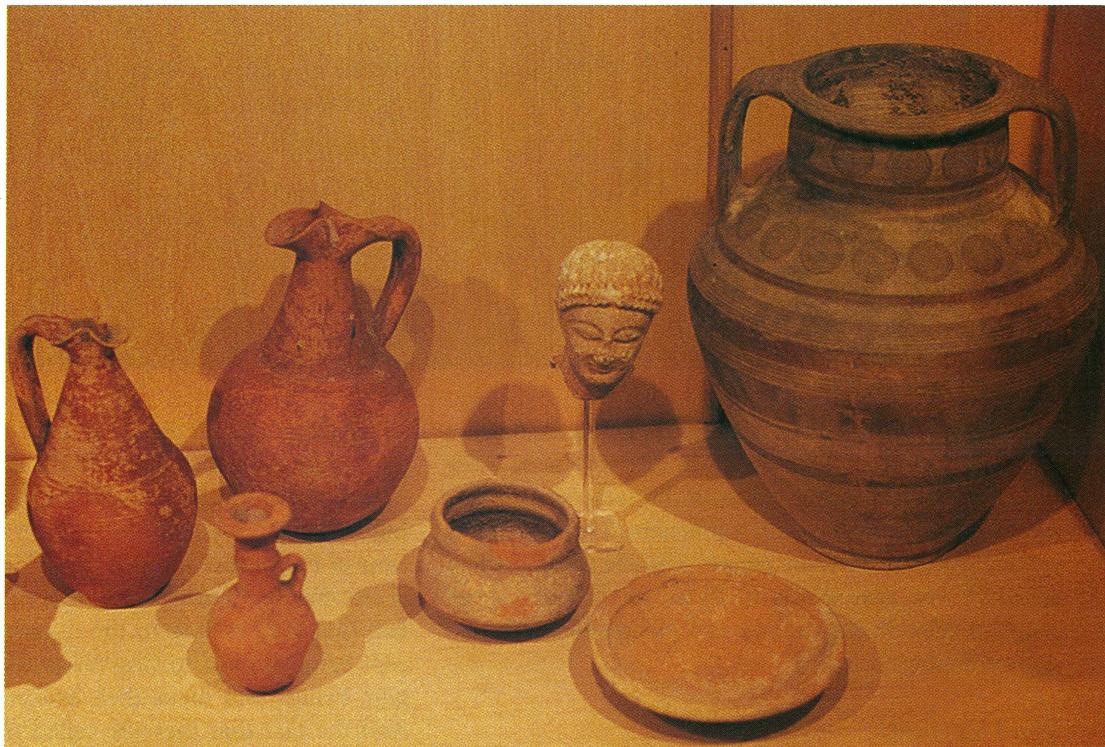
Jehu continued the purge of Ahab's family by sending letters to guardians of Ahab's 70 sons and grandsons who lived in Samaria. He asked them to select one of Ahab's descendants, make him king and be prepared to fight and defend the kingdom. Terrified of the possible

outcome of a resistance, the rulers of the cities and the guardians of the royal heirs submitted themselves to Jehu. Jehu then sent a second letter asking for the heads of Ahab's descendants. The city officials decapitated the descendants, put their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jehu at Jezreel. The next day Jehu began to kill those associated with Ahab.

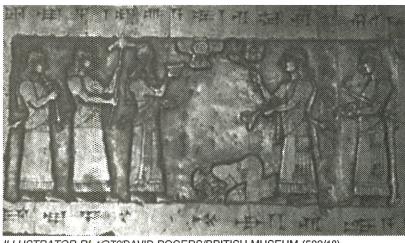
Left: Block showing inscription that mentions "Tyrdos." The old harbor is in background. Jezebel, the daughter of the King of Tyre, was slain by Jehu.

Right: These Phoenician jugs were found at Tyre, hometown of Jezebel.

Below: A scene on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. Feeling threatened by Assyria at the beginning of his reign, King Jehu pursued a policy of appeasement and became subservient to Assyria's King, Shalmaneser III.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BOB SCHATZ/ISTANBUL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (12/26/11)



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/DAVID ROGERS/BRITISH MUSEUM (5/02/18)

After eliminating the family of Ahab, Jehu left for Samaria. On his way he met 42 relatives of Ahaziah (all members of Judah's royal house) who were going to Jezreel to visit Jezebel and her family members. Under the king's orders, Jehu's men killed all 42 men at the well (or cistern) near Beth Eked (2 Kings 10:12-14).

Before Jehu reached Samaria, he met Jehonadab, the son of Rechab. Jehonadab was the leader of the Rechabites, a group of people who remained faithful to the old traditions of the religion of Yahweh. Because of the Rechabites' commitment of loyalty to Yahweh, Jehu invited Jehonadab to join him in his quest to purify the religion of Yahweh. Jehonadab accepted the invitation and together they went to Samaria to confront the worshipers of Baal. When Jehu arrived in Samaria, he killed all of Ahab's relatives who were living in Samaria.

Once in Samaria, Jehu proceeded to eliminate the Baal worshipers. Pretending to be a Baal follower, Jehu organized a celebration for Baal. Jehu invited the priests, prophets, and worshipers of Baal from throughout Israel. When all the worshipers were inside the temple of Baal, Jehu ordered his soldiers to kill all those related to the worship of Baal. The soldiers slaughtered the Baal worshipers, tore down the temple of Baal, and destroyed the sacred objects. Jehu further desecrated the holy place by making the temple a latrine for common use.

God's Judgment on Jehu

God honored Jehu's work by promising him that his dynasty would last four generations (see v. 30). Yet because of Jehu's excessive bloodshed and violence in accomplishing his mission, Yahweh began to bring His judgment on the house of Jehu and on Israel (v. 32).⁴ Wars against Syria occupied the rest of Jehu's reign. He also had to deal with the loss of territory east of the Jordan. In addition, Jehu became a vassal of Assyria and had to present himself with his tribute before Assyria's King Shalmaneser III. The indignity of this submission

was obvious when Shalmaneser called Jehu "the son of Omri."⁵ However, the most profound word of judgment on Jehu's selfish ambition and violent nature comes from God Himself: "I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel" (Hos. 1:4, NIV). The indignity of Jehu paying a tribute to the king of Assyria to secure the throne God had given to him demonstrates that in doing the work of God, one is always responsible and accountable to Him for the work done. **B**

1. Not all agree that Jehu was Israel's 10th king. In listing Israel's kings, some sources list "Jeroboam I, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu..." which makes Jehu Israel's 11th king (for instance, Paul R. House, *1 and 2 Kings, New American Commentary*, [Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995]). Not all sources, though, list Tibni as a king (for instance, John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000]). Some have understood that Tibni was a coregent rather than an actual king (see 1 Kings 16:21-22).

2. All dates are taken from Bright, *A History of Israel*.

3. House, 286.

4. Billy K. Smith, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, vol. 13 in *Layman's Bible Book Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 16.

5. *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 191-92.

Claude F. Mariottini is professor of Old Testament, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Lombard, Illinois.