

Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

Contradictions in Scripture: The Bloodshed of Jezreel

So far in our study of contradictions, we have mostly focused on the New Testament books, and particularly the gospels, for it is easy to find many seeming discrepancies among these books since they record the same or similar events. As we have seen, these supposed contradictions are usually caused by assuming that two different but similar events are the same events, so that the records of these events ought to be the same. Yet when we realize that they are separate events, we see that they are not contradictions at all. Yet more puzzling are some of the contradictions in the Old Testament, when God seems to say something that contradicts what He does later. We have seen examples of this in our messages on “The Death of Josiah” and “The Prophecy of Jonah.” A similar example is found in the strange discrepancy regarding “The Bloodshed of Jezreel.”

In Hosea, a book written by a prophet whom the LORD had sent to the wayward northern kingdom of Israel, we read that God is planning vengeance upon the line of kings that ruled Israel at the time of Hosea. In Hosea 1:4, we read,

4. Then the LORD said to him: “Call his name Jezreel, For in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, And bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5. It shall come to pass in that day That I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

This seems plain enough. The LORD claims to be angry at the current royal family, the house of Jehu. He claims that He is going to get vengeance upon them for the bloodshed of Jezreel. From this, we would guess that the man Jehu, the first of this kingly line, had committed some great act of bloodshed at the city of Jezreel, and that the LORD was going to get vengeance for this. It does not take us long to find just such an event as this bloodshed recorded in the book of II Kings. There, in II Kings 10:1-11, we read,

*1. Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote and sent letters to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to those who reared Ahab’s sons, saying:
2. Now as soon as this letter comes to you, since your master’s sons are with you, and you have chariots and horses, a fortified city also, and weapons,
3. choose the best qualified of your master’s sons, set him on his father’s throne, and fight for your master’s house.
4. But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, “Look, two kings could not stand up to him; how then can we stand?”*

Jehu has recently killed King Joram, the last king of the previous dynasty of kings known best for the wicked king Ahab. Now, he challenges the rulers of Jezreel, the home city of Ahab’s line of kings, to choose one of Ahab’s sons, set him on the throne, and challenge Jehu to battle. Yet we see that the rulers are afraid of Jehu, for he is strong, and the commander of Israel’s army. Thus, none of them are willing to fight against Jehu. It is clear to them, now, that they will not be able to stop him.

5. And he who was in charge of the house, and he who was in charge of the city, the elders also, and those who reared the sons, sent to Jehu, saying, “We are your servants, we will do all you tell us; but

we will not make anyone king. Do what is good in your sight.” 6. Then he wrote a second letter to them, saying:

If you are for me and will obey my voice, take the heads of the men, your master’s sons, and come to me at Jezreel by this time tomorrow.

Now the king’s sons, seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, who were rearing them. 7. So it was, when the letter came to them, that they took the king’s sons and slaughtered seventy persons, put their heads in baskets and sent them to him at Jezreel.

The rulers execute the king’s sons at Jehu’s command. Could this be the slaughter that Hosea was referring to? If it is, we clearly have a problem. For if we look back at the previous chapter, we see that God Himself had commanded this bloodshed! Consider II Kings 9:6-10, where the LORD gives His command to Jehu.

6 Then he arose and went into the house. And he poured the oil on his head, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I have anointed you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. 7. You shall strike down the house of Ahab your 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. 8. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel, both bond and free. 9. So I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. 10. The dogs shall eat Jezebel on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her.’”

So the slaughter that we read of in II Kings 10:1-7 was actually an act of obedience to God’s command! The LORD God had commanded Jehu to “strike down the house of Ahab your master.” He had made plain that “the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel.” So clearly Jehu had been acting on the LORD’s command when he had the seventy sons of Ahab killed. How, then, could God have held this against him, and been planning vengeance upon him because of it? The LORD Himself had commanded him to do it! How could God punish someone for obeying His command? Is this, at last, a true contradiction in Scripture?

We can first in dealing with this seeming discrepancy take more careful note of the slaughter we have read about of the seventy sons of Ahab. Notice that this did not actually take place in Jezreel. This bloodshed occurred in Samaria, the capital city of Israel. The rulers of Jezreel were there, apparently, along with the king’s children. Thus, the rulers of Jezreel who were in Samaria killed these seventy princes, and sent their heads back to Jehu at Jezreel. This blood was not actually shed at Jezreel, though it was done by the rulers of Jezreel at Jehu’s command. So is this actually the bloodshed being referred to by Hosea? Let us continue reading to see if there is anything else that might more closely fit the description, “the bloodshed of Jezreel.”

8. Then a messenger came and told him, saying, “They have brought the heads of the king’s sons.” And he said, “Lay them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning.”

9. So it was, in the morning, that he went out and stood, and said to all the people, “You are righteous. Indeed I conspired against my master and killed him; but who killed all these? 10. Know now that nothing shall fall to the earth of the word of the LORD which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for the LORD has done what He spoke by His servant Elijah.”

Jehu, with the heads of the king’s sons as his backdrop, speaks to the people. He points out that, though he had killed his master, they had aided him by killing the king’s sons. Then, he expresses his faith to the people. Now, he knows that this is all according to the word of the LORD. All that has taken place has been part of His plan that He revealed through His servant Elijah. Jehu realizes that the LORD’s will is being carried out through all this. He claims, and rightfully so, that all he had done up to this time had been part of the LORD’s plan. And, of course, Jehu knew what these people did not, that he had actually been commanded to commit this bloodshed by the LORD God Himself. Yet this would not be entirely convincing to these people, for they had not seen or

heard this command...indeed, no one knew of it but Jehu and Elisha's servant who had given him the command. Thus, he just uses what he knows will be meaningful to them...the fact that they have helped him in carrying out this assassination. But, he claims, it all is in accord with the will of the LORD. And, of course, that is right. Jehu obeyed the LORD's command, and carried out the LORD's will. How could he be condemned for this?

Let us see if we can puzzle this out by considering the next verse.

11. So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his close acquaintances and his priests, until he left him none remaining.

Now here we see another instance of bloodshed by Jehu. This time, the slaughter actually takes place in the city of Jezreel. It involves all who remained of the house of Ahab. This was in accord with the LORD God's commandment to Jehu in chapter 9. Jehu could not be condemned for this either. So, then, what does this do to eliminate our contradiction?

Yet notice what is said in the rest of the verse. Jehu did not just kill Ahab's family. He also killed "his close acquaintances and his priests, until he left him none remaining." This, the killing of Ahab's friends, his "great men," what we would call his close political friends who held positions under him, and "his priests," was not part of the LORD God's command to Jehu. The LORD had told him to wipe out the house of Ahab. He had said nothing about Ahab's friends and political allies.

Why would Jehu have wanted to carry the slaughter God commanded from Ahab's family to his political allies and friends? The answer is readily apparent. Most usurpers, when they are setting themselves up in a stolen throne, are very interested in getting rid of all who were supporters of the previous royal family. This would include all political allies and close friends. These would be the ones most likely to seek revenge sometime in the future for the destruction of the administration they had been privileged under. Thus, one taking the throne would usually want to kill all those who might be in such a position. This is what Jehu was doing here.

Yet notice that this method of taking the throne away from a predecessor is not at all God's way of doing it. In God's view, Jehu was not stealing a throne. Rather, the LORD was giving it to him. The throne of Israel belonged to the LORD, and He could give it to whomever He willed. He had now chosen to give it to Jehu, and thus it was his. No vengeful friend of the former royal line could change that. Thus, God had given Jehu no command regarding killing Ahab's family's friends and political allies. That had been done by Jehu's own, ungodly policy.

Contrast the way Jehu treated taking over Joram's throne with the way David treating taking over Saul's. David had no ambitious desire regarding this. He merely took the throne because the LORD told him He wanted him to. He carried no thought of slaughtering Saul's allies. He left them all alive, and even wept when Saul's former army captain Abner was murdered by his own army captain Joab in revenge for the death of Joab's brother. (II Kings 3:31-39.) And he even showed kindness to Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, and the one whom Saul's old friends might have looked to to put on the throne if they could have gotten David off of it! No, David had no bloody thoughts of removing all who might oppose him. His trust was totally in the LORD, and His ability to keep David on the throne if He so desired.

Yet Jehu had no such trust. He took the establishing of his throne into his own hands, and committed this bloodshed at Jezreel, a bloodshed that went beyond what the LORD commanded or desired. These men were killed merely to give Jehu a political advantage. They were not executed at the LORD's command. They were murdered for Jehu's convenience. Their deaths were not right, and it was these deaths that the LORD was going to punish Jehu's family for in Hosea 1.

Thus, we see once again that, when we examine things closely, there truly are no contradictions in Scripture. The "bloodshed of Jezreel" that the LORD was going to punish Jehu's house for was not

the bloodshed that the LORD had commanded him to commit, the wiping out of the house of Ahab. Rather, it was the not commanded and self-serving murders of the friends and allies of Ahab's house that the LORD blamed Jehu for. Thus, the LORD was not contradicting Himself when He brought vengeance upon the house of Jehu for this. Rather, He was avenging a sinful act of murder. This, truly, was the act that the LORD punished as the "Bloodshed of Jezreel."

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