

## May 20, 2025 - Session 3 **Both Sessions** Scripture/Questions



### Old Testament Jezebel

**Highlight Scriptures:** 1 Kings 16:29-34; 19:1-3, 2 Kings 9:30-37 – Please feel free to read these scriptures before our class. If you don't have a Bible, links to them can be found on the church website: [gulfcovechurch.com](http://gulfcovechurch.com).

*In order to give you the full picture of Jezebel's story, today I am using a summary of her life from an article by Athalya Brenner, which is from The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia for Jewish Women. As you read her story, note anything that stands out for you. What does this foreign woman's life in a time and place very different from our own have to say to you, a person of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Where is God in this passage?*

Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Phoenician city-state of Tyre, and wife of Ahab, king of Israel (1 Kgs 16:31), in the mid-ninth century BCE. She was undoubtedly the chief wife of Ahab and co-ruler with him. It is implied that she was the mother of Ahab's son and successor Ahaziah (1 Kgs 22:53) and alternately implied and stated that she was mother of the next king, Jehoram (2 Kgs 3:2, 13; 9:22). Ahab had other unnamed wives as well and many unnamed sons (1 Kgs 20:3, 5, 7; 2 Kings 10). Hence, whether Jezebel had other children or, specifically, was Athaliah's mother is unclear.

The extent of Jezebel's power is evidenced by the necessity for Jehu, the founder of the next royal dynasty in Israel, to murder her before his rule can be established (2 Kgs 9:30–37)—even though her royal husband and sons are by now dead. The biblical text insists that she is evil through and through.

Jezebel is the enemy of YHWH's [God's] prophets: she "killed the prophets of the Lord" (1 Kgs 18:13). On the other hand, there are "the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table" (v. 19). Elijah kills Jezebel's prophets on Mount Carmel (chap. 18). As a result, she swears that she will kill him (19:3). He takes her threat seriously and flees to the south, beyond the Israelite territory. His fleeing indicates Jezebel's power in the realm.

Another indication of her power is the story of Naboth (1 Kings 21). Ahab wishes to buy Naboth's vineyard, which is adjacent to the royal complex in Jezreel. Naboth refuses to give or sell it, claiming its status as nontransferable ancestral land. Ahab is depressed by this but cannot do anything. Jezebel, who sees the

matter as a test case of monarchic power (v. 7), finds a way: she writes to the elders and dignitaries of Jezreel, asking them to bring two false witnesses to claim that Naboth has cursed the king and God. Such behavior signifies treason; Naboth is stoned to death, and his property reverts to the king.

Although the letter is ostensibly signed with the king's seal (v. 8), the report comes back to Jezebel (v. 14). She tells Ahab that he can inherit Naboth's land, and he does so. Elijah protests to Ahab, "Thus says the Lord: Have you killed, and also taken possession?" (v. 19); he prophesies that Ahab's male descendants will die prematurely, his dynasty will perish, and that the "dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel" (v. 23). Ahab dies a brave soldier's death in Samaria (1 Kings 22); his son and Jezebel's, Ahaziah, succeeds to the throne for two years and then dies. His brother Jehoram succeeds him and is killed by Jehu, the new contender for the throne (2 Kings 9). Jezebel is killed by Jehu as well (2 Kgs 9:31–37): as she regally awaits Jehu and her doom in the Jezreel palace, some palace officials drop her through the lattice window. By the time Jehu has finished eating and orders that she be buried "for she is a king's daughter" (2 Kgs 9:34), the dogs have already eaten most of her carcass—in keeping with Elijah's prophecy.

### **Jezebel - Questions for Discussion**

1. We cannot condone the actions of Jezebel when she in essence comes up with a plan to deprive an innocent man, Naboth, of his property. But can we have some compassion for her as a foreign-born woman who wanted to be true to her religion, her god (and goddess) while living among people who worshipped a different God? Afterall, she did not have any say in who she married. Her parents married her to King Ahab to open trading routes between the two peoples.
2. The editors of this biblical passage wanted to show the dangers of intermarriage at a time when they were concerned about the influence the religion of the Canaanites was having on the Israelites who lived among them. They wanted the Israelites to worship Yahweh (God) alone. The conflict between the Prophet Elijah and Jezebel, the foreign queen reflects this concern. In our own recent past, there was a time when intermarriage (as one example, marriages between Jews and Catholics, or Protestants and Catholics) was

frowned upon. What are the drawbacks of this type of marriage? What are the benefits?

3. Does Jezebel fully deserve her reputation as a harlot? Why or why not?