

READING

1 Kings 21:1-16

SERMON

Jezebel

Jezebel, a song which some of you might now be singing in your mind, or if you weren't, you are now! If you are not singing it, because you have not got a clue what I am talking about, then you are too young to have known the song.

Jezebel is the next woman that we are looking at in our series of looking at women in the Bible. The great thing about the word of God is that it tells us about the bad bits as well as the good bits and Jezebel is certainly bad news. Her name appears in both the Old and New Testament. In the New Testament we read the name in Revelation 2, beginning at verse 18, page 1235. This comes in the section of Revelation which is seven letters written to seven churches and we read the letter sent to the church at Thyatira

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come.

To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— ‘He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’— just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 2:18-29 NIV)

Whether this lady in the church of God at Thyatira was named Jezebel we do not know. In this country there are certain first names which are not used. Names like Attila, or Adolf or Moriarty. Interestingly Adolf is not even recognised as a correct spelling by Microsoft! Jezebel it seems is also not a popular name now or in Biblical times so maybe the lady mentioned in Revelation is only a type, not a name. Therefore to understand fully what the letter is talking about we need to look at the Old Testament lady.

We first meet Jezebel in 1 Kings 16:29, page 358

“In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel for twenty-two years. Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.”
(1 Kings 16:29-33 NIV)

So we have **Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians**. So what does that tells us?

Jezebel means in Hebrew *Baal exalts* or *Baal is husband to* or *unchaste* but in Greek it means *chaste* or *free from carnal connection*. If you were not confused before, then this can be confusing. Her father and she were worshippers of Baal, you can see it in his name which means *man of Baal* and that she brought Baal worship into Israel, along with his female consort, Asherah, the goddess of fertility. She even fed the prophets of Asherah, a mere four hundred of them!

So let us look further at Jezebel and we can say various things about her which are typified in the passage we read earlier from 1 Kings 21, page 264, concerning Jezebel, her husband Ahab and Naboth, who knew his rights concerning land and that the land allotted to him, no-one could take away. As he says in 1 Kings 21:3 after being asked by Naboth if he could buy or swap the vineyard Naboth owned because he wanted really fresh vegetables, rather than ones from up the road. Verse 3, chapter 21

“But Naboth replied, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.”” (1 Kings 21:3 NIV)

That was his right, but then Jezebel comes in after seeing her husband having a sulk, verse 7

“Jezebel his wife said, “Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I’ll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”” (1 Kings 21:7 NIV)

Jezebel was working though to another rule which were around in the time of Ahab and at one time were prevalent in this country and all over Northern Europe. This was the rule which was called the *divine right of kings*. This was a question of authority. The concept was that monarchs are divinely chosen i.e. chosen by a local god, as in the mind of Jezebel, or by God himself, as often was thought in some of the kings of England. This assertion then at times went further, as with some of the Caesars in Rome that the monarch is divine which leaves very little room for any argument about decisions they make!

So we have this incident with Naboth who will not give up his vineyard. Remember that between chapters 16, where we first met Jezebel and chapter 21 we have chapter 18 where four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah are defeated in a contest by one prophet of the true God and the prophets of Baal and Asherah were subsequently killed. But Jezebel and Ahab did not seem to learn from this lesson.

Loves idols and not God

So we have a woman who loves idols and not God. It is often easier to follow other things and not God because they do not make the demands on people that God does. A follower of an idol can make it up as they go along. Today there are many who call themselves Christian but who only want to pick and mix from that faith – they do not want to go totally along with it because they do not like or want to live the lifestyle. So one could say that Jezebel always put herself first.

Domineering

I am not sure if Jezebel was a domineering wife or just that Ahab was a wimp. What does Ahab do when Naboth says “No”? Verse 4

“So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, ‘I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.’ He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.”

“His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, ‘Why are you so sullen? Why won’t you eat?’”

He answered her, ‘Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, ‘Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.’ But he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’”’ (1 Kings 21:4-6 NIV)

You want to say to Ahab, “Get a life. Get over it. Walk a bit further for your veggies!” But Jezebel swings into action – she will sort things out where Ahab cannot. She has already imposed her religion on Ahab and the country – she did try to exterminate Judaism by having all the priests killed, but some went into hiding, so she could not, but she says to her husband

“Jezebel his wife said, ‘Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I’ll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.’” (1 Kings 21:7 NIV)

And she begins to put her plan into action by writing a letter in Ahab’s name, verse 8

“So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth’s city with him.” (1 Kings 21:8 NIV)

We are told as followers of God, not to be domineering, or dominant, but to be meek. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5 NIV)

Or as Paul wrote to the church of God at Galatia

“..the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV)

Some even think that God got Paul to write those words because he could be domineering and ride roughshod over people in his zeal and enthusiasm!

We are called to be meek, to be firm, but not to be domineering; to build each other up, not put others down; to develop people’s potential, not keep them as immature people who need others to make their decisions.

Corrupt

So Jezebel is determined to get Naboth’s vineyard. No-one is going to say “No” to her husband. They have their position to think about. So the plan is put in place and even though Naboth was well within his rights, she set her plan into action, verse 9

“In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."” (1 Kings 21:9-10 NIV)

She involved others who were obviously either very afraid of her or in her pay, or have a good position due to her. Whatever, it reeks of corruption.

We are called upon to be trustworthy and pure in our dealing with others. Jesus said

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16 NIV)

We have to be like Daniel about who we read

“It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.” (Daniel 6:1-4 NIV)

Oh, that we could be like Daniel. **They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent** (Daniel 6:1-4 NIV). We should be like that and we have something better than Daniel to enable us to do that. We have the Holy Spirit with us – but we must allow him to work within us, changing us, moulding us as to how he wants us to be and being above corruption.

Treacherous

For Jezebel, along with her love of idols, her dominance, her corruption, there is also her treacherousness. She engineered the death of Naboth – it was murder by any other name. And then Ahab took over the vineyard belonging to Naboth. Sadly, in this world, in our culture, there seems to be so much treachery. No-one trusts anyone anymore, and I must admit that I join this culture of suspicion. Without treachery, there is trust. With treachery, there is no trust.

I would have been worried that day if I had been the elders and nobles of the Naboth’s city, because what Jezebel had done to Naboth she could so easily have done to them. I always worry when someone begins to run down another person to me, because I fear that when they are with the other person, that I am being run down.

Beware of Jezebels. But they are not in church!

“Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.” (Revelation 2:20-21 NIV)

It can happen in church – the thing is to make sure it is not the person sitting on your chair.

But to finish off the story of Jezebel. We read in 1 Kings 21:23 this prophecy made by Elijah about Jezebel

“And also concerning Jezebel the LORD says: ‘Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.’” (1 Kings 21:23 NIV)

And then we read in 2 Kings 9:30, page 379

“Then Jehu went to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard about it, she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, “Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?” He looked up at the window and called out, “Who is on my side? Who?” Two or three eunuchs looked down at him. “Throw her down!” Jehu said. So they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot. Jehu went in and ate and drank. “Take care of that cursed woman,” he said, “and bury her, for she was a king’s daughter.” But when they went out to bury her, they found nothing except her skull, her feet and her hands. They went back and told Jehu, who said, “This is the word of the LORD that he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel’s flesh. Jezebel’s body will be like refuse on the ground in the plot at Jezreel, so that no-one will be able to say, ‘This is Jezebel.’” (2 Kings 9:30-37 NIV)

What someone termed as one of the most gruesome deaths described in the Bible, but it does show that God is in control – he knew the effect of Jezebel was only going to be temporary and that he what was going to happen to her.

God is still in control now and know the end of all of us. So we should find security in that fact.