

WIVES OF THE BIBLE

A Cross-Section of Femininity

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

A WOMAN OF SUPREME WICKEDNESS JEZEBEL—AHAB'S WIFE

But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up (I Kings 21: 25).

IT was not our original purpose in announcing this series of sermons on Bible wives to present a cross-section of femininity, but as we proceed in our studies it is increasingly apparent that that end may be accomplished. We have thought already of the world's first great woman, Eve—Adam's wife; of the surpassingly beautiful woman, Sarah — Abraham's wife; and of the woman who failed her family—Lot's wife. In each of these we have discovered marked weaknesses:

- Eve fell before temptation and involved all her descendants in sin.
- Sarah developed a bitter jealousy and divided the house of which she was the feminine head;
- Lot's wife, in her love of Sodom associates and social pleasures, disobeyed the angel and brought destruction upon herself.

However, the word for each of them was "weakness."

"Wickedness" is a stronger term and involves not only sin but positive pleasure therein. That is why we apply it to Jezebel, the wife of Ahab the king. So suitable is this descriptive term when applied to her that men turn speech about, and if a woman becomes an embodiment of evil, they stigmatize her by saying, "She is another Jezebel."

I was interested to see what the word "Jezebel" means in our language and was a bit disappointed when I found it indicates only "*an unmarried woman.*" Whether she was not a wife, but Ahab's mistress, or was a maiden of advanced years when Ahab took her unto him as a wife, or whether her domination of the house was such that people considered her husband merely another of her servants (as is sometimes the case), we do not know; but the meaning of the word has been lost in the new significance her lifelong habits and behavior gave to it. It now means "a wicked female."

We are introduced to this woman in I Kings 16: 31, where we read:

And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him.

She was, then, a king's daughter and a Baal-worshiper to begin with, and as we trace her history we make the following discoveries: A Spiteful Spirit, An Inspirer of Wickedness, and An Infamous End.

A SPITEFUL SPIRIT

History recorded in I and II Kings discloses the following: She hated God's prophets. She sought to slay all opponents. She was at outs with God!

In I Kings 18: 19 we read of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the groves which eat at Jezebel's table. Certainly she was surrounded by prophets, but there was not among them a prophet of God. She was a worshiper of Baal, an opponent of God.

G. Campbell Morgan, in his volume, *The Crises of the Christ*, declares that when character is at variance with God, conduct is antagonistic to God.

Certainly Jezebel illustrated that statement. That is the explanation of Russian Communism. It is because the present Russian rulers—low-browed usurpers of power—are by character so remote from righteousness that they so intensely hate God, who is holy and true and good. It is because by nature they are haters that they anathematize the name of Him who is LOVE. Thus far in life I have never yet known a man or a woman to whom the name of God was such an offense as to fling him or her into a frenzy, if it were called in adoration, without finding in that man, in that woman, all vileness and all infamy.

It is doubtful if there is a man on earth to whom God's name is anathema, in whose company you could sleep with safety; and it is doubtful if there is a woman on earth who hates the God of Scripture to whom you could commit a helpless infant with any assurance that it would not be deserted or even slain. Anti-God is anti-ethics, anti-morals, anti-humanity. She hated the prophets of God.

It was Jezebel who cut off the prophets of the Lord (I Kings 18:4).

And it was Jezebel who sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, **So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them** (i.e., the slain of the false prophets) **by tomorrow about this time** (I Kings 19:2).

That was all natural enough. No one who hates God can love the prophets of God. That is why ministers in Russia have been so mercilessly treated by the communists; and that is the reason—and the only reason—why the heads of dear John and Betty Stam rolled from the block upon which the Communists of China had forced them.

They had done no evil; they had neither injured nor in any way offended their decapitators. It was said by those who witnessed the whole transaction that in manner and speech they were gentle and kind to their captors; but they were prophets of God and were hated on that ground, and that alone. That is the ground on which God's prophets are commonly hated.

Forty-five years ago Frank Pixley, writing in the *Argonaut*, remarked:

“As a rule we don't like preachers. A few of our early memory were respected, but they are all gone.”

A newspaper commented after this manner:

“We suspect that was in Frank's younger days when he was a better man than he is now. The change is in him.”

“Pixley, however, has plenty of company as there are a good many other people who do not like preachers—saloon men, gamblers, thieves, prostitutes, murderers—none of them like preachers. The Bohemians of society, the scalawags, the bilks and the frauds of every description do not like preachers.”

As a rule, preachers are clean in character, keen in intellect, possessed of a high sense of humor, and are therefore acceptable companions, sought out by great business men, philanthropists, statesmen, doctors, lawyers, judges; yes, even by emperors and kings; but the pleasure of that companionship is commonly a test of the character of the one who seeks it.

The Ahabs and the Jezebels of society hate the sight and name of the gospel minister.

I went to a ticket office window one day and presented my clergy certificate entitling me to a reduced rate on the railroad. The agent cursed under his breath while he made it out. I turned to a gentleman who stood near me and asked, “What is the matter with him?” He laughed and said, “Nothing except his hatred of ministers.”

But that was not his chief trouble; his chief trouble was the Jezebel-spirit; he hated God.

She sought to slay all opponents.

We have already seen how she slew God's prophets. But her venom against all opponents was equally great. When Naboth had declined to give up his vineyard at Ahab's proposal, because it had come to him as an inheritance from his fathers and could not be parted with without violating the law of the Lord, Jezebel immediately interposed; and when she had finished with this good man, his dead body lay outside of the city, and Ahab was on his way to take possession of the vineyard.

That is the way that Trotsky, Lenin and Stalin secured Russia. They killed its rightful rulers and enslaved its rightful owners.

There are two ways to kill a man, and Jezebel employed both. The first is to lie against him and destroy his reputation and there are always people ready to be false witnesses against a good man. We find the record in verse 10 of I Kings 21: **Thou didst blaspheme the king.**

We have a penitentiary and a gallows for murderers, but, unfortunately, the character-murderer (the meanest murderer of all) seldom gets a taste of either.

“The whisperer separateth chief friends”; the secret meeting leader damns you behind your back, but he himself escapes under the cover of the darkness that he used as a cloak for his convocation.

That is one method of murder, and Jezebel employed it. But she was not content to stop there. Truth has a habit of coming out. “Truth crushed to earth will rise again,” so she concluded that it was best to commit the second act and put the truth-speaker out of existence; so it is written: “. . . **Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died**” (I Kings 21:13).

I suppose Jezebel felt comfortable in mind when the report reached her that the deed was done. Naboth’s lips were sealed forever so that he could not expose her infamy, nor could he plead his own cause before the law and retain his possessions; but the end is not yet.

Elijah, the Tishbite, will speak in on this thing and have his say about it, for Elijah was one preacher who, though he feared Jezebel, feared God yet more.

From the days of Elijah until now the same customs have characterized society. The most accursed things can be accomplished and the average layman will keep still about it. He counts it wisdom to save his own skin.

A little while ago, when the subject of the Kruse girl’s rape and murder was up for public discussion, one lawyer said: “If the ministers would only step aside and leave us laymen to take care of this thing, there would be a better public response.” I felt constrained to say, “I have lived in this town for forty years and if the laymen have ever yet, without the leadership of ministers, lifted an effective voice against vice, the incident has certainly escaped me.”

There is an old saying to the effect that there has never been a revolution in Europe without a monk back of it; and certainly there has never been a demand for moral improvement in Minneapolis in my forty years of observation without a minister back of it.

The last four months have illustrated my statement abundantly, for some fifteen or twenty committees were formed under a layman’s hand with the ostensible purpose of cleaning up the city and holding crime in check; but rape and murder go on, and for many weeks now, weeks rapidly lengthening into months, we have heard nothing from these committees.

Thank God for the occasional preacher who has courage enough to face the Ahabs of political corruption and the Jezebels of social iniquity!

AN INSPIRER OF WICKEDNESS

Turning back to the text, we find that while Ahab, the king, was ostensibly the doer of these evil deeds, it was Jezebel, his wife, who “**stirred him up.**”

She was the power behind the throne.

It is sometimes facetiously said, “A man may be the head of the house, but the woman is the neck and she turns him whither she will.”

There is more truth than poetry in this statement.

Louis Albert Banks once called attention to what we have all seen every time we are at a seaport, namely, how that a great ship glides out even against the tide. The flags are floating to the breezes, the band is discoursing beautiful music, a thousand hands are waving good-bye to the friends on deck, and yet there is no side-wheel or stern-wheel turning, and you wonder why she glides away so majestically. But closer observation will show a little steam-tug, with a heart of fire and arms of iron, hid away under her sides, which is taking her off the ways and heading her out to sea. “It is so,” he said, “with the woman in the home.”

The great lumbering husband may seem to be quitting the wharves at his own option, striking out to sea at his own behest, choosing the direction of his own judgment, but when you get at the facts you will find that there is a woman in the shadows who is giving definiteness and direction to every movement; and if that man is proving himself an Ahab, you will discover it is because she is a Jezebel. If injustice is in his judgments, it will be discovered that she is dictating them; and if murder is in his power and policy it will be found that she is the bloody inspiration.

She incited her husband to sale of self.

Ahab which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

Dear old Joseph Parker, of London Temple fame, was a Christian philosopher and commenting upon this verse he says:

“That explains the whole mystery—the man had sold himself to the devil. And men are doing that selfsame thing every day. If it were a transaction in the market-place—if the auctioneer were visibly interested in this affair, and he could call out in audible tones ‘so much is the price, and the man is about to take it’—people would shrink from the villainous transaction; but this does not take place in the open. The compact is made in darkness and silence and in out-of-the-way places. It is an unwritten agreement. It is a mystery which the heart alone can understand. It is an instance of inward corruption.”

But it is also true that there are few married men who sell themselves without domestic assistance.

I have known men to sell themselves for a price, but the reason was that the woman at home demanded more than the husband could honestly make, and so at the gambling table he exchanged his integrity for her new dress. By crooked business he bartered his convictions of right for her expensive hat; he sold his very soul for her high-heeled shoes.

There is nothing in this text to tell whether Jezebel was in love with Ahab. Our guess is that she never was; that she did not know the meaning of love, except self-love. But it is also our conjecture that she had physical beauty and surreptitious charm that made it possible for her to put over false pretenses and dictate Ahab's conduct, and that the sale of his manhood for her sake never took from her penciled eyelids a second of sleep. Souls were nothing to her; slaughter, if self-interest dictated it, was her philosophy. The woman who has not God has no respect for the spiritual nature of any man or woman, not even her own!

Again, she motivated her servants to murder.

They had nothing against God's prophets, but at her word they accomplished her will. There again is a parallelism to the present Communist government of Russia, where painted women, whose morals are as low as the bottom of hell (to use a phrase at home on Billy Sunday's lips), instigate the murder of innocents and smile at the slaughter, smack their painted lips at the taste of blood.

Read, if you will, *Among the Autocrats*, by George Solomon, and see the history of Ahab and Jezebel repeated in the twentieth century without a protest on the part of Christian governments, and even with the approval of certain professor-citizens of America.

That is the shame of the Modernist pulpit, that we have some in it who speak the same infamous approval; and that is the disgrace of the great State-supported university, that it has not only privileged but actually encouraged the voices of such traitors to our country's interest.

THE INFAMOUS END

In II Kings 9:30-37 we have the record. Jehu had been anointed king of Israel at the word of Elisha and **when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.**

There is every indication, in this statement, that this embodiment of wickedness imagined that her attractions were still sufficient to charm even a king of God's appointment. But in that sinister endeavor she signally failed. Looking up to the window, Jehu said: **Who is on my side?** And evidently two or three Eunuchs nodded their heads to affirm their allegiance. And he said:

Throw her down. So they threw her down; and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses; and he trode her under foot. And when he was come in he did eat and drink, and said, Go see now this cursed woman, and bury her, for she is a king's daughter. And they went to bury her; but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet, and the palms of her hands.

Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.

Certainly this inspired record is suggestive, and from it we might at least learn the following things: Her sins called to Heaven for judgment; her own servants despised and destroyed her, and her sudden end was as terrible as prophetic.

Her sins called to Heaven for judgment.

It is a strange fact, but fact it is, that the most sinful are commonly the least concerned about the final consequences of conduct. Satan, when he controls the conduct of one, seems to have the ability to blind conscience and produce a degree of contentment. When God's children sin they suffer over it in proportion to the enormity of their mistake they are troubled and sleep goes from their eyes. But not so with the devil's dupes. They treat the matters that concern conscience as Jezebel treated her face. They paint them up to suit themselves; or as Jezebel treated her head, they adorn their evil deeds with the oil of self-justification. In other words, sin has the power to destroy the sense of sinfulness, and so far to deceive its subjects as to deny its commission and thereby produce the peace of self-deception (I John 1: 10).

Still further, her own servants seized and destroyed her.

Retribution is a fairly certain law of life. Dr. Thomas once said:

“Society is like the echoing hills, it gives back to the speaker his words, groan for groan, song for song.”

That is what Jesus meant when He said, **With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.**

Have you never known a woman to whisper slander against another and later to become herself the subject of still more evil speech, more crimson criticism? Have you not known a man to rob his fellows in self-enrichment, and finally find his fortune flown, and himself a poverty-stricken man? There is a homely phrase, “Chickens come home to roost,” and we see it illustrated in Jezebel's life.

Her hand had been stretched forth to persecute and kill whom she would; her servants had been compelled to execute vengeance at her command; and now out of that same company there came her executioners. In Chicago racketeers were slain by racketeers! Why is it that Communists are now being beheaded in Russia? There is a two-fold reason: First, justice is requiting them by paying them off in their own coin; and, second, Stalin is discovering that it is only by additional murders that he can preserve temporarily his own impious head. He knows full well that the dogs are waiting in the street for the day when they may feed on his flesh and blood.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Her end was as terrible as prophetic.

When Jehu saw that the dogs had consumed her flesh, he said: This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel (II Kings 9: 36-37).

And if one will turn back to I Kings 21:23, he will discover that Elijah, prophet of God, had seen so fully in the secrets of the future, that he had declared that this would be her final experience.

Little wonder! We cannot live without God and die with Him. We cannot hate Him in life and enjoy His love in death.

Arthur Pierson, in *The Miracle of Missions*, gives us an illustration of this fact. He tells the story of how John G. Paton, while in the district where he was laboring, came upon an infidel whose blasphemies made even his co-laborers to desert him, and who at his approaching death foamed at the mouth and even spat at Paton as he tried to talk with him. When Paton mentioned the name of JESUS, he yelled like a maniac and tore his bed clothes to pieces and had to be bound to the bed. When the missionary asked if he might pray for him, he shouted, *“Pray for me to the devil!”* And when Mr. Paton reminded him that he did not believe in either God or the devil, he shouted again, *“Yes, I do believe in the devil; and I believe in God, and a just God, but I hated Him in life, and I find myself hating Him in death.”*

There are a great many people who entertain the notion that when death, the last enemy, comes, it will turn infidelity into faith, the rejection of Christ into redemption, hate into love, sin into salvation. But the Scriptures give no warrant for such expectation. The time to get right with God is not when one is falling from the window to the pavement; it is not with the last breath; it is not in the last hour; it is not in the last day. The time to get right with God is NOW!

Behold, NOW is the accepted time, behold, TODAY is the day of salvation. Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Let the fateful end of Jezebel teach us the great truth, Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Let her sudden and terrible destruction point us to the Redeemer's love.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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