

# GOD PORTRAYS MORE WOMEN

by

Grace E. Mc Allister

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL

(I Kings 16:29-II Kings 9:37)

ONE DAY in the important, commercial, and luxurious city of Zidon a princess whom they called Jezebel was born in the royal palace. She grew to be a strong-minded, ambitious, dominant, attractive, and vivacious though unscrupulous woman. Tyre and Zidon were the important seaports of that day, and neighboring governments valued the advantage of friendship with so strong a power. Ahab, king of Israel, was not blind to the political and economic support to be obtained from an alliance with Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, so he proposed marriage to his daughter, Jezebel.

Ethbaal and his daughter were fanatical worshipers of Baal, the sun god. It was a most demoralizing form of worship. When Ahab and the king discussed the arrangement for the wedding, her father might have inquired what religious adjustments Ahab would be willing to make. Nominally, Ahab was a worshiper of God, but like his predecessor Jeroboam, he no longer went up to Jerusalem to worship. He no doubt would not interfere, and Jezebel might worship as she pleased. He erected a temple for Baal near the royal palace which Ahab's father built in Samaria, and lost no time in fulfilling every demand of the princess. He was utterly indifferent to the Lord and His claims, and seemed to go out of his way to provoke the Lord to anger. He **“went and served Baal, and worshiped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him”** (16:31-33).

Jezebel despised the teachings of the Word of God which required holiness and personal purity. She would have none of them. She hated God's prophets and their instructions. She was the Old Testament Herodias who resented any rebuke of her conduct. At that time there was a rugged prophet in Israel, Elijah, who was not afraid of royalty. One might think this dear man of God had been reading in the Book of Deuteronomy. His holy soul was moved as he beheld the departure of the people from the Lord and their wickedness in high places. He recalled the Word of the Lord that certain curses would overtake the nation if they refused to hear His voice. Among the curses to which the people said **“Amen”** on Mount Ebal was: **“Thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust”** (Deuteronomy 28:23, 24).

Also, if they served other gods, the Lord would **“shut up the heaven, that there be no rain”** (Deuteronomy 11:17).

Elijah waited before God, and prayed and mourned over the prevailing apostasy. He cried unto the Lord to give him courage to face Ahab with God’s message. He found the opportunity and delivered his twenty-five-word sermon (17:1), then vanished for three years. Ahab and Jezebel served Baal, the sun god. It is as if God had said, **“Israel is joined to his idols, let him alone.”** They were left to Baal, and what did Baal do for them? Only burned up and consumed every green thing. If Elijah had a passion for God and righteousness, Jezebel had a passion for hate and persecution. She became the first religious persecutor in history, **“For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah . . . hid them”** (18:4). She preferred famine to their preaching.

The plight of the people distressed Ahab much less than the welfare of his horses and mules, for he and Obadiah were out searching the land for food and water to save the animals. When Elijah presented himself before Ahab the second time, he was greeted with these caustic words, **“Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”** (18:17). This was not the last or only time that calamity was attributed to the presence of the Lord’s people.

But Elijah courageously and curtly answered the king: **“I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel’s table”** (18:18, 19).

Instead of the king giving Elijah commands, the man of God commanded the king, and he obeyed! Elijah let Ahab understand that he knew that Jezebel was the supporter of all the priests who served Baal and that she slew the prophets of the Lord. The one hundred prophets of the Lord who had escaped lived in caves and were fed on bread and water, while her devotees waxed fat at the royal table. So successful was her influence for Baal that even God himself could find only seven thousand secret believers who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Ahab obeyed the prophet, and when all the people were gathered on Mount Carmel, Elijah challenged the gathered hosts: **“How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him”** (18:21). And the people answered him not a word. That silence was ominous!

Elijah demanded a fair test to prove who really was God. It must be a test by fire because Baal was the god of fire. So the sacrifices were to be put on the altar, and the God who answered by fire **“let him be God”** (18:24). An amazing demonstration followed as the prophets of Baal called on their god. It revealed the hysterical character of their religion composed of incantations, wild cries, and blood-letting. This went on from morning until the time of the evening sacrifice. But there was no answer. What were the thoughts of the people by this time as Elijah called on them to **“come near unto me”** while he repaired the altar of the Lord? Did their consciences smite them? Did they long for the Temple and the blessings of the Lord, and the leadership of a man of God? Did tears start as they longed for a return to what was good, pure, and lovely?

How conspicuous was the contrast when Elijah began his dignified, unhurried, and confident preparations! God is never the Author of confusion or unseemly behavior, and God's man is acting in the way He has commanded.

Elijah called the people to draw near while he built the altar of twelve stones, put the wood in order, cut up the bullock, laid it on the wood, and dug a deep trench about the altar. Then he commanded the people to pour over it all twelve barrels of water. Everything was soaked, and the trench was full of water. Elijah's prayer was short and simple. The words are touching:

**“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel . . . and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again”** (18:36, 37).

Their affections had been set in the wrong direction. **“Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood and the stones.”** And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and said, **“The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God”** (18:38, 39). And Elijah said, **“Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape”** (18:40).

Was there a note of sarcasm in Elijah's voice when he said to Ahab, **“Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain”**? So Ahab went up to eat and to drink (18:41, 42). Gratification of his desires and ambitions seemed to be the object of Ahab's life. Jezebel saw that he obtained what he wanted so that she might have what she wanted. He had just witnessed unmoved the slaying of eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal without its affecting his digestion.

But Elijah went up to pray. Though he was bold as a lion before Ahab, he cast himself down to the earth, put his face between his knees, prayed for rain, and watched for the answer to his prayer. A cloud the size of a man's hand was the first sign of the answer. The hand of Elijah uplifted to God in prevailing prayer brought down blessing to all Israel. Though he waited to pray, the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; he girded up his loins and outran the chariot of Ahab to Jezreel. Was Jezebel watching for Ahab's return?

Ahab came in flushed perhaps with admiration for the outcome of the challenge, and, like Herod, would have heard God's prophet gladly but, as he recounted the events of the day, Jezebel's heart burned with anger and revenge for the destruction of the prophets of Baal. She determined to wreak her vengeance on Elijah and dispatched a messenger to the prophet of the living God.

**“So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time”** (19:2).

When Elijah received the queen's message, he fled for his life. He could challenge Ahab, Israel, and all those heathen prophets, but he ran away from an angry woman. How great her influence may be for good or evil! Peter quailed before the taunt of a servant maid and denied the Lord.

After the tension of the day God's valiant servant suffered an unexpected reaction. He and his servant raced away again from Jezreel to Beersheba. Elijah's heart was pounding with fear and excitement. He wanted to be alone so dismissed his servant there and went by himself a day's journey into the wilderness until he was exhausted. He threw himself down under a juniper tree and said: **"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers"** (19:4).

Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves—bold as a lion for God one day, depressed and cowardly the next. But God had a great compassion for His tired servant. His prophet needed someone to touch him—the ravens would not do this time. So God sent a heavenly messenger to touch him and to prepare and serve a freshly baked dinner. The angel stood guard over Elijah as he partook and as he slept. God was not through with His servant, and certainly Jezebel was not going to have the satisfaction of murdering Elijah. When we are discouraged and depressed, let the Lord feed us His bread from Heaven and recommission us. Never let yourself go down into a cave of discouragement. Only the still, small voice of God can restore us. Seek His help and comfort in prayer.

Though Ahab the king lived in a palace, he was a thoroughly discontented man. Discontent is torment: it affects body, soul, and spirit. Paul rejoiced in prison and learned there to be content. But Ahab looked over his palace wall and saw Naboth's well-cared-for vineyard and coveted it for a garden of herbs. God's law said: **"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house or anything that is thy neighbor's."** One day Ahab called on Naboth and offered to purchase his property for a trade or cash, whichever he preferred (21:2). Naboth was accustomed to consult the Lord's pleasure in the affairs of his life. He replied, **"The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee"** (21:3).

The Scriptures said: **"Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession"** (Ezekiel 46:18).

Thank God there are some things money cannot buy! Naboth had the courage to act according to his conscience even before the king.

Then we find it written: **"Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased . . . And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread"** (21:4). Ahab was a man of moods, pouts, and volcanic eruptions by turns. If he could not have what he wanted, life wasn't worth living for him or anyone else in the house. Jezebel investigated the cause of Ahab's absence from dinner and found him acting like a sulky, spoiled child. In very offended tones he complained that Naboth would not sell him his vineyard. His royal will was crossed which was insufferable.

There are other folk who cannot abide being crossed and will not recognize the rights of others. Unfortunately, such love of dominance even intrudes in the church at times and makes the lives of others difficult. Their opinions must be bowed to and their desires accepted and indulged no matter what the cost to others.

Jezebel promptly took the matter into her own hands. She demanded of Ahab, “**Dost thou now govern the kingdom?**” (Yes, but he certainly did not govern himself.) “**Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry.**” (Did his life consist of this?) “**I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth**” (21:7). She purposed in her heart not only to get the land but to be rid of Naboth himself.

She hated those people who were always quoting Scripture. As she reviewed the situation, she decided that her procedure must bear a religious semblance. So she wrote a letter in the king’s name to the elders and nobles of the city where Naboth lived. She commanded them to “**proclaim a feast and set Naboth on high among the people**” (21:9).

There must be evil in the camp that calls for self-examination and humiliation. She was smart enough to think up such a precedent as the sin of Achan where Israel was called on to sanctify themselves for an investigation. She made two charges against Naboth:

- (1) he blasphemed God (as if that were a matter of moment to her);
- (2) he blasphemed the king.

She provided two false witnesses. It was a capital offense to blaspheme God, but his property would pass to his heirs. Therefore, she added the charge of treason to the king, as in this case his estate would go to the royal exchequer. Public conscience might rebel at open murder so some appearance of justice had to be given to the sentence. The verdict and sentence were prearranged. “**Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die**” (21:10). What base men they were who acted as willing tools to the queen’s wicked designs! “**And the men of the city (neighbors] even the elders and nobles . . . did as Jezebel sent unto them . . . in the letters.**”

The nobles and elders sent to Jezebel saying, “**Naboth is stoned, and is dead**” (21:14). But God was not dead; but was still “**he that liveth and seeth.**” And we read what He thought about it, for He said: “**Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the Lord; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord**” (II Kings 9:26).

Then Jezebel said to Ahab: “**Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead**” (21:15).

She forgot that the blood of Naboth and his sons cried unto God from the ground. Ahab’s face lightened; he was a man of inordinate desires and emotions; he lost no time, but arose and went down to his newly acquired property.

Hitherto God had kept silent; now He spoke. He commanded Elijah: “**Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel . . . behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it**” (21:18). Our downittings and uprisings are all known to Him. He told Elijah to quote him saying, “**Thus saith the Lord.**” Those were embarrassing words to Ahab; he did not want to hear what the Lord had to say to him. “**Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?**”

The Lord would not let him deny it, or say he had never laid a finger on Naboth, or that he had nothing to do with it at all. Jezebel had not told him how Naboth was killed nor how she had obtained the land. It reminds us of Nathan's message to David. **"Thou hast killed Uriah. Thou art the man."** **"In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine"** (21:19). Ahab turned on Elijah spitefully, **"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"**

Thus the willfully unrepentant hates both God's message and His messenger. Ahab had evidently evaded any opportunity of meeting God's prophet. Sin makes us uncomfortable in the presence of those who seek to please God.

But Elijah had not finished his message and he replied: **"I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord"** (21:20).

You will have to pay the price, sin earns wages—death. The Lord had seen all he had done; He had discerned the thoughts and intents of Ahab's wicked heart. The day of accounting had arrived, **"Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and take away thy posterity"** (21:21).

Naboth and his sons had been cut off, so Ahab and his sons must realize just retribution. And of Jezebel also spake the Lord **"The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel"** (21:23). **"Thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin"** (21:22). Jezebel had implicated the elders, nobles, and the people in her sham trial of Naboth. **"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"** (21:25).

We may well examine our hearts to find out whether we incite those under our influence for good or for evil. As Christians, we should inspire others to that which is good, and help in their spiritual progress by ministering grace. Otherwise we grieve the Holy Spirit.

Ahab stood convicted, dreading the execution of God's sentence. A wicked man is often craven when his wickedness is exposed. He was as abject as he had been brazen. He humbled himself, put on sackcloth, fasted, and went softly. God noted his humility and allowed him space to repent and to become truly contrite. But Ahab lamented the judgment, not his sin. He felt sorry for himself, not his sin.

Three years later Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to join him in a war against the king of Syria.

They inquired of the four hundred newly imported prophets of the groves what their fortune would be if they went to battle (22:6). Dissatisfied with their ambiguous predictions, Jehoshaphat demanded that a prophet of the Lord, Micaiah, be sent for, who foretold that Ahab would fall in battle. One of the prophets of the grove was so incensed, he slapped his face. Ahab ordered his men to put Micaiah in prison and commanded that he be fed with bread and water of affliction until Ahab returned in peace. Though the king disguised himself, a bow shot at a venture smote him so that before evening he died from loss of blood. He was brought back to the capital city. One washed the bloodstained chariot; in the place where dogs licked Naboth's blood, dogs licked Ahab's blood, according to the Word of the Lord (21:19).

Ahab and Jezebel had three children: Ahaziah who succeeded to the throne and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother; Jehoram, and Athaliah. Ahaziah **“served Baal, and worshiped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done”** (22:53). He reigned two years, fell down through a lattice from his upstairs window, and was fatally injured (II Kings 1:2). His brother Jehoram succeeded to the throne and he, too, **“wrought evil in the sight of the Lord; but not like his father, and like his mother”** (3:2). **“Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam . . . which made Israel to sin”** (3:3).

The king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel and refused to pay the usual tribute. So Jehoram asked Jehoshaphat king of Judah to help him. Before going to battle, Jehoshaphat demanded they inquire of the Lord, and the three kings went to see him. Elisha spoke directly to Jehoram: **“What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother . . . Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat . . . I would not look toward thee, nor see thee”** (3:13, 14).

It was indeed an evil brood of children that came from a foul home. As wisdom is justified by her children, so folly and sin leave their result in their children. The trend today to juvenile delinquency is publicly condemned, and the cause is placed on the parents' doorstep. Like parent like children.

Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, married Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, and it is said: **“And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for [or because] the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the Lord”** (8:18). How infectious is evil! She was as great an influence for evil as her mother Jezebel had been. Jehoram went to battle against Edom and was badly wounded; he returned to his mother in Jezreel.

At this time Elisha the prophet sent a messenger to Jehu to anoint him king over Israel. Jehu drove to Jezreel as fast as possible with instructions from Elisha to smite the house of Ahab and avenge the blood of the Lord's servants, the prophets, at the hand of Jezebel, for the whole house of Ahab was to be cut off and the dogs would eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel. The vineyard of Naboth was truly a field of blood. How dear the purchase-price!

Sick and all as Jehoram was, he ordered his chariot, and met Jehu in the tragic vineyard. The king asked his usurper Jehu, **“Is it peace Jehu?”** He answered: **“What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?”** (9:22). As Jehoram fled, Jehu drew a bow and shot him through the heart. They cast him into the vineyard of Naboth, as the Lord had said, **“I will requite thee in this plat”** (9:26).

**“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”** (9:30).

This wicked woman in her last hours sought even then to use her seductive charms and domineering ways on Jehu. She had been better occupied to prepare her soul to meet an offended God.

Brazenly she called down to Jehu. Don't you remember, young man, how Captain Zimri led a revolt against his master and how in less than seven days he sought refuge in his palace and set fire to it, perishing in the conflagration? See what comes of insurrection!

Jehu looked up and saw her and some of the servants behind her. He called out, "**Who is on my side? who? . . . Throw her down.**" Two or three of them seized Jezebel and threw her down. Her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trod her underfoot. Jezebel had Naboth stoned, but she perished under the horses' hoofs. Jehu seized the palace, and after dinner he 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 (9:34, 35).

What mattered her painted face or tired hair! "**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 carcass 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**" (9:36, 37).

Inordinate ambition, covetousness, hatred, dominance, and pride have their own punishments.

In the Revelation, the church of Thyatira is rebuked for suffering the dominance of a Jezebel who would seduce from the faith the Lord's people and introduce things and teachings that God could never countenance. God was patient in waiting for Jezebel to repent, for He often spoke loudly to her in the death of her husband and of her sons and she repented not. She dragged not only herself but her children down to judgment and death by her wicked ways. But thank God, there were those courageous enough not to follow her wicked ways or accept her hateful doctrine, and though her life had been burdensome, they were encouraged to stand true to God and His Word in hope of the soon return of the Morning Star.

Who could think of a Christian ever emulating a Jezebel?

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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