

JEZEBEL - "The Appetite To Control People"



1. **(Q1-1 Kg 1:3-4)** Jezebel’s systematic execution of the prophets of Yahweh accomplished two goals: (1) It silenced the voices that would (or should!) have condemned her and Ahab’s rapid institution of Baal worship as the “state religion” for the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Prophets typically were the “voice” of authentication, the “divine seal of approval” on the actions of rulers in the ANE. Jezebel sought to make sure that there would *be* no contrary voices. This was a *political* move, not a spiritual one. There was, in fact, “room” for Yahweh in the religion of Canaan. But, there was *no room* for Baal in the monotheism of true Yahwehistic Judaism. (2) She instilled fear in the hearts of any/all who would oppose her. “Power” causes people to follow leadership out of fear of consequences. “Authority” engenders obedience out of respect and trust. Jezebel ruled by power.
2. **(Q1-1 Kgs 18:19)** Baal was the Canaanite storm god (i.e., rain, crops, fertility), and Asherah was the consort of the “main god” of Canaan, El. In Ahab’s day, Asherah was “pitched” as the consort of *Yahweh*, which eventually opened the door for full-blown Baal worship.
3. **(Q1-1Kgs 21:25)** Ahab not only appears to be *submitted* to Jezebel’s leadership in this story, he also seems to be *dependent* upon it. 1 Kings 16:31 gives us tremendous insight into Jezebel’s character, as well as the seriousness of Ahab’s initial choice to marry her:

“And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him.”
1 Kings 16:31, ESV.

Jezebel’s reputation for evil persisted for nearly 1,000 years, her name is applied to a false prophetess in the church at Thyatira in Rev. 2:20. (Of the 22 mentions of her name in the Bible, these is a 1,000 year gap between the first 21 and this one!)

4. **(Q1-1Kgs 19:1-4)** The contrast between what Elijah did on Mount Carmel, in the presence of incredible immediate danger, not to mention the King himself, and the effect of a *messenger* from Jezebel (she wasn’t even there!), is very revealing about this woman’s control and power.
5. **(Q2)** The Greek participle translated “likes to put himself first,” is a single word (*philoproteuōn*). It is a compound of the verb *phileo* (“to love”) and *protos* (“first”). This is a *values statement*. This man “needed” to be in control, and sought to do so by being the most “important” in the eyes of the church. Status is a very profound form of control because it is “deeded” (i.e. given), not demanded. Also, the verb referring to his “refusal to acknowledge” Paul’s authority is translated “welcome” in reference to teachers/leaders from other congregations. “Welcoming” the input, counsel, direction and wisdom of others is the *opposite* of control, or “loving the first place.”
 Paranoia and micro-managing people and things, are evidence of the “Jezebel syndrome.”
6. **(Q4)** Beneath or perhaps *behind* all the variegated expressions of control is this essential truth: we are hardwired to *want* control. It is our Edenic heritage; the long half-life of Adam and Eve.
7. **(Q5)** This passage (and its parallel in Mk 10:42-45) are very disturbing, except that final clause in both, which we all love to quote. Jesus and Jezebel were operating from two different worldviews:
 - Jezebel saw herself as “over” others, Jesus as “under” them
 - Jezebel had others serve her wishes, Jesus served others’ needs.

- Jezebel operated on the belief that greatness earned respect and obedience, Jesus taught that greatness was *evidenced* by service and sacrifice.
- Both measured themselves by others; one to put them down, the other to lift them up.



“Stumbling Stones”

1. **(Overall)** The principle of power versus control illustrated in this story *must* be understood to be infinitely larger than Jezebel. She merely serves as an excellent example of a force as wide as the human race, and as deep as all of human history. The *offer* of power and control is what the Serpent laid on the table before *both* the first Adam (Gen 3:4-6), and the last Adam (cf. Matt 4:1-9; 1 Cor 15:45; Rom 5:17).

The desire for power and control is now part of our very humanity, our fallen nature. It is an “Edenic residue” that will wage war in every believer’s life until death. This chapter is much larger *and* more significant than one woman’s manipulations. It is the constant struggle of all of humanity, believer and unbeliever alike.

The manifestation of this desire, as a rule, is different for men and women, even though the goal and motivation are the same. Both tend to use their “design” to manipulate rather than nurture; to “get” rather than to “give.”

Much of God’s instruction to men in the Old Testament addresses this “Edenic remnant” in women, which uses “design” to control rather than serve (Prov. 6 & 7). They are warned to be careful of:

- her eyes (Prov. 6:25)
 - her scent (Prov. 7:17)
 - her gait (Is. 3:16)
 - her speech (Prov. 6:24; 7:21)
 - her clothing (Prov. 7:10)
2. **(Q3)** Don’t get too bogged down on the details here that you miss the bigger picture. The preponderance of passages on this idea of leading and following, and the frequent admonitions (especially to men) about abuse of leadership, all point to the conclusion that we *all* have a problem in this area.
 3. **(Q4)** Be careful to not lose sight of the *meaning* of seeking power, in the presences of its many “faces.” Yelling, hitting, intimidating, threatening and insulting are all forms of seeking power and control. But so are pouting, promenading, flirting, and seducing.
 4. **(Q5)** The Greek word translated “benefactor” here has *nothing* to do with generosity. The word (*euergetēs*) is more of a title of honor that is bestowed on someone for some service to country and kindred. Think of “captain,” or “knight” or “prince.” In other words, think of status.



“Going Deeper”

1. **(Overall)** How is an unhealthy interest/obsession with Bible “prophecy” and/or horoscopes evidence of a desire for control?
2. **(Q4)** Because men have larger lungs and (typically) stronger muscles, threatening others is an easy way to control them. Do you think it is significant when *women* employ these tactics?
3. **(Q5 & 8)** Have group members share their answers to these questions.