

Women in Scripture



A Dictionary of
Named and Unnamed Women in the
Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books,
and the New Testament



Carol Meyers,
General Editor

Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer,
Associate Editors

WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN / CAMBRIDGE, U.K.

stored his fortunes. The sons are not named, but all of the daughters are, and all their names signify beauty. If Jemimah means "dove," then her name may also be related to an epithet of the Canaanite goddess Anat.

SEE ALSO Part I: Keren-happuch; Keziah; Part II: Daughters of Job (Job 1:2-19, etc.); Part III: Anat.

ILANA PARDES

Jerioth

meaning uncertain; perhaps "fearful one," from Hebrew *yir'*, "to tremble, be afraid" (1 Chr 2:18)

Listed within a textually problematic verse within the genealogy of Judah, this woman may be either a wife of Caleb, according to the Hebrew text (so NRSV), or a child of Caleb and another wife, Azubah, following the Syriac and the Vulgate.

JULIA MYERS O'BRIEN

SEE ALSO Part I: Azubah 2; Ephah; Ephraim; Ephraim; Maach 5.

Jerusha/Jerushah

"possession, inherited one," from Hebrew *yērūšā*, "possession, inheritance"

(2 Kgs 15:33; 2 Chr 27:1)

Jerusha, daughter of Zadok, was the chief wife of Azariah/Uzziah, king of Judah from 785 to 733 B.C.E. and the mother of his successor, King Jotham. Some scholars have suggested that the queen mother served in an official capacity in the Judean court, based upon the regular occurrence of her name in the regnal formulas of southern kings and other hints in the biblical narrative of the cultic and political power she wielded. Others emphasize the scarcity of biblical evidence for the existence of such an official role. However, this silence is not surprising, since the Bible is dominated by an androcentric perspective that often precludes any mention of women's activities. If the queen mother was an official functionary of the court, Jerusha, who may have come from a prominent priestly family, would have risen to power early because of

the co-regency of Azariah and Jotham, necessitated by the former's illness (2 Kgs 15:5).

RHONDA BURNETTE-BLETSCH

SEE ALSO Part I: Athaliah; Jezebel 1.

FOR FURTHER READING: Ackerman, Susan. "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel." Andreasen, Niels-Erik. "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society." Ben-Barak, Zafira. "The Status and Right of the *g'birā*."

Jezebel 1

"heap of dung"; pronunciation dictated by the pointing in the Hebrew *jezebel*; originally, probably "Zebul [another name for the god Baal] exists," "Zebul is," or "where is Zebul"; perhaps later understood as a parody: "no [Hebrew *ʾi*] Zebul," meaning "Baal is not" or "Baal does not exist" (1 Kgs 16:31; 18:19; 21:2; 2 Kings 9)

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 B.C.E. 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 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, Azariah, 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 is characterized as totally evil in the biblical text and beyond it: in the New Testament her name is a generic catchword for a whooring, non-believing female adversary (Rev 2:20); in Judeo-Christian traditions, she is evil incarnate (see Phipps). The Bible is careful not to refer to her as queen. And yet, this is precisely what she seems to have been. Some early Jewish, albeit postbiblical, sources deconstruct the general picture: "Four women exercised government in the world: Jezebel and Athaliah from Israel, Semiramis and Vashiti

from the [gentile] nations" (in a Jewish Midrash for the Book of Esther, *Esther Rabba*). Clearly, Jezebel acted as queen even though the Bible itself refuses her the title and its attendant respect, not to mention approval. In the biblical text, as Trible notes, Jezebel is contrasted with and juxtaposed to the prophet Elijah, to the extent that they both form the two panels of a mirrored dyptich. She is a Baal supporter, he is a YHWH supporter; she is a woman, he is a man; she is a foreigner, he is a native; she has monarchic power, he has prophetic power; she threatens, he flees; finally he wins, she is liquidated. The real conflict is not between Ahab (the king) and Elijah, but between Jezebel (the queen in actuality, if not in title) and Elijah. Ultimately the forces of YHWH win; Jezebel loses. It remains to be understood why she gets such bad press.

It seems reasonable that Jezebel, a foreign royal princess by birth, was highly educated and efficient. Also, although her son's theophoric names have the element *-yāh* or *-yāhā* (referring to YHWH) in them, she seems to have been a patron and devotee of the Baal cult. It is not incomprehensible that, whereas Ahab devoted himself to military and foreign affairs, Jezebel acted as his deputy for internal affairs: the Naboth report comes back to her, as if the king's seal was hers (see Avigad's identification of a seal, "*lyzbl*," as possibly Jezebel's); she has her own "table," that is her own economic establishment and budget; she has her own "prophets," probably a religious establishment that she controls. All these point toward an official or semiofficial position that Jezebel held by virtue of her character, her royal origin and connections, her husband's and later her children's esteem, and her religious affiliation to the Baal (possibly also Asherah) cult. Perhaps she had the status of *gēbīrā*, "queen mother" (Ben-Barak), or of "co-regent" (Brenner). At any rate, there is no doubt that the biblical and later accounts distort her portrait for several reasons, among which we can list her monarchic power, deemed unfit in a woman; her reported devotion to the Baal and Asherah cult and her objection to Elijah and other prophets of YHWH; her education and legal know-how (shown in the Naboth affair); and her foreign origin. Ultimately, the same passages that disclaim

Jezebel as evil, "whoring," and immoral are witness to her power and the need to curb it.

ATHALYA BRENNER

SEE ALSO Part I: Athaliah; Azubah 1; Jezebel 2; Part II: Wives of Ahab (1 Kgs 20:3, etc.); Part III: Asherah/Asherim.

FOR FURTHER READING: Avigad, Nahman. "The Seal of Jezebel."

Ben-Barak, Zafira. "The Status and Right of the *g'thrā*."

Brenner, Athalya. *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative*.

Pippin, Tina. "Jezebel Re-Vamped."

Trible, Phyllis. "The Odd Couple: Elijah and Jezebel."

Jezebel 2

(Rev 2:20–23)

The name Jezebel appears once in the New Testament in the Revelation to John in the letter to the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:20). After praising the church for its service, the "one like the Son of Man" (Rev 1:13) speaks critically of "that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet" (2:20). He accuses her of false prophecy, deceiving the church's people "to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols" (2:20). It is not clear whether or not the woman's actual name was Jezebel. What is important is that Revelation links her with the Jezebel of the Hebrew Bible. The name designates a deceptive woman who leads believers into sin. Though described as illicit sex, the sin could stand for broader behavior deemed sinful by the author. This reference takes the fornication metaphor further by calling Jezebel's followers adulterers (Rev 2:22). In the Hebrew Bible, adultery is frequently used as a metaphor for idolatry. Jezebel's punishment, and the punishment of her followers, is severe. She will be thrown into "great distress" and "her children"—that is, her followers—will be struck dead (2:22–23). This apocalyptic vision reflects the fate of the idolatrous Queen Jezebel in 1 and 2 Kings. Jezebel and her prophets are destroyed (in 2 Kings 9 and 1 Kings 18, respectively).

Revelation reveals only one opinion of this prophet Jezebel. The reader does not hear her perspective. She may have been a teacher or preacher

in the congregation with views different from those of the author of this text; though we cannot prove her historical existence we can explore the cultural implications of giving a powerful woman with differing opinions the name Jezebel. It is a way of dismissing and shaming her. Powerful women are often humiliated and disempowered in the biblical text through accusations of sexual promiscuity. Beginning with Eve, women have been blamed as temptresses and seducers of men. As a foreign woman, Jezebel is doubly "other," bringing with her both dangerous religion and sexuality.

In Revelation Jezebel serves as an apocalyptic bad woman whose actions lead to the end of the world. God destroys both her and the evil whore of Babylon. Jezebel is not linked with a political power as the whore is, but her connection with a different religious teaching is clear. Traditional commentaries have sided with Revelation in presenting Jezebel as an evil presence. Feminist readings propose alternative readings of the women of Revelation, focusing on the ambiguities of the figure of Jezebel.

TINA PIPPIN

SEE ALSO Part I: Jezebel 1; Part III: Great Whore.

FOR FURTHER READING: Pippin, Tina. "And I Will Strike Her Children Dead: Death and the Deconstruction of Social Location."

Joanna

"God is/has been gracious," a Grecized version of many Semitic proper names; from Hebrew *yōh* (an alternative form of *yhwh*) and *hinn*, "to grace or favor"

(Luke 8:3; 24:10)

Luke 8:3 singles out three women from a group characterized by having been healed from demons or illness, by possessing presumably independent means, and by having decided to join the itinerant Jesus movement and serve as its benefactors. The name of Joanna stands second both in Luke 8:3 and on the list of witnesses to the empty tomb (Luke 24:10). Whereas Mary of Magdala is characterized by her place of origin (a common ancient designation) and the severity of her previous misfortune (seven demons), Joanna is identified by reference to