

Jezebel

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: "The name Jezebel usually evokes for us the image of a painted woman who is sexually alluring or trying to be, a manipulator of men, a political meddler, an idolatress. The Bible's condemnations of her, however, concern her role in public religious and political affairs, not her private (im)morality. Examination of the Biblical texts and related evidence shows that more was at stake for the Biblical writers than the frivolous elements in her modern stereotype."

From where did the modern image of "a Jezebel" emerge?

1. Revelation 2:20 This is the most quoted Biblical connection between Jezebel and immorality, which does not require that the Old Testament Jezebel be particularly immoral, only that her teaching resulted in some Christians in Thyatira to "commit immorality."
2. Spanish Jews called Isabella I "the Catholic Jezebel." She was both politically and morally bankrupt.
3. Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart were both labeled Jezebels in the fiery writings of John Knox.

The Old Testament Jezebel's story is contained entirely in Kings, with no mention of her in Chronicles. Her name appears first in 1 Kings 16:31 and last in 2 Kings 9:27. The chapters containing her story are 1 Kings 18, 19, and 21, and 2 Kings 9.

1. Jezebel worshipped Baal (and Astarte). Her marriage to Ahab was likely part of an alliance with Lebanon (Tyre and Sidon). It was customary for such queens to bring their religions with them (*e.g.*, the foreign wives of Solomon set up idols in Jerusalem, 1 Kings 11:1-8). Thus, the building of large temples to Baal and Astarte in Samaria would be expected. The first mention of Jezebel treats Ahab's adoption of her gods as a sadly natural progression from Ahab's acceptance of "the sin of Jeroboam," golden calf worship (1 Kings 16:31).
2. Jezebel "cut off" (killed) as many prophets of God as she could find (1 Kings 18:4, 13), although Obadiah had hidden 100 of them.
3. Jezebel took care of the daily needs of 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (1 Kings 18:19).
4. After Elijah killed the 450 prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, Jezebel vowed to kill him before another day passed (1 Kings 19:2). The way she threatened him put her name (The Prince, Baal, lives) in opposition to that of the prophet (The Lord is my God), implying that her killing of him would be like Baal conquering the Lord. Elijah retreated to the wilderness.
5. Jezebel was concerned over the pouting of Ahab when he could not obtain the vineyard of Naboth, so she arranged for Naboth to be framed as a blasphemer and traitor so Ahab could confiscate the land (1 Kings 21:1-16). God through Elijah laid the blame on Ahab (1 Kings 21:19) although Jezebel was cursed as well (1 Kings 21:23). Jezebel was blamed for "inciting" Ahab (1 Kings 21:25). However, Ahab repented, so the curses were delayed until "his son's days," which is why the last of Jezebel's life is several chapters later, in her son's reign (1 Kings 21:29).

6. Jehu was anointed king of Israel and told to avenge the deaths of the prophets at the hand of Jezebel (2 Kings 9:7). Her curse was repeated (2 Kings 9:10). Jehu attributed harlotries and witchcraft to Jezebel (2 Kings 9:22). When Jehu came for her after killing her son the king, she put on her wig and makeup probably as a sign of her position as queen mother rather than to be alluring (2 Kings 9:30). She called Jehu "Zimri" because Zimri was a servant of King Baasha who assassinated his king to usurp the throne, but was himself assassinated ten days later. She could guess her own fate, but took the opportunity to cast aspersions on Jehu's potential longevity (2 Kings 9:31). Jehu ordered her orderlies to throw her off the balcony from which she spoke. The fall caused considerable injury, and Jehu finished her by trampling her with his horse (2 Kings 9:33). Jehu then went inside to eat dinner. After the meal, he sent a group to bury her, but they found only her skull, feet, and palms, thus fulfilling the curse (2 Kings 9:35). Her story ends with a play on words, there being only one letter different between Jezebel (The Prince, Baal, lives) and "the dung lives" (2 Kings 9:37).