

Empathy for the Wicked – Jezebel

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MAIN VERSES

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Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love. A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God. Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family, so welcome home.

This week we get to talk about the villain that has become my favorite villain in a very strange way—Jezebel, the queen of Israel, the ancient queen known for attributes of sinful ways. We're going to take a look at her story today, given to us by the biblical authors. We're continuing the series through some of the wicked and villains of the Bible, and today we come to a very well-known woman. Everyone's heard of Jezebel, but I would dare say that many of us are probably not familiar with her.

The Story of Jezebel

Today we're going to explore her story that the biblical authors give us, which starts in 1 Kings chapter 16 through 21 and ends very abruptly in 2 Kings at the end of chapter 9. The name of this series, as you know, is Empathy for the Wicked, and it's empathy for the wicked for a reason. The goal is to find empathy. The goal is to dive into the narrative—the story of the Bible—and seek to find empathy. Not sympathy, but an understanding of why the biblical villains are the way that they are.

The story of the Bible portrays every character not simply for historical sake, but with details, with specific encounters and events that are meant to teach us something about them, that are meant to guide us in the longer story and narrative. They're meant to teach us wisdom. And if we read the story of Cain, and we read the story of Delilah, and we read the story of Herod, and we miss the why behind everything—why they were the way that they were—then we run the

risk of falling into the same pitfalls that made them into the wicked, sinful people that we know them as.

The Defamation of Jezebel

Jezebel—the ancient queen who's for the most part known for having a sexual prowess, possibly a prostitute, a murderer, a witch. She's known as an enemy of God. Her name has become infamous throughout history. It's actually evolved into one of the worst religious insults that you can call another believer. We even named a missile that we were going to use on our enemies in World War II after her. Send Jezebel over, right?

She's mentioned in 1 and 2 Kings and briefly, of course, in Revelation. But in church, her name has evolved into a defaming caricature that we tend to overlay on people. Anyone know what I'm talking about? We tend to sling it around. Mainly men tend to abuse it, and it's mainly laid on women. "The spirit of Jezebel, right? Spirit of Jezebel." Anyone ever heard that? It's like the closest thing you can do to cussing in church. "She obviously has the spirit of Jezebel on her."

More times than not, from what I've witnessed, it's because there's been a conflict between a man and a woman, and the man feels like the woman needs to submit in some way, shape, or form, and she's digging her heels in on whatever the issue may be. So therefore she's rebellious and has the spirit of Jezebel on her. More times than not, it actually ends up being not necessarily a rebellious attitude in a woman, but an insecurity of a man when that term gets slung around.

When we actually read the story of Jezebel, we get an extremely different picture, a different image than the character that we know her as. The images of this seductive whore tempting men with her beauty are missing from the story. They're not there. This woman who is utterly rebellious towards her husband, causing reckless havoc in every single relationship she finds herself in—it's nowhere to be found in the story of Jezebel. In fact, quite the opposite is true.

We find a powerful queen who commands respect and submission even from the manliest men who she reigns over, rightfully so. A woman who is so intentional with her power and her words that she strikes fear and intimidation into the heart of the most powerful prophet of God in the Old Testament—Elijah. We find a woman who is so loyal to her husband, so devoted to her marriage, that she would do anything to solidify his reputation as king.

The Meaning of Her Name

What was her downfall? What caused her name to be cursed throughout all of biblical history? See, it's fascinating. And if you're a Bible geek, you may have already known this, but I didn't realize it was actually legitimate. The name Jezebel is actually an uncommon ancient name. Likely her name was Jezebul or Jezebal, meaning "Where is the prince?"

You see, in Sidon and throughout the Near East, a rain god or the thunder god—the god of the crops known as Baal, Hadad or Baal—was worshipped. This god was worshipped in a cycle that was parallel to the seasons. Essentially, his tale was that since he was responsible for the crops flourishing, after the harvest and the fall came, what's the next season that comes? Winter comes, right? Everything gets dark, everything gets cold, everything kind of goes away for a while. And it was believed that Baal Hadad, or Baal for short in the Bible, was slumbering in the underworld. He was trapped. So that's why there were no crops that came up, right? A very similar story is true with Tammuz, further east in Sumer and Babylon.

So when the time of spring would come about and the seasons would burst forth and vitality and life would spring up, widespread worship of Baal would happen and Baal would be seen as awakening from the underworld, giving life. And the pagans would chant, and they would chant, "Where is the prince, the prince of fertility, the prince of this land? Where is the prince? Where is Baal? He is rising up. He is rising up." Jezebel means "Where is the prince?" It's a chant to Baal. And so it makes sense that her name wasn't necessarily Jezebel—it was Jezebul.

What a fitting name for a pagan queen that celebrated Baal and worshipped Baal in Israel. Why do we call her Jezebel then? Well, in Hebrew, Zebul means dung. It means poop. And so the theory goes that the biblical authors, when they wrote this narrative, they rewrote her name to be Jezebel instead of Jezebul. So instead of "Where is the prince?" and the great and mighty pagan divine King Baal, it's "Where is the turd?" It's fascinating. I thought that was funny.

That's what the biblical authors suggest through this prophecy of what would eventually happen to Jezebel here in [2 Kings 9:37](#): "Jezebel's body will be like dung, zebel, on the ground in the plot of Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, 'This is Jezebel.'" So that's your fun Bible fact for the day. It's just kind of interesting—Jezebel, where is the dung?

The Beginning of Her Story

But before we start overanalyzing what her downfall was, let's start at the beginning. And just like the last few weeks, I'm going to retell the story of Jezebel using our imaginations. Get into the mode of imagining this story. It's an expanded version of 1 Kings through her death in 2 Kings.

Imagine sitting in a palace in Tyre and the commotion is getting louder and louder and louder outside the window. It's the spring equinox. The days of darkness, of cold, the rain were over, the sun is breaking forth, the vitality of the land is bringing forth, it's returning. A climactic celebration of life returning to the land is upon the entire kingdom. Here they worshipped Baal-Hadad, or Baal, the god of rain, the god of life and thunder, the god that gives vitality to the crops. During winter, Baal slumbers. The sun darkens, life withdraws from the land, but every spring, at least it was believed, Baal awakens and gives life in these pagan lands throughout the Near East, giving life to the crops, the cattle, and the people.

Imagine Jezebel sitting there as she hears the commotion. She lifts the brush full of dark black ash over her eyes, darkening them, showing not just beauty but power. Her father, Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, was also the high priest of Baal. He may have worn the crown, but she shows her power through her dignity, through her beauty. She walks to the window and gazes out to the kingdom. She hears the cry of the people right in the courts of the temple to Baal, right next to the palace. "Jezebel, Jezebel, Jezebel." She smiles, but also becomes a little frustrated because they're not chanting for her name. They're chanting the cries to Baal. "Where is the prince? He is rising. We welcome his vitality back to our kingdom."

She sits there hearing these things, wondering if she's going to miss this place. Will she miss her community that she's so integrated in? She's being given away into a marriage by her father to a king of the south, to a people who are peculiar. Their history is exclusive, a culture where outsiders are not welcomed, who serve a God who forbids them from engaging in the world around them. But this new king—this new king of Israel—he has a vision. He has a vision to make Israel well known, to make Israel great again throughout the nation. King Ahab, what will he be like? Will he be a strong king? Will he have a good personality? Will he tell good jokes? Jezebel sitting there at her window getting butterflies but also being nervous in this world where daughters of royalty are traded in marriage for political abundance, just like objects. This was her purpose—to be traded for some type of political alliance, to marry a foreign man and solidify the power and expansion of Sidon.

Her fantasies of her future came to a halt as the horses roared to a stop outside. You see here, her caravan to Israel awaits her outside the palace. [1 Kings 16.30](#). The God of Israel. All the kings did of Israel before him. You could say things were coming along nicely for Jezebel as she sat in her palace. In only a few short years that she had made residence in Samaria, after marrying this Ahab, this Israelite king, the people have already started to honor her as the queen, as the queen of Israel. They pay her compliments. They yield to her power. King Ahab seemed a bit immature for such an esteemed king, but with her help, his name will surely go

down in history as the greatest king of Israel, the king that united all of the kingdoms of the East. With her by his side, the political power in this small land would be unstoppable. She looked over at the newly erected temple of Baal on the hilltop. Perfect, she thought. You see, the people here serve Yahweh, a minor family god in her mind, unknown to the rest of the world.

How will Israel ever be taken seriously in the rest of the world when they have nothing in common with the Sidonians or the rest of the Phoenicians, for that matter? What about the Babylonians or the Assyrians? Everyone's heard of Baal. Everybody has heard of Baal-Hadad. That has to be the first step. If Israel's going to be great, they need to be able to relate to the nations around them. They need to speak a common language, if you will. We must establish the cult of Baal here. Train priests so that pilgrimage will happen and Israel will become the most important trading ground in all of the world. In just a few short years, she became known as the queen of the people. She frequented the markets, the villages, even showed support for aiding the poor whenever she could. She became very, very popular. Her beauty shone with popularity.

The Queen of Israel

Why? Good, Jezebel thought to herself. This is starting to feel a lot like home. Finally. My father is a mighty king. I am his daughter. Israel will grow to reflect my name through my efforts. Jezebel and Ahab, leaders of the new Israel, the mighty Israel. There was resistance, however, for almost three years now, a remnant of Yahweh followers plagued this monarchy of Israel, mainly a vagabond prophet known as Elijah, one who stopped the rain and cursed the land to die. No matter, we still have springs available for the towns. The poor citizens in the rural areas, they suffer harshly despite the relief that she organizes monthly for them. As she laments the current drought, a voice comes from behind. Queen Jezebel, excuse my interruption. It was Hamilek, the advisor of the castle. He stated in haste, we have intercepted a small caravan of traitors to the kingdom, rebels right outside in the valley. She turns. We have a national crisis of food and water shortage. Why are you bothering me with news of some political agitators that you have taken captive? We don't have resources nor time to fight politics right now. Our main goal should be the people, the children that are suffering and taking care of everybody. Was the last shipment of water sent out to the north like I requested last week?

My queen, my queen, they are the prophets of Yahweh. They have come to curse our land, followers of Elijah, the great prophet. Imagine silence filling the room. Sitting at her vanity, she looked in the mirror. She had been focusing so much on dealing with the crisis at hand, the drought, people dying, taking care of everybody, serving them, making sure everyone gets fed

and has water, making sure the animals don't just die off, that she failed to focus on actually fighting back, actually facing this rebellion. What would her father do in this situation, this great king? What would he do? What ought she do as the Sidonian queen of Israel? Jezebel, where is the prince? How do I act in order to get Baal's attention, that he may rise once again and bring forth the provisions of the land? How do I protect my people?

Silencing the Opposition

The days of this Yahweh, the ancient family god, are surely dead. She reached for her eye brush and applied the coal. The black ash glides over her eyelid, through the valley of her eye. If the days of Yahweh are dead, then so should the prophets of Yahweh be dead. She turns to the advisor. Kill the prophets of Yahweh, all of them. Send word to every soldier, every mercenary. All of these prophets are enemies of the future state of Israel. They defy the king and they terrorize Israel's people. They are terrorists bent on bringing their ancient law of brutality into this new world. We must do whatever it takes to secure our borders at once. See, Jezebel had been hard at work promoting the cult of Baal throughout the Israelite borders. In fact, 450 newly recruited priests had just returned from Sidon. They were trained to minister in the temples of Baal, offer sacrifice, and tend to the communities of people. Hmm. There is even an additional 450 prophets of Asherah to come. Who knows, maybe the older generation of Yahwist will view Asherah as some type of ancient consort to their God and they will join in the common ways of the world around us. Increase the prophets of Baal and Asherah, decrease the prophets of Yahweh. This is how we win. This is how we protect our people.

The advisor nods. Yes my queen, we will root these evildoers out. We will protect the people. Hail Queen Jezebel, the protector of the people of Israel. The campaign seemed to be a success. In just a few short months, the remaining prophets of Yahweh were silenced by the sword. Not the mission that Jezebel had planned to pursue. True kings and queens pursue peace. True kings and queens pursue relationships, covenants, treaties. They don't just go around slaughtering people. It affects how people view you, and it also affects the taxes that you no longer receive from people because they're dead. This is not what you want to do. But when those threaten the livelihood of the community, they must be rooted out. Security and power must come first, no matter what. It must be preserved.

The Contest of Gods

Ahab breaches the doorway. Oh, hello, my king. What is this occasion that brings us together today? Ahab begins to speak, approaching his queen. I've been away for about a month now

with our servant Obadiah, searching for springs and fields to take our cattle to so they don't die off. We must find a solution. We must find a way to appease Baal or even Yahweh for rain. Jezebel grits her teeth under her breath. I know, dear, I know you don't serve Yahweh, but this is the God of our fathers. We must respect the history of my people. We are a people of tradition, founded on stories of salvation through the mighty strength of Yahweh our God. Your Yahweh seems to have stopped the rain, if you didn't forget already, causing immense suffering for his own people. This doesn't sound like a God that deserves to be worshipped to me. I'll tell you what we need to do, Ahab. We need to find this would-be prophet Elijah. He's the one that cursed the land. He's the one that cursed the cattle and the people. Even now, the children are dying in the streets despite the water relief that we're trying to import in.

Well, that's why I stopped by, dear. I've actually been in contact with Elijah for negotiations. He wants to meet at the top of the Mount of Carmel. Negotiations? We don't negotiate with terrorists, Ahab. You should kill him once and for all. Jezebel, I don't disagree. But what if we kill him and the curse of the land never gets lifted? Elijah is a powerful prophet of the old ways, the old religion, the last of his kind. Come now, don't be disheartened. He wants to negotiate the end of the drought of the land via some sort of contest. A contest? Yes, some contest between the gods. Listen, I'm taking both the newly trained prophets of Baal and the newly trained prophets of Asherah with me to the top of the mount, okay? Nearly a thousand voices to rouse the power of Baal against his single voice. Jezebel looks over. Just remember, our focus is on the people and the strength of our nation. Don't get too distracted by these games that you're playing with him. As you wish, my dear. Ahab winks with certainty as he walks out the door, hops on his horse, and the armed escorts make their way off to the top of Mount Carmel.

Fear and Doubt

This would be the last time that Jezebel felt secure as queen, the last time that she felt invincible as queen. From now on, fear would consume every moment of her life. Doubt. Her, the daughter of Ethbaal, queen of Israel. Her, the one that a single prophet made a mockery of. How dare he, this Elijah. He calls her a whore of the people. He calls her a sorcerer, a witch, all false allegations, for she never once cheated on Ahab. And she's never once revealed herself to even another man, nor is she a petty witch. She was the strength of Israel. It all depended on her. All of Israel's fate rested on her shoulders. She became weary of constantly comforting her husband's anxiety and insecurities caused by that fateful afternoon on that mountain. That petty competition with Elijah whom Ahab stupidly allowed to make the terms for. That afternoon when a single old prophet slung insults at the throne, at Jezebel, at the kingdom that they were

putting everything into. How he, the king, just sat there idly and watched every new trained prophet of Baal and Asherah be slaughtered at the command of this single man, Elijah.

No matter, Jezebel thought to herself. Elijah was no match for her. He can manipulate my husband, a weak man in whom I need somehow to keep strength for. But she grinned thinking about the reports of the result of the single letter penned in her voice. How it struck Elijah in his heart, how he ran as a coward into the mountains, a short relief as she looked on at her kingdom.

Ahab did go on to win a victory over an army, Ben-Hadad. It was impressive. He showed skill, strategy, and power as he wielded the armies of Israel against these invaders, but he still lacked the courage to kill the general, instead making treaties with them. Smart, I suppose. Perhaps it will lead to a stronger economy for Israel. As the sun began to rise across Jezreel, Ahab marched into the palace dining hall frustrated, throwing a temper tantrum, something he had been doing commonly, throwing objects and screaming absurdities.

Obsessed with the Vineyard

"Naboth! Curse be Naboth! It's not fair! It's not fair! I want it! I should have it! Curse be Naboth!"

Jezebel, sitting near the hearth, brushing her hand. "Ahab, calm down. Whatever is the matter now?"

"Naboth, the owner of the vineyard near the valley."

"Yes, I know the one. What about it?"

"I offered him the grandest royal deal for his vineyard. We got the rain back and I want to grow some vegetables. I want to start juicing. We need to be healthy. And I want to plant my vegetable garden there. It's near the palace. It's perfect. And I offered him more than what it was ever worth."

"Okay, he refused you. Come now, eat some breakfast. You're king. You have thousands of other gardens to choose from. Come on. Surely this can't be enough to ruin your entire day."

"I don't want to eat. I want the garden."

"He won't sell you the garden because of the old laws of Yahweh."

"What does that mean? What old law? You're king. Why can't you just buy it? I don't understand."

"The old laws of Yahweh. When our people came, the tradition of our story, as I have to remind you over and over again, we were rescued by Yahweh. He brought us this land and he gave each tribe a parcel of land and it's inherited down through families and every generation. So he says, this is my family's land and because of the laws of the old ways of Yahweh, he can't sell it to me. He wants some of the vineyard."

"Ahab, I just don't understand why he can't stop. Ahab, grow up—eat something, quit whining. You are king now. You are king over Israel. There are none greater. I'm tired of constantly having to remind you of your own power and your own strength. It seems ever since I arrived, I've been pulling the weight of this entire kingdom, making the calls, keeping it safe, providing for our people, and keeping your reputation strong, Ahab. I need you to be stronger as my husband. I need you to carry this kingdom alongside me. Carry your kingdom alongside me."

"Fine. You know what? I will handle this. I will get you the vineyard, okay? Let me show you how to stand in your role as leader over this nation, as king. Sometimes if you want something, you need to take it. You need to be a man and buck up and do it."

Jezebel's Plan

She began writing letters to the elders of the village where Naboth lived.

"Ahab, come here. I want you to see this. Hold a day, a day of fasting for continued grace upon the land, a day where the king and queen will be honored, that's you and me, and in memory, at nightfall begin a feast to break this fast. Now elders, place Naboth in a prominent place during the celebration. Place two men across from him midway through the feast. Have the men jump up and accuse him of blaspheming your God and you. And have his punishment be according to our ways. Signed Ahab king of Israel."

She looks over at Ahab. "Give me your seal."

"Jezebel, what are you doing?"

"I'm showing the people that you are king and you don't take no for an answer. Give me your seal now."

He hesitantly takes off his ring and hands it to her as she seals the letter and sends it to the village. So the elders and the nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the

letter she had written to them. They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite of him and brought charges against Naboth. Before all the people, saying, Naboth has cursed both God and king. So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. Then they sent word to Jezebel, Naboth has been stoned to death.

As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Now get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He's dead. Can't be an inheritance to the family now."

When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down and took possession of Naboth's vineyard.

The Infamous Jezebel

This is the story of Jezebel. This is it. That was the story of this infamous, wicked, pagan queen who was called a whore of Israel because she brought her own gods into Israel when she was traded in marriage. Not a promiscuous harlot, not a witch, no, a foreign queen, given an opportunity to rule a new land, to make it better, a loyal wife who was so devoted that she was willing to do anything to increase her husband's reputation as ruler and king. Jezebel.

Some of us may be thinking, I mean, she's pretty bad, like she got a guy killed. And yeah, she was a pagan, so she worshiped all these idols, but she sounds like a pretty strong leader. She sounds like a really good leader for her kingdom today. Surely leaders of all nations today have done worse than get someone killed. She has strong vision, charisma. She commands authority even in a time when women were supposed to be silent. I found this villain the easiest to empathize with because I could see her as a great queen of one of today's worldly kingdoms.

The Fall of Ahab's House

The story continues. Ahab is confronted, and he yields and repents to God. He humbles himself. His lineage remains cursed. God's going to wipe his lineage out, but only after he dies, which he does shortly after. The leadership in Israel shifts and rocks. And Jezebel does her best to balance the struggle of politics, but she's ultimately overtaken. A new leader is appointed by God to rule the people. Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, anointed by Elisha, the apprentice of the great Elijah, the one who cursed the rains for three years and the one who made a mockery of the king.

See, Jehu, the newly anointed king of Israel, is charged to carry out wiping clean all of Ahab's household. Jezebel sits, a widow now, at her vanity, brushing her hair. Her kingdom, everything she worked for, was falling. She just received word that Jehu had killed her son, Jerome, like a coward, shot him in the back with an arrow in the battlefield. She continues brushing her hair. The herald announces, "My queen! My queen! Jehu! Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, murderer of your son Jerome! He is approaching on horseback! He's coming!"

She continues brushing her hair, unresponsive. "My queen!"

"That will be all. Thank you."

She looks in the mirror one last time, dipping her brush into the black ash, swiping it across her eyelids, reminding herself that she is Jezebel. She is the one that brought power to Israel. Queen of Israel, daughter of Ethbaal. She goes to the window to see the dust being kicked up on horseback. It is Jehu coming. She calls for the eunuch: "Bring me my crown." And she places it on her head.

Jezebel's Last Stand

Beautiful, stunning, powerful. Her eyes meet Jehu coming up below her window.

"Is it for peace, Jehu, that you've come?"

Jehu would not respond.

"Is it for peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" Zimri was a king who murdered his master in order to usurp the throne. The same accusation she throws at Jehu. With venom she spits at him. This man who murdered her son could not even yield to look up to her with his eyes. He calls out to the palace, "Who is with me? Who is on my side? Throw this queen down! She is no longer your queen."

The crown on her head, black ash around her eyes, rings on her fingers—she was the most powerful woman of Israel. In a world where women were hardly allowed to speak, she overshadowed men and commanded them. She ruled. Looking up, she glances one last time at the valley outside the palace, the mountain range of Samaria, and the huge garden her husband had planted near Naboth's Vineyard. This was her home, she thought, as the window rushed towards her.

2 Kings 9:32: "He looked up at the window and called out, 'Who is on my side? Who?' Two or three eunuchs looked down at him. 'Throw her down,' Jehu said. So they threw her down, and

some of her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot. Jehu went in, ate and drank. 'Take care of that cursed woman,' he said, 'and bury her, for she is a king's daughter.'"

There's the story of Jezebel in the Bible.

Identifying with a Villain

Now, yes, I presented it on purpose in a way that hopefully forces you to identify with her in some way, shape, or form. I think here in 2019, in a world that is consumed with politics and power and authority and security, I think we can relate to her. I think she makes a good secular leader. Jezebel, as she became to be known, was not some Israelite that broke Torah. She didn't even know Torah. Her sin was not breaking covenant with God. Honestly, Jezebel was just a foreign girl who was likely forced into a marriage with a stranger named Ahab.

In a world where women are minimized, how will she respond? Will she be weak, submissive, traded like an object? Or will she respond by using her inherited power to make a name for herself, to make a name for her kingdom, Israel?

A Kingdom Against God

So what was so bad about Jezebel? Well, the kingdom that she attempted to create is one that God never wanted. Plain and simple. She brought false gods into Israel, but they had already started worshipping other gods.

The Upside-Down Kingdom

Yeshua himself condemns a kingdom like the one that she instituted. A nation that rules by violence, that lies in order to invade and take someone else's property, and pushes to be the greatest among the world by use of force. It's not a kingdom that God promotes, nor is it a kingdom that God told his people to promote. But yet, that is what we're all taught to be today, isn't it? We win by being better than everyone else, don't we? We win by pushing others down so we can get ahead. We win by showing more power, by having more education, by making more money. We fight to take what we want, and we fight to make more money so that we can buy more of what we want. Is this not the American dream? Power rules. Power tells us that we are better because we wear a suit to work, and people who clean toilets are beneath us, a lower status. Power feeds our minds to think that we're better than others. That person who drives that older car, lives in a lesser home, maybe has a different skin color or talks with an accent —

obviously they are not from this land. They're a foreigner, and therefore they're not as good as us. They're not the same status as us.

A God Who Frees Slaves

See, the story of the Bible is about a God who frees slaves. Sometimes we forget that. Bottom of the barrel people, the Hebrews, slaves in Egypt. He frees slaves and then he empowers them to be servants to the world, making them into a nation that represents his power, bears his image. The people of Yahweh, the God who frees slaves. But instead of showing God's image, we read a story of a people who are not bringing God's light to the world. This people grows in power. They become just like the slave masters they were freed from. Don't believe me? Read Amos. This is how Isaiah starts out. This is what Jeremiah's accusations are. You have become Egypt, because you have sought not to take the power that God's given you and serve the world, but to consume the world and make other slaves beneath you. What was God's response to this? The Babylonian exile and the Assyrian exile. If you want to be the people who are going to enslave others, then I will make you slaves in Assyria, and I will make you slaves in Babylon, just like you were in Egypt.

See, Yeshua's disciples actually struggled with this concept. In Mark chapter 10, verse 35 through 45, two of Yeshua's disciples come to him — John and James — and they ask if they can have the seats of power beside him when his kingdom overruns the world. When he ushers in his grand kingdom, can they sit and rule on his left and his right? The other ten disciples get really upset, likely because they didn't ask first, you know. "Oh, that's a great idea, I want to ask, I want to get this seat." And then Yeshua lectures them. You remember what he says? He reminds them that my kingdom is not like the kingdoms of the world. Starting in verse 42, he calls them together and says...

The Upside-Down Kingdom

A term that we have for Yeshua's vision of the kingdom of God is called the upside-down kingdom, because it's completely backwards to everything that we pursue as kingdoms of the world today. Yeshua comes as a king, as a mighty king, who is vindicated by God, who is carried on the clouds of heaven up to sit at the right hand of God, fulfilling Daniel chapter 7, given authority over all of heaven and all of earth. And he doesn't sit on his throne so that he can steal and pillage and hammer down others. He says here that I've come to rule, and in an upside-down way I've come to rule like no other king has ever ruled. I've come to serve. I've come to serve all, even those who are my enemies. The kingdom that Yeshua was ushering in, the

kingdom this Jesus was birthing, was not a kingdom like Jezebel's. It wasn't a kingdom that had its sights on all-consuming power and security and authority and gain. It was not a kingdom where kings lord over others using power and fear and threats and violence and politics to get what he wants.

Now here we see that the disciples thought it was. These disciples, the closest ones to the master, the closest ones by his side, thought that their attitude needed to be prepared to rule over the nations as if they were masters over slaves, as if they were better, as if they were without sin, and God had chosen them because they were so perfect.

Let the Little Children Come

Earlier in this very chapter, Yeshua lectured them about children, and he said the same thing. In [John 10](#), verse 13, he says — people were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. So set the scene. All these kids — we all love kids, right? We got a lot of kids here. So imagine Yeshua's there, this great rabbi from Nazareth, and he's preaching, and we're just trying to get in and engage with him because he's pretty cool, and he's this wise man of God, this new Moses, this new prophet. And then all these people have the audacity to bring all their kids, and the kids are getting in front of you. Now these kids are four, five, six years old. They don't really know who he is, like I do. Like, certainly it won't benefit them to have an encounter with this rabbi. Like it will benefit me. And these people think that my place deserves to be taken by their four-year-old. So they get upset, and they begin yelling at people. "Listen, your kid's not even old enough to — I mean, what's he know, the Shema, that's about it? Teach him that. He don't know why. Your kid doesn't know all the prophets, doesn't know Isaiah. He doesn't know about the coming anointed one, the Christos, the Mashiach that's coming. You don't understand that this is the Son of Man. This is the one that's prophesied in Daniel. Your kids don't know that. I know that. So I need to be in front of them."

Yeshua — the disciples rebuked them. And when Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He's ticked off. He said to them, let the little children come to me, don't you hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to them. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you. So here he's speaking to his disciples, but I want us to try to get into the story. Truly I tell you. Now what does this mean? And I'm sure we've had lots of discussions about this in Sunday school or Sabbath school or Midrash, and we try to picture children nowadays and, okay, what does it mean to approach God like a child? Maybe that's blind faith, maybe that's not questioning — you don't question your faith, you just, like a blind child, or like a child yells for dada, papa,

abba. Maybe that's how humble we need to be when we approach God. Maybe we shouldn't have the distractions of an adult, right? Because that's going to happen. Although all these things are true, something I feel Yeshua is saying is actually much harder than all of that.

Less Status Than a Slave

See, in the first century, you have — I'm going to call it a caste system, but it was a hierarchy of status, right? You have the lords, the plebeians, you have the free men, you have slaves. And obviously, if you're a free man, you have a greater status than a slave, right? There was one class of people, though, in the first century that had less status than a slave. Can you guess? Children. This is a society where abortion may have been illegal, but a child had no rights in regard to who they were as a human being, unless they were accepted by their father. So let's say there's a child that's born, and you really wanted a boy, but it's a girl. So — an actual ceremony — if you turned your back on the child after it was born, you have disowned the child. The child is now a nobody. What's going to happen to the child? Sell it to the slaves, sell it to the traders, maybe they'll raise it to be a slave or something. Or, if you just want to get through all the red tape, you can take the child out to a field and just leave it there, because — I mean, you're not killing the child, but you're not taking the child in as your family. So whatever happens to the child is the child's fault. It's not your fault. It's a very common practice to leave children in the fields to die — of animals, or the weather, or traders that would come through and pick them up. We read about the Christians in Ephesus who would actually be the ones who would run out to the fields and pick the children up. Most of the time just to hold them in their dying breath so they could give them a proper burial, but other times they would adopt them. But this was Roman culture. This was first century. Theirs is the kingdom.

If you want to be great in this kingdom, you have to assume the same status as a child. Now sure, this means being humble, and this means having faith, and this means running to God like a father, but it also means giving up your status and your assumed position of being better than anybody else. This means that you become, to the world, less than a slave in the way that you're willing to give sacrificially. You submit to serving. You have to submit to giving up the status. This is how you rule. This is how you overtake the world. This is how you show the world what God's sacrificial love looks like. You imitate it. And this is why it's called the upside-down kingdom of Yeshua — because we don't like it, because it's hard.

Who are the people that you look down on the most?

Status and Our Prejudices

Who are the people that you view as having little or no status in your life? We all have someone, I'm sure we're picturing right now. There's got to be somebody. Maybe it is children. Let's try to make this uncomfortable. Can we do that? Great. I'm so excited because I love looking at my own emotions and how I view topics, and if it bugs me and it gets me kind of knee-jerkish, then I know it'll get some of you really upset. So let's try to make this uncomfortable.

Examining Our Own Biases

How about instead of envisioning a nice conservative white brown-haired child sitting at the feet of Yeshua, imagine a darker-skinned child from El Salvador that was not born here. Maybe they're here illegally. Maybe they're receiving more benefits from the government than you are. Do they deserve that? Of course not. Why would they deserve that? No, they're not here illegally. No, they don't deserve that. Is their status as high as a child born here? A good legal citizen? Of course not. Anybody getting there? Anybody slightly bothered by this example?

How about a refugee from Syria, a Muslim receiving asylum here in the USA, getting a fully paid apartment without having to pay taxes, and having a job handed to them. Are you greater in status than they are? Of course you are, you pay taxes here. You didn't take a free handout. You're a citizen here, right?

Matt, are you saying that a legal immigrant should be able to come here and use up our resources? Are you saying that we should just allow Muslims in this country? They could be terrorists. Matt, are you saying that there doesn't need to be a wall? Matt, are you saying, please, I beg of you, fill in the knee-jerk reaction that you're having right now. Please fill it in. The questioning. What's he saying?

The Disciples' Desire for Status

If that's you right now, if you can envision the one person that you refuse to give a higher status to in your brain right now, I'm excited. If you can envision that demographic, I'm really excited for you because you are just like me. We empathize with Jezebel the moment we view our status as above someone else's; that's the moment we become the John and the Jameses next to Yeshua. I mean I've been with you all this time, truly. I'm your closest disciple. So when you come in with hellfire and brimstone, can we have, can we sit beside you and rule with you? Above everyone else, right? Can we make some of the calls? They don't get in the kingdom. They owe you this much in taxes and we want to do that.

Becoming Jezebel, Becoming Israel

The moment we look at someone else's status as beneath our own, whoever they may be, and view someone as having less value in life, we become the Israel that was exiled to Babylon. We become the Israel that forgot that they once had no status, but a God of love made them into a nation. We become the Israel that forgets their God.

So whether it's illegal immigrants or whether it's the person with lighter or darker skin color than yours or whether it's the person who views your politics of this worldly kingdom differently than you do or whether it's a person who wears a suit to work or whether it's the person that you feel has no status in the world, you are called to lower yourself to be their servant in status and in action.

The Hard Message: Self-Sacrifice

That is the hard message of Yeshua—one that I struggle with, and me too—but it doesn't make it any less real and it doesn't make it any less black and white coming from the words of the king. Yeshua's own disciples struggled with it. In order to enter the kingdom, we must choose to give up our status and we must be that servant to the world, a servant to those that the world sees as bottom of the barrel, a servant to those that no one wants. Loving self-sacrifice is the essential way to God according to the Bible. The entire Torah points to this according to Yeshua in loving God and loving your neighbors. This is how life flourishes in God's kingdom.

Two Kinds of Power

So as we conclude, worship team, you guys can come up. The world of Ahab and Jezebel was built on power, it was built on fear, it was built on worldly security. Sure, it may have looked like a righteous kingdom when they served the people, but their servant's heart was actually a heart of greed. If people fear them or love them, it all still equals power for them to increase their own status.

You see, power does not make you a villain. Power is God-given, but the power that is given to you by God is meant to be shared with the rest of the world. We were created to walk a path of emptying ourselves for others. This breathes the vitality of God into the world around us.

"My Kingdom Is Not of This World"

John chapter 18, Yeshua has his final discussion with Pilate, and Pilate's trying to size Yeshua up because Pilate's this big ruler in the world, and he's doing everything he needs to do. And in John chapter 18, verse 35, Pilate, he says, "Am I a Jew? Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it that you have done to them?" And Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight, kill, use power to prevent my arrest by Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

Yeshua is saying, "If my kingdom was like yours, it would have been just like Jezebel. And we would have written letters, and we would have had you accused of something you didn't do, and I would have been freed, and you would be dead. But my kingdom is not like yours."

Serving others, emptying ourselves of greed, selfishness, and corruption—these things are used to gain power in this world. We see it on the news all the time amongst our own political leaders of past, present, and the future. We're citizens of another kingdom though, one that is not of this world, one that has a greater king who rules in a very upside-down way according to this world.

The Call to Empty Ourselves

Are you willing to empty yourself or start that process? Are you willing to sacrifice for others? Are you building your own kingdom and hoarding your own wealth and your own status in order to hold it over other people's heads? That's a question that Yeshua legitimately asked. And I feel like that's one of the takeaways from the story of Jezebel. She did everything right according to our current world standards. Everything right. Cursed by the prophets and forever known as "Where is the dung?" That's not how you rule the kingdom of God.

So please stand as we conclude worship. I don't know how applicable this message is for you today, but I feel like at least in some regard, it's encouraging to know where we need to keep going and we need to keep heading toward in our walk with Yeshua.

Closing Prayer

So I don't know what you're going through this week. I would ask that you would let it go if it's something that is holding you back. I would ask that you would be brave enough to admit the areas of your life that need to be diminished so that His rule can increase. And I challenge you with that. If you need prayer, we have a prayer team off to the sides. We have people here that will support you and pray for you and lift you up and cry with you to stand with you and serve you as the people of God do. And I'm thankful to have that here.

Alvina Malkinu, our Father, our King. Father, I ask that your Holy Spirit would continue to thrive within this community, but within our hearts individually. Father, I ask that at this moment you would prick our hearts and show us the areas that we don't want to see. Show us the areas that we've closed the door in, that we like to keep hidden away, that we like to hold on to. Show us the areas where we need to give and we need to submit and we need to push the assumed status out of our hearts so that we can further emulate you and become your image bearer in reflection of the light of your son, Yeshua, our King. Father, we thank you for the ability to humbly come before you today and make such a request. And we thank you for your love and commitment that never fails.

Shalom, I'm Matthew Vander Els and I hope you enjoyed this message.

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