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Unearthing Jezebel: Reconstructing the Jezebel's and the Black Women's Narratives

Abstract:

Jezebel was a powerful, faithful, and proud Phoenician princess. She represented beauty and hope, though she was restrained in a biblical narrative that was written from the perspective of her enemy. Jezebel's narrative was orchestrated within the walls of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH). Jezebel was an answer to the ideological, political, social, and theological questions and concerns that motivated the study of the Israelites history. She was depicted as erotic, seductive and conniving. Jezebel's biblical narrative became the fabricated narrative for the Israelites' account of their destruction. Jezebel was a caricature who served only to bear the castigation and ridicule of the biblical text and its interpreters.¹ This caricature image of Jezebel, through the narrative of white America, became the fabricated marker of Black women in America. The historical image of Black Jezebel—a hypersexual, seductive and manipulative slave woman—has been one of the most pervasive and evolving images influencing the sexual socialization and perceptions of African American women today. The historical Black Jezebel, the criminalization of Black female bodies, and Jezebel's biblical narrative will be drawn together to address the connection between Jezebel's confined narrative in the Deuteronomist History and the Black female narrative that is restrained in American colonized history. The interlocking of both narratives gave birth to the victimization and criminalization of Black female bodies.

Paper:

Jezebel, a woman whose storyline is much lengthier than any other woman in the Bible, was a foreign princess who became the Queen of Israel. She may be considered one of the most hated figures in the Bible. Phyllis Tribble notes, "No woman (or man) in the Scripture endures a more hostile press than Jezebel."² Jezebel was labeled an adulteress, fornicator, an unclean, lascivious murderer (Galatian 5:19-21). However, the Bible never provided examples of adulterous behavior. Jezebel's promiscuity accusation was a result of the biblical authors connecting Jezebel's worshipping her gods with chasing false lovers. A relationship with a foreign deity is similar to an extramarital affair.³ Jezebel is known in the Bible as the main source for turning God's people towards idol gods (Revelation 2:20). Jezebel's biblical narrative became the fabricated narrative for the Israelites' account of their destruction. With any fabricated story it is important to approach the account from different hermeneutic lenses instead of recognizing the intended purpose of a narrative as the ultimate truth.

The twisted image of Jezebel is still prevalent today and is embedded in how society characterizes Black girls. "The historical image of Black Jezebel—a hypersexual, seductive and

¹Melissa Jackson, "Reading Jezebel from the 'other' side: Feminist Critique; Postcolonialism, and Comedy, Review and Expositor, Vol. 112(2). (2015) 242.

²Phyllis Tribble, "Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 1 (1995): 3-19.

³Janet Howe Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones: Jezebel through the Ages* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), xv

manipulative slave woman—has been one of the most pervasive and evolving images influencing the sexual socialization and perceptions of African American women today.”⁴ The historical Black Jezebel arose during slavery as an explanation for slave owners’ sexual attraction to and sexual abuse of African American women. Jezebel was depicted as a Black woman with an insatiable appetite for sex and was not satisfied with Black men.⁵ Andrea Williams explains, “The slavery-era Jezebel, it was claimed, desired sexual relations with white men; therefore, white men did not have to rape black women.”⁶

Throughout history Jezebel’s name has carried sexual implications, has been linked with prostitution, and has become a term of contempt and abuse. Deborah Gray White states, “Unfortunately for black women, Emancipation and Reconstruction did not stop their sexual victimization. From the end of the Civil War to the mid-1960s, no Southern white male was convicted of raping or attempting to rape a black woman; yet, the crime was common.”⁷

The constructed Black Jezebel lives today. It is an entity of America’s racial DNA and is vested in its institutionalized systematic structures of oppression. Black girls are regarded as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers.⁸ They are not offered the same protection as their white peers, resulting in harsher treatment by law enforcement and the juvenile justice system. Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez explain;

Given established discrepancies in law enforcement and juvenile court practices that disproportionately affect Black girls, the perception of Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like may contribute to more punitive exercise of discretion by those in positions of authority, greater use of force, and harsher penalties.⁹

From the time of slavery Black girls were not considered children and so worthy of safety. They were chattels and by the age of two or three they were put to work and subjected to the same dehumanization suffered by Black adults.¹⁰ The perception of the Black Jezebel took away the innocence and security of Black girls and women. The removal of innocence makes Black females more susceptible to be violated, shot down in the streets and treated inaptly by law enforcement.

The conceptualization of Black Jezebel has a direct impact on how Black women and girls are treated in the criminal injustice system. In 2014, the imprisonment rate for Black women (109 per 100,000) was more than twice the rate of imprisonment for white women (53

⁴ Danice L. Brown; Rhonda L. White-Johnson. and Felicia D. Griffin-Fennell. “Breaking the Chains: Examining the Endorsement of Modern Jezebel Images and Racial-Ethnic Esteem among African American Women” (Culture, Health & Sexuality, Vol. 15, No. 5, (2013), 525

⁵ Andrea Williams, “The Jezebel Stereotype,” Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, <https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/jezebel/>.

⁶ Andrea Williams, “The Jezebel Stereotype,” Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, <https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/jezebel/>.

⁷ Andrea Williams, “The Jezebel Stereotype,” Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, <https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/jezebel/>.

⁸Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzzlez, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls Childhood,” SSRN Electronic Journal (undefined), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>.

⁹Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzzlez, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls Childhood,” SSRN Electronic Journal (undefined), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>.

¹⁰Michael J. Dumas and Joseph Derrick Nelson, “(Re)Imagining Black Boyhood: Toward a Critical Framework for Educational Research,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 86 /1 (2016.): 27-47

per 100, 000).¹¹ Black girls are viewed as more adult than their white peers and, therefore, are more likely to be disciplined for their actions. Yet they are also more vulnerable to the discretionary authority of teachers and law enforcement than their adult counterparts.¹² The adult personification of Black girls is called adultification. Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez in their study, *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*, define adultification as “a form of dehumanization, robbing black children of the very essence of what makes childhood distinct from all other developmental periods: innocence.”¹³ The authors wrote, “Adultification contributes to a false narrative that black youths’ transgressions are intentional and malicious, instead of the result of immature decision-making—a key characteristic of childhood.”¹⁴ Viewing Black girls as adult reinforces the Jezebel stereotype of Black females as hypersexualized and combative, thereby, robbing young Black females the protections other females enjoy. Thus, Black girls are five times more likely than white girls to be suspended from school and 20 percent more likely to be charged with a crime.¹⁵

It is important to read the biblical narrative of Jezebel with the ultimate goal of rescuing her hidden story. Jezebel’s true story was never told. Her story is confined in the Israelites’ history, between the lines of the biblical account, and beyond the Deuteronomists’ documentation of her existence. Jezebel’s palms, never buried,¹⁶ are reaching out from beneath the repository of the Deuteronomistic History for someone to grab hold and pull her up from underneath. She yearns to be rescued so her story can be exposed.

The Black female palms are also reaching out from underneath the colonized history that scripted their story, the story of Black female bodies living in postcolonialism and imprisoned in a system that sees them as property. It is important that Black females grab hold to Jezebel’s palms and together erase Jezebel’s defamatory image and rescue the Black female’s narratives from the clutches of the authors of colonial history. Jezebel’s biblical narrative is the Black females’ colonized narrative, which was also written by their enemy. Until Jezebel’s concealed narrative is released from the clutches of the authors of the Deuteronomistic History, the narrative of the Black female Bodies will not be free from the clutches of the authors of American History.

By offering a different lens for reading Jezebel’s narrative with the anticipation that this new way of seeing Jezebel will provide a fresh and positive way of conceptualizing and treating Black Female’s bodies in America. Providing a new alternative that is biblically based, of reading Jezebel’s narrative for the sake of emancipating Black females’ bodies from the grip of

¹¹“Fact Sheet: Incarcerated Women and Girls,” The Sentencing Project, November, 2015, <http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls.pdf>.

¹²Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzlez, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* (undefined), accessed March 28, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>.

¹³Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzlez, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* (undefined), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>.

¹⁴Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzlez, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* (undefined), accessed March 28, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>.

¹⁵Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzlez, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* (undefined), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>.

¹⁶When Jezebel’s was thrown from her window her body splashed to the ground and she was eaten by dogs. Jezebel’s skull, feet, and her palms were the only body parts that the dogs left behind. See 2 Kings 9:30-35 for more detail.

American colonized history, and also from postcolonialism, is a new framework that will enhance the current literature concerning the historical Black Jezebel and biblical studies. It is not enough to know that the Black female body has been perceived and treated as a representation of the biblical Jezebel. It is also imperative to recognize that the Black woman narrative, similar to Jezebel's narrative, is told from the perspective of her enemy.

Unearthing Jezebel: Jezebel and the Deuteronomist Authors.

Jezebel is first introduced in 1 Kgs 16:31. However, her presence is not for her own sake, but for the sake of Ahab, her Israelite husband. Following Jezebel's introduction, her narrative is divided into three stories in the books of Kings. In the first story (1 Kings 18-19), Jezebel is indirectly in a contest between Elijah and the prophets of her god Baal, in which Elijah eventually murders four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. In the second story, Jezebel plots to seize the vineyard of Naboth, a Jezeelite, for her husband King Ahab (1 Kgs 21: 1-16). In the third story Jezebel finds herself in a confrontation with the newly-anointed King Jehu (2 Kgs 9:30-37). Each of these four stories is oppositional in nature, as each time Jezebel is pitted against a male.¹⁷ Jezebel represents the opposite, and her opposition is seen as a weapon against God.

As a result of Jezebel's oppositional status she was labeled an adulterer, fornicator, and an unclean, lascivious murderer (Galatian 5:19-21). She is known throughout the Bible as the main source for turning God's people towards idol gods. Would Jezebel portray herself the same way the Bible depicted her? Would she have seen herself as a threat to God? Jackson says no: "By placing Jezebel so plainly in the role of foreign wife and faithful Baal-worshipper, the Bible flattens Jezebel out, and she becomes little more than a trope—a caricature who serves only to bear the castigation and ridicule of the biblical text and its interpreters."¹⁸ Jezebel's biblical narrative was not written from her perspective. Her enemies told her story, and therefore her voice was shattered, and her truth was repudiated. Lesley Hazleton explains:

When your story is written by those in passionate opposition to everything you believe in, it will be, to put it mildly, warped. Everything becomes twisted; every action, every gesture, becomes not only suspect but turned on its head. The wildest rumors are passed off as fact. Inconvenient facts are ignored or edited out, relegated to oblivion, until all we are left with is not a real person but an image, a morality-tale character.¹⁹

The Deuteronomistic History encompasses the biblical books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings.²⁰ The books of Deuteronomy through Kings constitute a continuous history characterized by a basic homogeneity in language, style, and content. Freedman, Myers, and Beck explain:

The Deuteronomist(s) ordered and shaped these sources, introduced his [there] own distinctive chronology, and inserted his own comments and speeches (often in the mouths

¹⁷Melissa Jackson. *Reading Jezebel from the "other" side: Feminist Critique, Postcolonialism, and Comedy, Review and Expositor* Vol. 112(2), (2015): 242.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 242

¹⁹Lesley Hazleton. *Jezebel: The Untold Story of the Bible's Harlot Queen* (New York: Doubleday, an imprint of the Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc. 2009), 6.

²⁰David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000).

of major characters) at critical junctures in his [there] history. Because the Deuteronomist's compositional technique included selection, editing, and creation of new material, the resulting work was not merely a compilation of tales, annals, and sagas, but a unified work manifesting a deliberate design and a uniformity of purpose.²¹

The Deuteronomistic History is not merely an unfolding of what occurred in the past, but an account to “address the needs of the present and future by studying and learning from the past experience to aid in charting a course for present and future action.”²² The theology of the Deuteronomistic History was a pattern of apostasy, punishment, repentance, and deliverance. Freedman indicated that the Deuteronomists intend “...was to show the exiles that they were in the second stage of that cycle and therefore needed to cry out to Yahweh in repentance.”²³ Nevertheless, one has to be selective and strategic on how to present the past. In the cast of YHWH's people—people that were governed by a patriarchal structure, who worshipped a patriarchal God—had to retell or reconstruct a history that supported an ideology of a superior male dominated regime. Thus, placing the blame for their downfall on an entity that is oppositional would seem more fitting than to blame someone within their own regime.

What better person to target than Jezebel, a foreigner, a woman, and a polytheist. Gaines explains, “The compilers of existing biblical records have total contempt for Jezebel; she is a representative of all that threatens their patriarchal authority and cherished monotheistic.”²⁴ Jezebel was an answer to the ideological, political, social, and theological questions and concerns that underpinned the study of the Israelites history. Her narrative became the construed narrative for the Israelites' account of their destruction. As a result, Jezebel's true narrative was never told. It is still hidden behind the biblical story, between the lines of the biblical account, and beyond the Deuteronomists documentation of her existence.

Story One: 1st Kings 16: 30-33

From a political and economic standpoint, Ahab's marriage to Jezebel makes perfect sense. Jezebel is a princess. She is the daughter of King Ethbaal, ruler of Phoenicia from 887-856 B.C.E.²⁵ From Israel's prospective, alliance with the Phoenicians through the marriage of Jezebel to Ahab, Israel's King, would enhance trade. Such practice of marriage between families of kings was a normal practice in the ancient Near East. “It ensured stability, trade relations, peace, and other collaborative endeavors, such as defense and construction.”²⁶ However, for the Deuteronomistic Historians envisioning Israel's monarchic past, Ahab's marriage to Jezebel became immoral. Hence, Ahab marriage to a foreign woman who worshiped a foreign god was

²¹David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000).

²²Marvin A. Sweeney. *I & II Kings, The Old Testament Library* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 1

²³Steven L. McKenzie, “Deuteronomistic History,” David Noel Freedman ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary 6 values* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2: 161-162

²⁴Janet Howe Gaines. *Music in the Old bones: Jezebel Through the Ages* (Southern Illinois University, 1999)xiv.

²⁵Marvin A. Sweeney. *I & II Kings, The Old Testament Library* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2007), 1.

²⁶Carey Walsh. “Why Remember Jezebel?” in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination* Ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi; (University Press Scholarship Online, 2013), 3

apostasy, which onset the cycle of the theology that undergirds the Deuteronomistic history. Jezebel, therefore, is the focal point for narrative disgust in the story of 1 Kings 16: 31-33.

Verses 30-33 evaluate Ahab's reign, which "serves the theological interests of the DtrH insofar as it emphasizes that he committed more evil than all who were before him."²⁷ However, vs. 31 pinpoints what he did that gave him the status of the supreme evildoer: "he took as his wife Jezebel, daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians" (1st Kings 16: 31b). The Deuteronomists do not tell us much about Jezebel's Phoenician life, beside that she is the daughter of King Ethbaal. We do not know if she has a mother or siblings; how old she is when she married Ahab, or if she had a choice in the marriage arrangement. She is a pawn positioned between two kings, her father and husband. Phyllis Trible indicated that "Jezebel enters Israel in an arrangement between males. Husband and father define her."²⁸

Although she has no voice in the opening story of her narrative, Jezebel is blamed for Ahab's actions. "Entrapped by hostile editors and male lords, Jezebel appears as an evil object, neither speaking nor acting."²⁹ When we read the text carefully, we see that all of the verbs are connected to Ahab and not Jezebel. Thus, Ahab did evil, took Jezebel as his wife, went and served Baal, worshiped Baal, erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, built in Samaria, made a sacred pole, and provoke the anger of the Lord. Jezebel played a passive role in the story, but her existence bears the affliction of her husband's wrongdoing. At this point begins Jezebel's biblical story in her larger narrative.

Story Two: 1st Kings 19:1-3,

In this story, Jezebel speaks for the first time. Chapter 19 begins with Ahab reporting to Jezebel events that had taken place on Mount Carmel. Again, Ahab is doing the action and Jezebel is the receiver. There are four characters in this episode: Jezebel, Ahab, the prophet Elijah, and the servant. Only two voices are heard—Jezebel and the narrator. Furthermore, the less significant character, Jezebel, the foreign woman, is portrayed as the all-powerful one. Elijah flees from the fear of Jezebel's threat. Nevertheless, Jezebel causing a prophet of God to flee for his life would only result in a negative rendering on Jezebel, an image that supports the Deuteronomists agenda.

The Deuteronomists tried to recall a history that entrapped Jezebel as a villain. "She functioned as a scapegoat of collective guilt for Israel's religious infidelities, past and present."³⁰ Right before the second story of Jezebel's narrative, Elijah challenges Baal, Jezebel's god, to a showdown on Mount Carmel. Jezebel was not present for this event, but she was blamed for it, which resulted in the death of four hundred and fifty of her prophets. Jezebel's reaction to the murder of her prophets was not to surrender to Yahwism but instead to speak words of vengeance to Elijah for killing her prophets. One can question if Jezebel intended to fulfill her threat. If she really wanted to murder Elijah, she would have sent a killer and not a messenger.

²⁷Marvin A. Sweeney. *I & II Kings, The Old Testament Library* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press. 2007), 1206.

²⁸Phyllis Trible. *Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers, Journal of Biblical Literature*, 114/1. (1995) 4.

²⁹ Ibid, 4.

³⁰Carey Walsh. *Why Remember Jezebel?* In *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, Ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi. (University Press Scholarship Online, 2013)

The central element in this story is Jezebel's oath. Jezebel sends a messenger to warn Elijah. Here, for the first time, Jezebel is doing the action, and the Deuteronomists portray Ahab as passive. However, Jezebel's first instance is to send a death threat instead of a sword. "She warned Elijah, thus making it possible for him to escape from the country."³¹ By giving the specific time and date of his execution, Jezebel allows Elijah unauthorized consent to escape. Elijah understands Jezebel's oath, and thus fears for his life. Nevertheless, the Deuteronomists decided that they did not want Jezebel to kill Elijah. I would argue that such a decision was not for Jezebel's sake, but to preserve the reputation of Elijah. How would it look for a foreign woman to kill a prophet of God, the same prophet who just killed four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal—YHWH's nemesis? For the Deuteronomists, the name of Jezebel is condemned, while Elijah's name is applauded.³² However, the Deuteronomist authors could not end the story with Jezebel, a foreigner and polytheist, outwitting a prophet of God. Like any other story, the protagonist must be destroyed. Jezebel, the protagonist in the narrative of the Israelites constructed history, eventually faced a brutal death. But what led to Jezebel's murder? In the next story of Jezebel's narrative, she is portrayed orchestrating the death of Naboth, an innocent man of God. This orchestrated death allegedly became the impetus for the assassination of Jezebel.

Story Three: 1st Kings 21: 5-16:

Chapter 21 begins with Ahab, Jezebel's husband, asking Naboth, a Jezreelite, for his vineyard. Ahab desired Naboth's vineyard because it was close to his palace in Samaria, and he wanted to turn the vineyard into a vegetable garden. Ahab offered to give Naboth a better vineyard or pay Naboth for the value of the vineyard. However, Naboth refused to sell his vineyard because it was a violation against Yahweh rules to give away his ancestral land. Denied by Naboth, Ahab returned home resentful and sullen.

Israelite law was on Naboth's side. The "Levirate Law" indicates that it was critically important for inherited land to remain in the patriarchal family. But if there was no possibility for such a sale, why would King Ahab ask Naboth for his property, and why would Ahab react the way he did when Naboth refused to depart with his ancestral land? Why did not Ahab just take the land? Before the above story, chapter 20 details how Ahab defeated Ben-hadad, the King of Aram, and killed one hundred thousand Aramean foot soldiers in one day.³³ Chapter 20 also portrays Ahab as a mighty warrior. But, in Chapter 21, Ahab is depicted as a petulant child: "Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, 'I will not give you my ancestral inheritance.' He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat."³⁴ But why is Ahab portrayed this way? Is the reason to link Ahab's behavior to Elijah's behavior when he ran for his life (1 Kings 19)—defeated and helpless—in order for the Deuteronomist authors to reenact the scene with Jezebel and Elijah? Unlike 1 Kings 19, Jezebel kills Naboth in the story of 1 Kings 21.

³¹Robert J. Merez: *Jezebel's Oath, 1 Kgs 19, 2* (United Kingdom: Edinburgh, EHP IRS.), 259.

³²Phyllis Trible. "Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers," 4.

³³"They encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle began; the Israelites killed one hundred thousand Aramean foot soldiers in one day" (1 Kings 20: 29).

³⁴"Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, "I will not give you my ancestral inheritance." He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat" (1 Kings 21: 4).

1 Kings 21: 5-16, Jezebel is shown exercising power of authority instead of her husband the King. In verses 5-7, Jezebel and Ahab are in dialogue: Jezebel inquires about Ahab's behavior, Ahab explains why he is resentful and not eating, Jezebel questions Ahab's position as King of Israel "...do you now govern Israel?"³⁵ And, finally, Jezebel indicates that she will give Ahab the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. In verse 16, Jezebel follows through and Ahab obtains Naboth's vineyard.

Although vv. 1-16 do not explicitly mention Jezebel as a foreigner, but the repetition of the relationship of Jezebel to Ahab in this story (where she is referred to as Ahab's wife a total of three times in the story of Naboth's vineyard) links back to the first mention of Jezebel in story 1 Kings 16: 29-34. As Cronauer explains, "This theme of Jezebel as Ahab's wife is tightly linked to the introduction of Jezebel in the proleptic summary of Ahab's reign found in 1 Kgs 16: 29-34...this summary...strongly highlights the negative effects of Jezebel becoming Ahab's wife."³⁶ The link between Jezebel as Ahab's wife in verses 1-16 to 1 Kings 16: 31 implies that Jezebel is not only Ahab's wife, but more specifically, Jezebel is Ahab's "Sidonian" foreign wife.³⁷

The Deuteronomists agenda is to present Jezebel's character and actions in such a way as to highlight that both she and her actions are foreign in comparison to those of a faithful Israelite. Therefore, manipulating Israelite's laws to get what she wants enriches Jezebel's Deuteronomic character. "She is characterized as being cunning (it is her plan), ruthless (she had Naboth put to death), unethical (she used false witnesses), and domineering (she was the one who commands Ahab, the king)."³⁸ Jezebel is a murderer, and more so, a foreigner. She must be destroyed.

Story Four: 2nd Kings 9:30-35

Jehu, former commander in the army of Ahab, is introduced in Jezebel's biblical narrative right before her death. His introduction into the storyline was centered on his ordination as the next King over Israel.³⁹ Jehu's installation came with a directive from Yahweh, to obliterate the house of Ahab along with the worship of Baal, which includes Jezebel. Jehu immediately took steps to secure the throne and went after the house of Ahab. After killing two of Ahab and Jezebel's sons—Joram, king of northern Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah (2 Kings 9:14–29)—Jehu proceeded to Jezebel's palace in Jezreel, where the queen stood waiting for him at her window. With the help of two eunuchs Jehu assassinated Jezebel. Jehu's murder of Jezebel was not solely to avenge Naboth's death, but to destroy the Baal worshipping foreigner who supposedly turned Ahab and the people of Israel towards idol gods. After having Jezebel killed, Jehu slaughtered all the priests of Baal and destroyed the temple and its sacred stone. Jehu wiped out Baalism from Israel. The purpose of Jezebel's death is revealed right after the third story (1 Kings 21: 5-16) in Jezebel's narrative.

³⁵"His wife Jezebel said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful;" (1 Kings 21: 7a)

³⁶ Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003) 174.

³⁷ Ibid, 174.

³⁸ Ibid: 174.

³⁹"Then the prophet Elisha called a member of the company of prophets[a] and said to him, "Gird up your loins; take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. When you arrive, look there for Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi; go in and get him to leave his companions, and take him into an inner chamber. Then take the flask of oil, pour it on his head, and say, 'Thus says the Lord: I anoint you king over Israel.' Then open the door and flee; do not linger" (1 Kings 9: 1-3).

The prediction of Jezebel's death occurred in 1 Kings 21:17-29. 1 Kings 21: 1-16, Jezebel is in charged. But in 1 Kings 21: 17-2, Elijah is back on the scene and seems to be in control. Elijah not only predicts the death of Ahab, he also, with a revenge agenda, predicts the horrific death of Jezebel, "Also concerning Jezebel the Lord said, 'the dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel,'" (1 Kings 21:23). Was Elijah commissioned by Yahweh to prophesy Jezebel's death or was it the narrator, the Deuteronomist authors' who cast the final judgment on Jezebel? A close reading of 1 Kings 21: 17-26, exposes the Deuteronomist authors as the culprits behind the death of Jezebel.

Verses 20-22 speak of the crime of Naboth in general terms and refer to the characters in the second person, ("you have sold yourself to do evil..."); as they do of the punishment ("I will bring evil upon you..."). Next, the text moves smoothly from v. 22 to v. 23 without any indication that Elijah' speech may have ended.⁴⁰ Verse 23 shifts from Ahab's punishment to Jezebel's. The shift is expected: Jezebel was portrayed as playing a central role in the murder of Naboth and therefore should be punished. But in verse 23-26 the characters are referred to in the third person and Jezebel is introduced in the verses. This change in style of writing could imply that there was also a shift between Elijah and the narrator from v. 22 to v. 23? Walsh explains:

In the absence of any textual indicator of the shift from Elijah's speech to the narrator's, the reader looks back to vv. 23-24 and sees that those verses too can be construed as the narrator's words. In fact, several elements points in this direction: both units (vv. 23-24 and 25-26) begin with disjunctive x ... qatal constructions; both refer to Ahab and Yahweh in the third person; and both introduce the figure of Jezebel, who is otherwise unmentioned vv. 17-29. Reconstrued this way, the descriptions in vv. 23-24 are not a prophetic announcement of Yahweh's response to the judicial murder of a single Israelite landowner but the narrator's explanation of how Jezebel's evil influence on Ahab resulted in her doom."⁴¹

Elijah's words merge into Yahweh's at verse 21 and then into the narrator's in verse 23. The punishment from Ahab to Jezebel also moved within these verses, but the reason for the punishment does not moved. Ahab was punished for Naboth's death, but it is questionable if Jezebel's death was a result of Naboth's death or because she supposedly urged Ahab to turn against Yahweh and worship idol gods, "Indeed, there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord, urged on by his wife Jezebel. He acted most abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord drove out before the Israelites." (1 Kings 21: 25-26). Nelson indicates that, "The prophet, God, and the narrator all agree in a single Deuteronomistic chorus. The offense of the royal couple is not presented as a crime against Naboth or the ideal of justice so much as an offense against God."⁴² Could verses 23-26 link back to 1 Kings 18-19; the battle on Mount Carmel, the killing of Baal's prophets and the fleeing of Elijah or even earlier to story 1 Kings 16: 30-33, when Jezebel is first introduced as Ahab, foreign wife, "Ahab, son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and

⁴⁰Jerome T. Walsh. "Methods and Meanings: Multiple Studies of 1 Kings 21." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111/ 2, (1992), 200

⁴¹ Ibid, 200-2001.

⁴²Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 203.

served Baal, and worshiped him” (1 Kings 16:30-31). 1 Kings 16: 30-31 and 1 Kings 21: 25-26 reference Ahab doing “evil in the sight of the Lord.”

Jezebel was slaughtered because of her Deuteronomistic fabricated persona—as an adulterer, fornicator, and lascivious murderer. Up until her death, Jezebel’s narrative was hijacked by the patriarchal Deuteronomist authors. But at the end of her life she took control over the demeanor of how she would die—as a powerful, faithful, proud Phoenician princess. By putting on eye makeup, arranging her hair and looking out of her window, Jezebel dignified herself for her ultimate fate. Parker explains, “Jezebel meets the moment of her death with the confidence that pervades her character. Jezebel is a woman who is also a warrior. She wants to be ready for the impending threat and presents her strongest self.”⁴³ Nevertheless, Jezebel’s preparation for death was also warped by the Deuteronomist authors to support their agenda.

In 2 Kgs 9:22 Jehu accuses Jezebel of whoring, which is the first time Jezebel is reference as a whore in the Bible.⁴⁴ The singular reference to Jezebel as a whore was linked to Jezebel’s appearance at the window before her death and therefore, the act of putting on makeup and arranging her hair was construed as being a sexual act to seduce Jehu. The distorted interpretation of Jezebel’s last days continues to haunt the bodies of Black women and girls in post-colonialism.

Jezebel’s bravery and self-dignity that governed her death were overshadowed by the Deuteronomist authors’ tactic of typifying her as the bad evil and malicious foreigner. Jezebel’s narrative became the construed narrative for the Israelites’ account of their destruction. At the hands of the Deuteronomist authors, Jezebel was stripped of her identity and culture. She was falsely labelled and stigmatized as other. When she was no longer of use, Jezebel was hurled, splattered, crushed, dismembered, devoured, and turned not into dust but to dung. Lying in pieces on the ground, Jezebel’s remaining body parts – her skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands – provide a haunting colophon to her story.⁴⁵ But that image will no longer be the trademark of Jezebel’s story. Jezebel’s disinterred palms have reached out from beneath the files of the Deuteronomistic History and have grabbed on to the palms of Black women. Together they will erase Jezebel’s defamatory image, provide a new theological and hermeneutic alternative of reading Jezebel’s narrative, and free Black female bodies from the clenches of the authors of America History.

Black Women’s Narratives and the Colonist Authors:

The Book of Kings does not reveal what happened to Jezebel’s remaining body parts, if they were left to rot, gathered up to be buried, or were tossed outside the city walls as trash. What is evident is that although Jezebel’s corpse was devoured by dogs, the spirit of her body survived and lives in her skull, feet, and palms. They live to tell her story, both stories—the hidden account of the Phoenician princess and the tale of the biblical Jezebel. The remaining body parts of Jezebel function as a link between the Deuteronomistic world and her hidden

⁴³Julie Faith Parker, “Re-memembering the dismembered: piecing together meaning from stories of women and body parts in ancient Near Eastern literature,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 23/2 (2015), 174.

⁴⁴Before Jehu kills Jezebel’s son Joram, Jehu called his mother a whore “When Joram saw Jehu, he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” He answered, “What peace can there be, so long as the many whoredoms and sorceries of your mother Jezebel continue?” (2 Kings 9:22).

⁴⁵Julie Faith Parker, “Re-memembering the dismembered: 174.

Phoenician world. Similar to Jezebel's body parts, the Black female body serves as a passage between humanity and non-humanity as well as the articulation of that passage.⁴⁶

The Black female body has been physically defamed, marked by slavery, tortured, sexually abused, and used. When their bodies became of no use, they were thrown out like garbage to waste away in prison. But similar to Jezebel, the Black female body, with all its cuts and bruises survived. It survived to tell her story. The story of how she survived in the midst of oppression. The Black female body remained constant as it moved from slavery, emancipation and Civil Rights.⁴⁷ Black bodies, although controlled by others, were still connected to their souls. Through their souls, the Black female body spoke when their mouths were forced shut. Their bodies bared the autobiographies, the personal narratives of a worldview that was previously lost or concealed by the colonist authors. The autobiography of Black females, Emilie M. Townes explains, "...asserts that human life has or can have meaning. It provides evidence that our actions are worth being remembered. We are agents of time and circumstances. We are not only determined by the flow of events, but we can affect that same flow through our act of being."⁴⁸ Black women wrote to proclaim that they were not mere passive features in history but individuals who helped move and shape history—their own history. Black women's autobiographies reposition themselves in history; they provide a helpful entrance into a period and a people who have not been examined closely.⁴⁹ Black female existence has been examined and scrutinized through the eyes of white America. Their stories have been fabricated to support the ideology of American's inhumane system. However, through Black women's personal narratives, an accurate account of what it is like to live in a body that is both Black and female, in a system of oppression, is presented. Townes expounds:

Through autobiography, the Black writer demands that the white social and cultural structure reckon with the reality of black life rather than the image white society holds of Black life. The search for identity ends with the Black autobiographer discarding the mask he or she wore to survive in the midst of oppression. The act of revealing who he or she is demonstrates selfhood and freedom."⁵⁰

Freedom for Black women is founded in the unearthing of their hidden stories. Jezebel's freedom is also located in the resurrection of her concealed narrative. Both narratives reveal a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding: to reveal to the reader their self-worth and to develop an authentic self-image.⁵¹ Black women write for the purpose of redefining and claiming their identity. They are proud of their blackness, but continue to struggle with the image of how they are portrayed by white America—as Black Jezebel. Jezebel cannot write her narrative, but because she continues to live in the bodies of Black female, Black female personal narratives become Jezebel's resurrected narrative and Jezebel's resurrected narrative becomes Black female personal narrative. Black Jezebel is reevaluated and set free in Black women's

⁴⁶Sharon Patricia Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*, New Americanists (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 43.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 43.

⁴⁸Emilie Maureen Townes, "Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope" *American Academy of Religion Academy Series*, vol. 79, Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, (1993): 18

⁴⁹ Ibid, 18

⁵⁰ Ibid, 28

⁵¹ Ibid, 33

literature. She is no longer seen as detrimental to the Black female body but as an essential component of their history. Jezebel is a proclamation for Black women instead of an icon of deviant sexuality.

Conclusion

Racism fueled with religion manufactured the inhumane system of slavery in America and became the catalyst for the creation of the Black female narrative in American History—the Black Jezebel narrative. Such narrative gave birth to the criminalized Black body, the systems of mass incarceration, capitalism, and oppression. The Black Jezebel account has been embedded in the fabric of American culture and into its institutions. Religion and how it has been used in the manufacturing of American History has to be reexamined and repositioned outside the rims of American History. Religion has to be extracted from the clutch of American History and used to dismantle the systems of oppression. Repositioning religion as a tool for justice would release Black female bodies from the hold of imperialism. Similar to the Deuteronomist authors, Black females wrote to understand their past, present and future experiences. They wrote “...as a process of reconstructing the past out of the psychological needs of the present.”⁵² However, unlike the Deuteronomist authors, Black females did not fabricate a history or demoralized a people or person in order to make sense of their inhumane treatment by others. Instead Black females wrote to reconstruct a history that was lost, obscured and ignored.⁵³ Black women wrote to reposition themselves outside of American History and into their own history. They wrote to claim their voices and to shed light on the Black community:

Black women writers function as continuing symbolic conveyors and transformers of the values acknowledged by the female members of the Black community. In the quest for appreciating Black women’s experience, nothing surpasses that Black women’s literary tradition. It cryptically records the specificity of the Afro-American life.⁵⁴

The history of the Black women experiences is found in their stories. From slavery to present-day incarceration, Black women wrote narratives that interact with American history in order to establish their identity.⁵⁵ They wrote to ... “destroy pervasive, negative orientations imposed by the mores of the larger society.”⁵⁶ These stories provided an account of what life was like for Black females living in America. They gave a voice to an experience that was otherwise hidden or distorted in American colonized history. Black Women autobiography mirrored Black reality:

Their writings are chronicles of Black survival. In their plots, actions, and depictions of characters, Black women writers flesh out the positive attributes of Black folks who are hidden beneath the ordinariness of everyday life. They also plumb their own imaginations in order to crack the invidiousness of worn-out stereotypes. Their ideas, themes, and

⁵²C W E. Bigsby, *Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies*, vol. 50, *The Second Black Renaissance: Essays in Black Literature* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 183.

⁵³ Townes, “Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope:” 22

⁵⁴Katie G. Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 60.

⁵⁵ Townes, “Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope:” 22

⁵⁶ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*: 62

situations provide truthful interpretations of every possible shade and nuance of Black life.⁵⁷

With hope and faith as the blood and oxygen oozing through the veins of Black female bodies and escaping through their narratives, they rescue God from the grip of racism and reposition God standing with them. This God is a God who sees Black women as Jezebel, not the biblical Jezebel but the bold, courageous, proud, Phoenician princess—a God separated from racism, pushing with Black women against the wall of oppression, preventing it from collapsing on their bodies. Faith merged with hope enables Black females to return to the Bible to reclaim their history, to rewrite their past, edit their present, and compose their future.

⁵⁷Katie G. Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 68

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