

Juniper as shade in I Kings 19:3-5
**The Story of the Wicked Queen
And the Prophet of God**

Who was the wicked queen? We are talking here of JEZEBEL. She has been called “the woman who was a she-devil” and “the Lady MacBeth of Hebrew History” and “the woman who forgot that no one can trifle with God.” She is the first female religious persecutor in history. She was the daughter of Ethbaal (man of Baal), king of Zidonians who worshipped Baal, Ashtaroth and Astarte gods. Her story is told in I Kings 16 through 21 and in II Kings 9. This is in the time of the Phoenician empire and the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah.

Jezebel married Ahab, Hebrew king of northern Israel. After their marriage, Ahab began following Baal. He built a temple in Samaria to house 450 prophets of Baal; Jezebel built a sanctuary in Jezreel for 400 priests of the god Ashtaroth. She personally fed these 400. Jezebel proceeded to attempt to destroy all worship of Jehovah-God.

BUT GOD SENT ELIJAH THE PROPHET to King Ahab. He gave God’s message to Ahab, predicting three years of draught. He didn’t reappear before Ahab until the end of the three years, at which time he challenged the prophets and priests of Baal to a contest to reveal whose God was the real one. He called all 850 of them to Mount Carmel. They built two altars – one for Jehovah and one for Baal. The true God had to prove himself by sending fire to light the wood.

The prophets of Baal got to go first. They shouted themselves hoarse; they sliced themselves with knives – all day long. No response. Then came Elijah who rebuilt his altar (which they had torn down) by stacking 12 stones. He dug a 3-foot trench around the altar. He arranged the wood on the altar and laid an ox on top of it. He poured four barrels of water over the altar. Three times! Then he walked to the altar and pleaded “Lord answer me so these people will know that you are God...” Fire came down from heaven and burned up the sacrifice. It burned the water up. It burned the stones up. The crowd went wild! They fell on their faces and said “The Lord He is God!” The prophets of Baal were seized and slain. And then the Lord sent rain on the parched land.

But the triumphant Elijah had yet to reckon with Jezebel! When she heard about the slaughter of her well-fed priests and prophets, she swore a terrible oath to destroy Elijah “by tomorrow”! Elijah felt the fury of a murderous woman was more than he could face and fled for his life to Beersheba (in the south) where he left his servant and fled another day’s journey (about 20 miles) into the wilderness and collapsed under our **juniper tree!**

Under the juniper, Elijah said to God “it is enough, take my life”! He was physically and mentally depleted. He was suffering nervous exhaustion. He was overworked. He couldn’t take any more. (Ever been there?) He had had a great success on Mt. Carmel, but he felt that he was the only one left in Israel that worshipped Jehovah-God. What was left to live for? He fell asleep.

God let him sleep, then sent an angel to refresh him with some fresh baked bread and a jar of water. He ate then slept some more. A second time the angel woke him up and gave him food and told him to eat because the journey was too great for him. (Ever feel your journey is too great for you?) But Scripture tells us that the strength of that food lasted him for forty days and nights (I Kings 19:8) as he proceeded to Mt. Horeb (Sinai) to meet with God. (Real energy food).

There God met him. He treated him to a spectacular display – strong wind, earthquake and fire. Elijah loved it all! Then came the still, small voice of God. God sent him back to the scene of danger and action. BUT God encouraged him. He was *not* the only believer left in Israel. God told him there were still 7000 left who didn’t worship Baal. God then told him a couple assignments he needed to do and that He would be giving him Elisha for a helper and successor.

But what about Jezebel? Here is the rest of the story – and it is not pretty. Jezebel continued her murderous behavior (read all about it in I Kings 21). These stories we don’t have time to look into today. She did, however, die a horrible death (II Kings 9:33-37). She was thrown from a window, speared, trampled by horses and eaten by dogs. All that was left to bury was a skull, feet and hands. She had plenty of opportunity to turn to Jehovah-God. But she continued to defiantly fly in His face and suffered the consequences. Romans 6:23 reminds us that the wages of sin is death. May we not be like Jezebel. May we accept God’s free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Just as God provided for Elijah’s needs, He provides for us in our times of discouragement. A good verse to help in times of discouragement is Philippians 4:8 “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*” Sometimes all we need to conquer discouragement is to change our thinking, change our thought focus. Share some ways you have been encouraged by Scripture in your times of discouragement.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “Through the Bible” (J Vernon McGee); “All the Women of the Bible” (Lockyear); “Her Name is Woman” (Gien Karssen). Manners and Customs of the Bible (James M. Freeman)