

Revelation 2:21-23

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rev/rev-2/revelation-221-23/>

Jesus explains that He gave the woman whom He calls Jezebel the chance to repent, but since she refused, He will deal with her accordingly, as He will with all of us when we are judged for our actions.

After Jesus addresses the way that the church is corrupt due to their allowing the woman in Thyatira, whom he calls *Jezebel*, to teach falsely and lead believers astray, the letter turns to address Jezebel's culpability when it says, *I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.*

The chances God gave the Old Testament Jezebel to *repent* might have been when Obadiah hid one hundred of the Lord's prophets so that Jezebel wouldn't kill them (1 Kings 18), or perhaps when Elijah had all of Baal's prophets killed after Baal failed to bring fire down from heaven and God was proved to be powerful (1 Kings 19). Or perhaps after she killed Naboth in order that her husband, King Ahab, might have his vineyard (1 Kings 21).

The Jezebel in this passage is being judged by God for leading the believers in Thyatira into "acts of immorality" (Revelation 2:20). For this she will face judgment, as God will *kill her children with pestilence.*

The Old Testament Jezebel's death is recorded in 2 Kings 9. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, has just become king over Judah. However, the prophet Elijah has anointed Jehu to be the new king. So Jehu has come to see Jezebel. When she heard that he was coming:

"She painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out the window."
(2 Kings 9:30)

This is consistent with the profile of Jezebel being a seductress and a temptress: She is doing this to Jehu here, with her adorning of makeup.

"As Jehu entered the gate, she said, 'Is it well, Zimri, your master's murderer?'"
(2 Kings 9:31)

The Zimri being referenced here is a man who had overthrown King Ahab, Jezebel's husband at an earlier time, but, within seven days, Zimri had been overthrown himself because he didn't have adequate support. By calling Jehu "Zimri," Jezebel is saying that he doesn't have enough backing to overthrow Ahaziah, and that it is not worth trying because Jehu will just be toppled too.

In response to this accusation of a lack of support, Jehu:

“lifted up his face to the window and said, ‘Who is on my side? Who?’ And two or three officials looked down at him. He said, ‘Throw her down.’ So they threw her down, and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trampled her under foot.”

(2 Kings 9:31-33)

The people that threw Jezebel to her death were those who were close to her, likely the eunuchs who took care of her. But they were not on her side, but rather Jehu’s.

Jezebel’s death led to a fulfillment of a prophecy from Elijah that her corpse would be unrecognizable. When they went back out after feasting to find her body and bury it, they found nothing but her skull, hands, and feet:

“This is the word of the Lord, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘In the property of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; and the corpse of Jezebel will be as dung on the face of the field in the property of Jezreel, so they cannot say, ‘This is Jezebel.’”

(2 Kings 9:36-37)

In Revelation, Jesus speaks of a similar fate for the Thyatiran woman He calls Jezebel. Jesus says that her judgment will be:

Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

(Revelation 2:22-23)

Just like the Old Testament Jezebel, the Thyatira Jezebel will be given a chance to *repent of her deeds*. But just as Jezebel failed to repent when given the chance and therefore faced a gruesome death, so will she and the believers *who commit adultery with her* meet with pain and suffering if they continue in their sinful ways.

The Bible treats sexual sin seriously. 1 Corinthians 6 tells us why; because sexual sin is worse than other sins because it is self-destructive:

“Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

(1 Corinthians 18-20)

Sexual sin is set apart from other sin in that it is a sin against your own body. Therefore, it is particularly to be avoided and repented of. God does not want believers to be mastered by their appetites and desires, but to submit their desires to Him and follow God’s desires, because that is how we are actually most fulfilled. The world promises that sexual sin will bring pleasure. In reality, it brings pain and suffering. Consistent with 1 Corinthians 6, the *bed of sickness* that the Thyatira Jezebel will endure could be a natural consequence of her own choices. Romans 1 tells

us that God's wrath on sin is to turn over those who choose sin to their own appetites, which results in what we might term in the modern era as addiction and loss of mental health (Romans 1:24,26, 28).

It seems that Jezebel will have the greater accountability, since she is a self-appointed leader and a false teacher. But there is still responsibility for those who fall under her sway. Because those *who commit adultery with her* will also fall into *great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds*. It is likely that the phrase *commit adultery* here is figurative and applies to those who mimic *her deeds*. The Bible uses the image of *adultery* as a picture for God's people following pagan ways. This image of believers in sin as adulteresses is used by James to illustrate a believer who chooses to follow the ways of the world instead of God:

“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”
(James 4:4)

The responsibility here is upon each person. Each human has been given stewardship of their own choices, and will reap the consequences of their actions. It is encouraging to note that the believers can avoid the dire negative consequences from continuing in their sin if *they repent of her deeds*. When God's people fall into sin, there is redemption and forgiveness available. As 1 John states:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
(1 John 1:9)

God does not enjoy judging people. God asserts in Ezekiel 18 that he has no pleasure in seeing the wicked suffer from their own choices, but would rather they make good choices and prosper:

“‘Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?’”
(Ezekiel 18:23)

However, God makes clear that He takes direct responsibility for ensuring severe negative consequences for those who sin and refuse to repent, as He says *I will kill Jezebel's children* (followers) *with pestilence*. The Greek word translated *pestilence* is usually translated as “death.” The Bible speaks of death as the natural consequence of sin. Death is separation. When we die physically our spiritual self separates from our body. When Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced the death of exile, being separated from Eden. It seems here that by God adding *kill* to *death*, that here God is saying those who follow Jezebel's ways will die physically.

There are other instances where God used physical death as judgment on His people in order to make a point that sin is not the way to go. In Acts, God struck down Ananias and Saphira for lying to the Holy Spirit. This brought the fear of the Lord upon the early church (Acts 5:1-11). Paul speaks of instances where people have died as judgment for taking communion without first repenting of their sin (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). This seems to be a similar instance, where God is

promising to make an example to the church, in order to preserve them from the destructive lifestyle that stems from the perverse teaching of Jezebel.

Lest they think they can hide their sin, Jesus reminds them that He knows their *minds and hearts*. If they repent, He will know. And if they do not repent, He will know. The reason God will see to it that the followers of Jezebel will die is for two reasons:

1) So that *all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts*;

and

2) That God will see that each person is rewarded according to what they have done. As

Jesus says: *I will give to each one of you according to your deeds*.

The recurring theme of the seven letters to the seven churches is that each believer will get direct rewards from God for the choices and actions they made while living upon the earth. This is stated explicitly by Paul in 2 Corinthians:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”
(2 Corinthians 5:10)

This verse from 2 Corinthians speaks of rewards for all actions, both good and bad. This applies to Jesus’s judgment of believers after their death. Revelation 2:23 tells us that God also applies judgement to His people while they are still living. In His last letter, Jesus will state the reason for the chastisement of His people:

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.”
(Revelation 3:19)

The reason Jesus is chastising His people is because He loves them, and does not want them to suffer the negative consequences of sin. In the case of sexual sin, a sin against their own body. Jesus uses each event to conform us to His image (Romans 8:29).

Biblical Text

²¹ I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. ²³ And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.