

Is Makeup a Sin?

Part 2: Jezebel & Other Old Testament Scriptures

*“And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.”
(2 Kings 9:30)*

Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre of Phoenicia. She was the wife of Ahab, king of north Israel, while Asa was king of Judah, or south Israel.

The scholar V. Barzowski interprets Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel as a dynastic marriage intended to cement a Phoenician political alliance. This went back to the times of King Solomon, to give the then inland Kingdom of Israel access to the Mediterranean Sea and international trade.ⁱ The Phoenicians were well known as traders and artisans and ruled a prosperous seafaring kingdom.

Among Solomon’s wives were 700 foreign princesses. Ahab provoked the Lord to anger more than all the other kings. Jeroboam was a sinful king; an even worse sin is seen in Ahab marrying a foreign princess. As a foreign wife of a king, Jezebel would also influence her husband for evil. A consequence of their marriage was the establishment of the worship of Baal and Ashtaroht/Astarte.

For 15 chapters Jezebel is the Queen or Queen Mother, the power behind the thrones of her husband and sons, the source of the worst idolatry Israel has ever pursued, and the motivating factor in the nation’s worse betrayal of its true allegiance to YHWH.

A lack of understanding of 2 Kings 9:22 has led some writers to describe Jezebel as a whore. *“And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?”* Forget about being a “witch”; she “painted” her face, did she not? Therefore, she was a prostitute! The worship of Baal involved sacred prostitutionⁱⁱ, but sacred prostitutes were not married women. Married women could serve part-time as Priestesses, and Jezebel probably served as a High Priestess of Baal, which would have made her like a false Prophetess.ⁱⁱⁱ



Throughout the entire recorded actions of Jezebel we do not read of a loose moral woman seeking love affairs, but Jezebel was fiercely loyal to her husband, Ahab; neither do we read of the activities of a witch. What is described are the actions of a **power hungry queen**. Jezebel loved **power** – not men. She killed and persecuted the Prophets of God (1 Kings 18:4), she plotted and carried out deception, corruption, murder, possession of stolen property, and illegal possession of ancestral property in her move against Naboth, and she apparently carried out that plot in a cool and calculating manner, unconcerned with anything or anyone except the success of her gambit and the power she could wield.

In **metaphorical language**, to turn away from loyalty to YHWH was to act like a whore, or like an unfaithful partner in a marriage, and Jezebel led Ahab and the people of Israel into that kind of unfaithfulness. In **metaphorical language**, to pursue false gods and goddesses is to place one's trust in false powers and participate in "sorcery" – rituals that manipulate and placate false divine beings – and Jezebel led Ahab and the people of Israel in this false worship.^{iv} Jezebel was not a **literal** whore, nor a witch, but Jehu is speaking as a Prophet of God in **powerful metaphors**. 2 Chr. 21:12-13 explains: "... Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and has made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to **go a whoring**, like to the **whoredoms of the house of Ahab**..." (Also see: Ez. 16:28, 33; 6:9; 43:7; Jer. 3:3; 13:27).

2 Kings 9:30-37 "And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it..." sets the scene as happening simultaneously with Jehu's killing of Jehoram and Ahaziah. Some commentators have the peculiar idea that what follows is in fact a **seduction scene**. The argument is that Jezebel has made herself up and presented herself in the window in a desperate last attempt to *seduce* Jehu and thus save her life, but there is NO HINT of this in Kings. This is the view of the UPCI, but how could anyone seriously mistake the scene for an attempt at *seduction*? *Practical Holiness a Second Look*, by David K. Bernard, p169, states, "Without exception, the Bible always associates the use of makeup with wicked women. When heathen Queen Jezebel tried to seduce Jehu so that he would not execute her, she used makeup and ornamentation."

The meaning of Jehu's entrance into Jezreel was clear to Jezebel: He came as the one who overthrew the dynasty of her husband and sons. She understood that her fate as Queen and Queen Mother of the ousted dynasty was final. She too would die. This, in itself, indicates that her makeup and adornment were NOT preparation to *seduce* the new king but to meet him in **full regal fashion**. In his *Guide to the Bible* Isaac Asimov describes Jezebel's last action as deliberately symbolic, indicating her dignity, royal stature and determination to go out of this life as a Queen.^v

The word translated "face" is the Hebrew, 'ayin, #5869 in *Strong's Dictionary of Bible Words* and is the common word for *eyes*. About 589x it is translated "eye" or "eyes" in the Bible.^{vi} The "painting" she did was with stibium, #6320, *puwk*.^{vii} The portion of her face which she painted was the area around her eyes.^{viii} Applying kohl, or stibium, was a **common practice** among Eastern women; Phoenician women commonly used eye makeup. (Pictured below are palettes of Phoenician type for mixing cosmetics before application, limestone and alabaster, 8th-7th centuries BC.)^{ix} Solomon's foreign wives would have worn makeup. Israel traded with Phoenicia, and cosmetics would have been among the imported commodities.



Jezebel also “tired” her head. Some commentators think she arranged her hair elaborately, but “tire” is the Hebrew *pe’er*, #6287, and means, “an embellishment, i.e. **fancy head-dress.**”^x UPCI author, Bernard, has his version of this view concerning Jezebel’s “tire”. On p171 he says, “When Jezebel tried to seduce Jehu, she “tired her head” or “adorned her head” (NKJV). In light of the context, it is unlikely that she simply arranged her hair in a modest manner. It means she arranged her hair elaborately and apparently put ornaments on her head or in her hair.” There is no

evidence of this; neither does Bernard present any evidence.

The seat in the window some seem to see as a practice of loose women beckoning lovers, others think of Sisera’s mother gazing out the window waiting for her warrior son to return from battling the Israelites (Judges 5:28-30). She made ready and chose her own way and place to meet Jehu -- her means of establishing control.

Jezebel’s greeting to Jehu (2 Kings 9:31) is another indication that her makeup and royal trappings, or head-gear, had nothing to do with *seduction*. “*And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?*” Zimri was the army commander who turned traitor and destroyed the dynasty of Baasha by killing the king, Elah, and the whole royal family (1 Kings 16:9-20). His reign lasted 7 days before Omri, Ahab’s father, unseated him. Zimri killed himself. His name was the byword for falsehood and treason.^{xi} Jezebel accused Jehu of being another Zimri, another murderer and usurper, a regicide, beneath Jezebel both morally and physically. She sought to stop Jehu by reminding him of the quick overthrow and death of Zimri.^{xii} Her greeting was **aggressive** and **sarcastic** – far from being *sexual*!

Lesley Hazelton, author of *Jezebel*, presents an interesting view on Jezebel’s seat in the window. Found by archaeologists in the acropolis of the Israelite capital of Samaria are intricately carved ivory bas-reliefs known as the “woman at the window” plaques. No more than 3-4” high and 2-3” across, they show a woman’s head. Her eyes are heavily outlined with kohl, her hair elaborately arranged in a mass of long ringlets, her ears weighed down with ornate earrings. She is framed by a triply recessed window of the kind found in ancient temples, and the windowsill is supported by ornate columns whose capitals echo the arrangement of her hair. The style and the craftsmanship of the plaques are unmistakably Phoenician, not Israelite – clear testimony to Jezebel’s presence and influence.



These ivory plaques, seen in museum showcases, are not merely decorative but ritual objects. The woman at the window is the representation of **Astarte**, and this image of her was as accepted and beloved in its time as is the modern one of the Virgin Mary in her blue mantle with arms outstretched in blessing.

Like Astarte, Jezebel was framed in the window. She would die in the fullest awareness of Astarte, as the human embodiment of the goddess. Not only was Jezebel

thrown down, but the goddess herself was overthrown, and the Queen's death represented the ultimate victory of Yahwism over polytheism.

Eunuchs were often found as the guards and servants of royal women because they were "safe" males who did not threaten the patrimony of the king. With the locus of power shifted to Jehu, the eunuchs shifted their allegiances accordingly. (2 Kings 9:32-33).

Ezekiel 23:40 & Jeremiah 4:30

*"...ye have sent for men to come from far...and, lo, they came: **for whom** thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments..."*
(Ezekiel 23:40)

"And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life."
(Jeremiah 4:30)

"To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids."
(Proverbs 6:24-25)

Jerusalem's unfaithfulness to God was sometimes likened to a woman who was unfaithful to her husband. The message of the prophets, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, in the above texts, was that even though she made herself fair (FOR men to whom she was not married) her lovers would turn against her, and she would be judged. It is within this context the above verses were written.

These verses, plus the one concerning Jezebel, are used by the UPCI as proof makeup is only associated with wicked women in the Bible. The woman in St. Luke 7: 37-47 had long hair, and her sins were many. Does this prove that all women who have long hair are sinners? A harlot in Proverbs 7:17 uses perfume. Does this prove all women who use perfume are harlots?

Painting the eyes was a common custom of the time. Women darkened their eyebrows, lashes, and the edges of the eyelids in order to make the white of the eyes look larger. *Clarke's Commentary* (Vol. 4, p35; Vol. 2, p513) states, "The fashion seems to have prevailed very generally among the Eastern people in ancient times...This staining of the eyes with stibium...was a universal custom."^{xiii}

Other practices mentioned in these verses were equally common. Before the symbolical, adulterous woman in Ezekiel painted her eyes, she washed. The symbolical, adulterous woman in Jeremiah clothed herself with crimson. "Scarlet" is #8144 in *Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* and is the same word translated "crimson" in Jeremiah. The "virtuous woman" of Proverbs 31:21 clothed her household in scarlet/crimson. David, in speaking of Saul's good points in 2 Sam. 1:24, says that he clothed the daughters of Israel in scarlet. The Scriptures mention the women put on ornaments. Jewelry was commonly worn by Hebrew women, Rebekah being the first holy woman mentioned in Scripture adorned with jewelry (Gen. 24:47, 53).

Eye makeup cannot be isolated as the single tool of *seduction*, excluding the other practices mentioned, but UPCI author, Bernard, in *Practical Holiness a Second Look*, p184, states, “Many acceptable things can be done by an evil person or can become evil only because of an evil motive. However, makeup does not fall under this category. [Why not?] The **other things mentioned** all have valid purposes other than ornamentation or seduction, but makeup does not. [Why not?] The **other things** are all mentioned favorably in other passages of Scripture, but makeup is not.” [What about jewelry?] The scriptures in Jeremiah and Ezekiel mention *other things* such as wearing of ornaments, but on p171 Bernard uses both of these texts to support his view *against* jewelry!

Makeup **CAN** be used as a tool of seduction for the purpose of fornication or adultery, but so can bathing, colored clothing, wearing jewelry, perfume, etc. ALL the things mentioned in the texts were done in the context of adultery. It is the **motive and the intention of the heart** behind the actions.

Job's Daughters

The verses in Ezekiel and Jeremiah were written in the First Temple period, during which era there was not widespread evidence of the use of makeup among Hebrew women, but in contrast Job named one of his daughters “Keren Happukh” – “horn of eye-paint” (Job 42:14).^{xiv} *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* points out that her name refers to a vessel made of horn, wherein Eastern women kept the paint used about their eyes to make them appear large and beautiful. *The Critical and Experimental Commentary* gives her name the meaning of “horn of stibium”; *Peloubet's Bible Dictionary* and the *Vulgate*, “horn of antimony” and *Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, #7163, says, “horn of cosmetic.”^{xv}

UPCI author, Bernard, has a peculiar view regarding the name of Job's daughter. On p170 he says, “this no more endorses the wearing of makeup than the names Ruby and Jewel endorse the wearing of jewelry or the name Jade endorses the contents of a jade box.” In **modern times** names do not have particular meanings, but in **Biblical times** the names given to children at birth many times bear certain significance. A long list of examples could be given. In Gen. 2:10 the name, Moses, was given to him by Pharaoh's daughter “Because she drew him out of the water.” In 1 Sam. 4:21, “And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel...” In 1 Sam. 1:20, “Hannah...bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.” Job's daughters were given names with good meanings. One was called Jemima, meaning “fair as the day”, a “dove.”^{xvi} The second, Kezia or Cassia, a highly cherished and fragrant spice.^{xvii} The third was a name linked with what was considered a sign of beauty – the painting of the eyes. If the use of eye makeup were considered a bad practice of wicked women, righteous Job would not have given this name to his daughter! Job's daughters no doubt used makeup on their eyes.^{xviii} “*In all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job...*” (Job 42:15)

Conclusion

There is NO direct commandment in the Bible against wearing makeup. Three or four scattered references to “painting” the eyes do not prove that all women, who wore makeup, were evil. There were other actions involved which could be either good or bad; “painting” the eyes cannot be isolated as evil from the other things mentioned. Many practices other than applying makeup can be seductive. It is the thought and intent of the heart that can make such practices evil.

These verses of Scripture, from the First Temple Era, are not all we have to go on in our study on makeup. We know in the cultures of ancient civilizations applying kohl was a common practice.

Jezebel’s whoredoms refer to the idolatrous worship she introduced into Israel. The nation of Israel, as a whole, committed whoredoms.

The circumstances surrounding Jezebel’s death do not support the view that Jezebel “painted” her face to seduce her executor. Jezebel’s use of eye “paint” no more signified herself as a whore than “tiring” her head, but both indicated her status as a Queen.

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- ⁱ "Jezebel" – Wikipedia; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jezebel>
- ⁱⁱ "Sacred Prostitution in Ancient Phoenicia"; "Ba'al Worship in the Old Testament," by Dennis Bratcher; <http://www.cricvoice.org/baal.html>
- ⁱⁱⁱ "Jezebel: Great Queen or Strumpet?"; <http://www.bible-people.info/Jezebel.htm>
- ^{iv} "Jezebel: Portraits of a Queen", by Patricia Dutcher-Walls
- ^v "Jezebel" -- Wikipedia; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jezebel>
- ^{vi} "Women's Adornment", by Ralph Woodrow
- ^{vii} "Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words"
- ^{viii} "Women's Adornment", by Ralph Woodrow
- ^{ix} "Perfumes and Cosmetics in the Ancient World", by Michal Dayagi-Mendels
- ^x "Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words"
- ^{xi} "Jezebel", by Lesley Hazleton
- ^{xii} "The Wycliffe Bible Commentary"
- ^{xiii} "Women's Adornment", by Ralph Woodrow
- ^{xiv} "Perfumes and Cosmetics in the Ancient World", by Michal Dayagi-Mendels; p40
- ^{xv} "Women's Adornment", by Ralph Woodrow
- ^{xvi} "Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words" #3224
- ^{xvii} "Strong's Expanded Dictionary of bible Words" #7103
- ^{xviii} "Women's Adornment", by Ralph Woodrow