

Unmasking the Jezebel Spirit

John Paul Jackson
(Kingsway, 2002)

A Recommendation

RT Kendal writes on the cover:

This is a book which every leader and every lay person needs to read, and which can even save your church or ministry.

When a friend sent me this book, I must confess to approaching it with some considerable reservations. I have heard the term 'Jezebel spirit' being bandied around too often for comfort, and have seen all too many people chasing 'shadows'. I found this book a revelation, however. It not only made sense of a number of situations we have been involved in ourselves, but explained what was going on with far more insight than we could possibly have done. It also alerts the Body of Christ to see just how widespread this problem really is. So far from being a case of 'crying wolf,' Jackson's teaching unmasks some of the really serious ways by which churches and organisations are being undermined.

Jackson's primary observation is that 'Jezebel' spirits most frequently infiltrate ministries that have a prophetic-intercessory edge. In all too many cases, the net result has been either to slow the movement right down or to cause it to grind to a complete halt.

Given the controversial nature of this subject, Jackson avoids falling into some gaping traps. For example, it is often assumed that someone with a Jezebel spirit is invariably a woman, but he takes great care to stress that this is by no means automatically the case. The longing to exercise power and control is every bit as much a masculine trait as a feminine one. Jackson is equally concerned to stress the difference between an immature person who prophesies imperfectly and a genuine Jezebel spirit. It will not be **his** fault if people fall into the mistake of falsely accusing one another of this phenomenon!

Like any good exposition, the wisdom in this book cuts both ways. We may pick it up hoping to reassure ourselves that we have been suffering the attacks of a Jezebel spirit, only to discover that we ourselves have been displaying an uncomfortably large number of the symptoms ourselves. This is a book we need to approach, therefore, with a great deal of prayerful openness. The best of us lose our cutting edge if we water wrong seeds in our life, and begin to follow after wrong aspirations, rather than after the heart of God. It's major clean up time in the Body of Christ!

A number of leaders to whom we sent copies of this book found in it a convincing explanation for extreme difficulties that they had been experiencing. May this synopsis prove helpful in its own right, and point you, as need may be, to the book itself.

Jezebel and Thyatira

Jackson's scriptural basis centres around an analysis of the historical Queen Jezebel and her relationship with King Ahab. He also mentions the passage in Revelation 2, in which the Spirit of the Lord convicts the otherwise excellent church at Thyatira of the need to take urgent action against a certain prophetess (Jezebel) who was leading people astray.

It seems incredible that a church that was doing so well should have fallen for such things, but it did just as countless churches and organisations are doing today. Jackson exposes how hidden motives combine with a strong desire in certain people to find ways to achieve influence and exercise control. The results of this are as serious as witchcraft itself.

The Jezebel spirit is shown to represent one of Satan's most successful attempts to infiltrate the Body of Christ. Because it operates primarily through gifted and seemingly 'sold-out' believers, it is much more difficult to detect than some more overt immorality or occult activity. Most pastors and leaders ready to assume that a person with obvious prophetic gifting must be blessed with an equally well developed character. This can be a fatal mistake. It is important to note what God expects us to do about such things when we come across a Jezebel spirit operating, and what He will do about them.

Revelation 2:20-24 might seem at first glance to owe more to the language of the Old Testament than the new, but this is our loving Lord who is speaking and He is concerned when admixture in the Church leads to His beloved people being controlled and manipulated. Jackson points out that the Lord insists that the believers in Thyatira decontaminate themselves from the power of this spirit and promises them special rewards for doing so: authority over the nations, and the 'morning star.' (2:25-29)

There is an implied warning, however, that this will be an intense battle. Resisting this spirit will involve suffering but this is ultimately less costly than succumbing to this spirit and following its ways (v22). Ignoring the problem or capitulating in the face of it effectively makes a church or individual leader as complicated as Ahab himself.

I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways, I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations He will rule them with an iron sceptre; He will dash them to pieces like pottery' Just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Salient characteristics of the Jezebel Spirit

Because almost every paragraph tells a story and adds an important part to Jackson's message, I was reluctant to highlight certain aspects of his teaching for fear of shortchanging or misrepresenting the rest. We would wholeheartedly encourage you to make the effort to acquire a

copy of the book (and perhaps consider obtaining an additional copy for your church leaders?) but let's be realistic: not everyone will get round to doing this. In which case, it is surely better to flag up at least some of the key points so that we have at least some idea of what we are speaking about, and what to look for. The issue may or may not have any immediate significance for your own life, but it is highly likely that you will at least know other people who are caught up in similar scenarios, and who would benefit from the specific teaching and warnings that the book contains.

The first thing to note is the way that a person with a 'Jezebel' spirit sets off one person against another by a variety of subtle and not so subtle tactics. Characteristic of this is the controlled use of flattery, not to support but to gain position and control. Such people frequently inform key leaders that there are 'movements' afoot against them, and go on from there to encourage them to remove certain people from office so as to promote their own cause.

Biblically speaking, Jezebel would have had no influence on Israel without Ahab. Every 'Jezebel' needs an 'Ahab' both to establish credibility and to pander to their need to exercise dominion. Often it is husbands, wives or pastors who fall into this category. Jackson shows the pressure and manipulation that the Jezebel spirit exerts on husbands or wives, who almost always end up serving as 'Ahabs'. Without whom these people would have no credibility – or the inflated self-esteem to do what they do.

Ahab bespeaks a mind-set that avoids confrontation and denies fault. The spirit of Ahab loves the position it has and fears confrontation. Someone with an Ahab spirit would rather make peace at any cost, even if it leads to making extreme compromises."

People who follow someone with a Jezebel spirit tend to be emotionally dependent. They have a great inner drive to have a special relationship with someone to make up for their own woundedness. Instead of developing into a healthy intimacy, however, they seek to enmesh and merge with this other person. 'The attempt to fill the loneliness and lack of self-love drives them into co-dependent and often abusive relationships.'

The situation becomes doubly deadly if 'Ahab' becomes infected with a fully fledged Jezebel spirit themselves. Jackson describes how contagious this seductive spirit can be.

The Jezebel spirit always appears ultra spiritual, but, beneath the spiritual mask lies an overwhelming desire to be number one. It loves being noticed and receiving adulation. 'Wanting others to become dependent on them, they rarely find things going well in a church, because they must prove that their spiritual maturity surpasses that of the pastor.' They often dredge up prophecies or dreams from the depths of their soul, or 'borrow' them from other prophets in order to make the best possible spiritual impression.

Such people are normally full of jealousy for those more gifted than themselves, or who receive greater honour and acceptance. As Solomon warned, '*Anger is cruel, and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?*' (Pvbs. 27:4)

Another characteristic of the Jezebel spirit is an underlying **bitterness**. This often takes hold of people's lives when they feel they are being overlooked for recognition or honour. Self-pity sets in and makes a person begin to seek ways of getting the gift they believe they have noticed by others. Since bitterness is often a reaction to a perceived, but possibly illusory, injustice, it will provoke a person to react against all authority, whether just or unjust.

Bitterness brings despair. It is truly sinful and leads to lawlessness. In men, it is often characterised by a deep-seated bitterness towards women, or towards authority figures. It is a bitterness that drives them still harder to display their gift. In women it is often associated with

jealousy.

Just to make things more complicated, the original insights or “words of wisdom” that such people parade usually contain more than an element of truth. At some point, however, vital boundaries are overstepped, and both hearing and actions become mixed with the soul and therefore corrupted. Believing themselves to be spiritually superior to others, they are reluctant to admit to the possibility of being in sin and deception. Demanding blind obedience from others, such people have a great aversion to being reasoned with or questioned. Eventually, these individuals become unteachable and unyielding.’

‘Jezebel spirits’ seduce others to their cause by flattering promises of how greatly the Lord will use them. Once these people express the required level of loyalty, however, Jezebel does an about face. Like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Jezebel starts by telling people about the remarkable spiritual gift that they alone can develop. But then they scold them in a carefully controlled ploy that is designed to keep followers dependent on them and trapped in a low self-esteem from which only they can rescue them. (2 Peter 2:1-3, cf John 5:44) This toxic cycle eats away a person’s self worth and leaves naive young believers prone to fear, and doubting that God speaks to anyone.

Once these people achieve the recognition and position that they crave, they initially respond with false humility. This misleading meekness is short-lived. That false humility is actually a mask for deeply rooted pride and presumption.

Jezebel feels particularly threatened by gifted prophetic people, seeing them as a threat to their zone of control.

When the Balloon goes up

Typically, it is when Jezebel’s position in the church or organisation begins to weaken that they set out to discredit the pastor. A typical tactic is to claim that the pastor is ‘not as kind or as spiritual as he once was’ while Jezebel remains “just as concerned for the people as ever”. This, of course, is a tactic that reminds me of Absalom’s duplicity in rousing the people against King David. See 2 Samuel 15:1-6.

At this point, when they are unable to be ‘number one’ Jezebel frequently begins to start making accusations, using a subtle mixture of truth and lies. There is a great danger of getting sucked into this argument, and replying in kind with counter accusations. This never works. Charges and confrontations must be restricted to the purely factual. Because this is such an emotionally wearing experience, Jackson highlights how important it is for pastors not to react to the pressure by becoming suspicious or contentious themselves in return.

Jackson shows in considerable detail how the Jezebel spirit **imposes its will** on other people, effectively making them pawns to achieve their ends. As we have seen, this is closely akin to witchcraft. This by no means indicates that the individual concerned is a witch in the traditional sense of that word – although Jackson does illustrate the extreme example of a pastor who caught a self-centred woman (a highly committed prayer leader) sticking pins into a doll dressed like the pastor’s wife, all the time praying for the death of various other church leaders. Why was she doing this? Because she was convinced that she was the answer to the church’s need, so that her own cause could be advanced. These are the extremes to which the Jezebel spirit can lead people. Jackson spells out in detail why this Jezebel spirit needs to be **confronted**, and recommends strongly that this should be done by pastors rather than prophets.

Jackson warns that it is almost invariably extremely difficult to pin Jezebel down. For a start they rarely admit to any errors except perhaps minor ones which give the appearance of humility and

act as smoke screens. They are also likely to deny fervently that they have said certain things that have been overheard but not necessarily witnessed by others. They are adept at providing 'alternative' explanations in their desperate attempt to justify the inexcusable.

When Jezebel launches a full blown challenge against a pastor, the effect can be so abrasive and upsetting that it makes them run a long way away, to pastor a church on the other side of the country or even beyond. Jackson's experience is that even there the inner tormenting that comes with being pursued by a Jezebel spirit will continue, until the Ahab weakness in them is acknowledged, repented of, and healed.

All too often, the result is that Jezebel emerges from confrontations relatively unscathed, while the pastor is left severely embarrassed, looking as though he has been guilty of launching unfounded accusations against one who is whiter than white. Someone with a Jezebel spirit will seek to gain sympathy from many people especially when confronted. The individual will claim that he or she has been spiritual abused and if the pastor responds at all defensively, or with any apparent sign of vigour, this merely reinforces their contention that they are being spiritually abused.

All this, of course, can leave the pastor critically exposed. The pastor was not wrong to attempt to deal with the situation; it simply reflects the fact that the degree of deception at work in the situation may have been greater than had been anticipated.

Jackson reminds us that we are not dealing just with a person here, but with dark powers. If pastors are insufficiently alert to the deceptions at work in these situations, they are in danger of coming under the same spirit themselves. At this point the demonic spirit grows stronger, and begins to exercise an increasing measure of control over a Church.

The danger is that having heard the pastor's side of the story, Jezebel is now in a position to anticipate the sort of charges that will be brought against them, and has the time to craft a clever rebuttal, effectively dismantling the case against them. Jackson insists that this problem will brew to hurricane strength if not confronted quickly and fully. Severe action may need to be taken to prevent the spirit from dominating events in the church.

Ministering to the Jezebel Spirit

Jackson gives helpful guidelines for ministering to people with a Jezebel spirit. He advocates that such a person needs to be unflinchingly resolved in his purpose; a 'spiritual eunuch' who will not be tempted by the lust of the eyes or the pride of life. Jackson also supplies a list of 'key phrases' that may indicate that a Jezebel spirit is operating in someone's life. (See especially pages 146-148 and 174-177) There is also an important chapter on 'Reclaiming the Followers of Jezebel' and helping them to reintegrate into 'normal' Christian life after the contamination of being taken in by this virulent deception.

From our own experience of confronting this spirit, my greatest longing has always been to see something good emerge from the battle some 'profit on the trouble'. I was comforted to read Jackson's assertion that, 'If handled rightly, an attack by a Jezebel spirit will ultimately strengthen a church. Small battles produce small victories, but great battles produce great victories in our lives, in our ministries and in our churches.'

Are we right to explore such things?

Bearing in mind Paul's stricture that we should have nothing to do with the works of darkness, do we need to delve into such murky areas? (Eph. 5:11) My answer would be an emphatic 'yes'. I believe the Church is in great need of having its eyes opened to the way in which this spirit, and its followers, operate. The effects of the Jezebel spirit can bring untold oppression and misery

into people's lives, especially in terms of emasculating Christian leaders. The second part of the Ephesians 5:11 verse stresses that we are to expose these works of darkness. We ignore the Jezebel spirit at our peril.

Whilst there is an inevitable risk that a few may go overboard on the subject and start seeing Jezebel spirits at the root of every pastoral problem, wiser heads will recognise that to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and will be on hand to spot dangerous trends and deceptions in time to prevent great damage from being caused. If this book alerts people to such ways, then it will have succeeded in doing precisely what RT Kendal claims, and will save your church or ministry from great harm.

I believe this book sounds a call that we need to pray for these 'Jezebels' who are doing such damage in the Body of Christ to be exposed, as well as for people trapped by them to be restored to humble service. Pray especially for the pastors and leaders who are either enmeshed themselves or who have to deal with such conflicts. To paraphrase Isaiah 11:3-4, may they not 'judge by what they see with their eyes, or decide by what they hear with their ears; but judge with righteousness and make right decisions.'

May the Lord use John Paul Jackson's teaching to encourage many ministries and churches and set them free to be all the Lord would have them be!