

Voices: Jezebel and the question of who goes to hell

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While browsing Twitter on Jan. 22, my thumb stopped scrolling. My face heated as I read a [tweet](#) by Tom Buck, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lindale, Texas,: *“I can’t imagine any truly God-fearing Israelite who would’ve wanted their daughters to view Jezebel as an inspirational role model because she was a woman in power.”*

The timing, the reference and the follow-up tweet all made the target clear. Buck was referring to Vice President Kamala Harris.

I could have scrolled on, because this mindset is nothing new, but I am dedicated to the work of racial reconciliation, especially within the American Christian church. So, I prayed for my Black female friends. I knew it would be another stitch ripped open on an ever-healing wound.

Black women being called “Jezebel”—a biblical character known for her sexuality and misuse of authority—has [a long history](#). The comparison is all too familiar to our Black sisters in Christ.

Questioning VP Harris’ salvation

In the hours and days following Buck’s tweet, Christian leaders condemned it and called out the insensitivity and harsh comparison of Vice President Harris to Jezebel. We also witnessed Christian leaders extending the thought further by also dismissing her faith.

While referring to Buck’s tweet—and the subsequent outcry from newscaster Jake Tapper and *Washington Post* writer Anne Branigin—during

a [podcast interview](#) Feb. 16, Tom Ascol, president of Founders Ministries, said: “Kamala Harris is going to hell without Christ, and she thinks she’s doing well. This Branigin is going to hell, Jake Tapper is going to hell if they think what they’re promoting is actually right, good and true.”

Ascol, in an attempt to make an example of a political figure, instead made a definitive statement on the salvation of others.

Although Vice President Harris, member of the Third Baptist Church in San Francisco, is arguably a liberal politician, Baptists do not hold a space on the soteriology council. Nowhere in Scripture are we granted permission to make a declaration on another person’s faith in Jesus Christ, no matter their political leaning. Though we often lean on, “Are they bearing good fruit,” what authority do we have as Christians to dismiss someone’s salvation?

‘Jezebel’ outside the Bible

I understand characterizing Harris as a Jezebel is based on the conservative stance against abortion and gay marriage. However, the foundational offense of Buck’s tweet has to do with the historical comparison of Black women to Jezebel.

The use of the Jezebel label has been connected to the Black female body since slavery was brought to America. Sociologist Sue Jewell [shares](#): “From the early 1630s to the present, Black American women of all shades have been portrayed as hypersexual ‘bad-black-girls.’” We see this played out throughout our society in the reaction to Black girls and women as hypersexual and immoral.

Barbara Bush, historian and author of *Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838*, noted there was a formation of cultural prejudice and bias toward the African female body when Europeans equated their cultural

practice as a “lack of modesty and lack of sexual morality.” We see this played out in the thinking that Black girls are more adult and more promiscuous in comparison to their white counterparts.

Treading carefully

Reducing Vice President Harris to a Jezebel led to other Baptist leaders taking the additional step of dismissing the Christianity of a powerful woman of color. Tom Buck and Tom Ascol have responded to this charge by stating they do not believe they made a racist comment toward Black women.

Jared Longshore, the podcast host, pointed out Jesus called a woman “Jezebel” when he addressed the church at Thyatira (Revelation 2:20), thereby excusing Buck’s application of the label to Harris. Ascol agreed, saying Buck simply did what Jesus did.

Although the argument claims to be Christ-centered, the truth is Buck’s tweet was a severe disconnect at best, or flat-out racist at worst. Either way, it has no place in the church, the pulpit, the pew, and no place in Christianity. Our Black sisters deserve better.

I am proud to be a Baptist, but we need to tread carefully, friends. We are not the holder of faith, not even our own, and we fail our biblical foundation when we verbally abuse women—in this case, Black women. Denying racial intent does not lessen the racial impact nor does it excuse condemning a fellow Christian to hell.

As followers of Christ, we clearly are called to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbors as ourselves. To take the path of discrediting, dismissing and degrading those created in God’s image is to fall short of these commands.

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