

# **The Beast And Babylon (Part Eight): God, Israel, And The Bible**

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For those who consider themselves Christian, the issue is clear: Do we believe God? Do we really believe He is involved in our lives and that He truly does love us? Are we willing to discipline ourselves and sacrifice, bringing a measure of discomfort upon ourselves, in order to be faithful? Do we not all seek a rich and fulfilling life? However, fulfillment is not generated by variety of experience. Experiencing many things may produce excitement and greater general knowledge, but true fulfillment derives from oneness with God through living His way of life. A dynamic relationship with God is life's missing dimension.

Our judgment is not even one thousandth of one percent of God's, yet even with our limited grasp of things, we see a great deal of disbelief in the Western nations, those that call themselves "Christian." Like their ancient ancestors, Israelites are still seeking fulfillment by pursuing things that cannot possibly produce a complete life. They seem to be doing little more than pursuing their lusts.

The following points summarize the present situation:

1. Babylon has become a spiritual entity, spreading from its Tigris-Euphrates roots to become a worldwide, anti-God system.
2. We live in the end-time nation that epitomizes that system developed to its greatest influence in all of history.
3. We cannot physically flee from it, but we must spiritually flee it, not allowing it to govern our attitudes and conduct.
4. Israel's great weakness is an unbelieving, impatient, hardheaded, fickle, immature curiosity bent upon self-satisfaction, which, if followed, produces unfaithfulness to the covenant through idolatry. It is idolatry because, once ignorance is removed, we are taking sovereignty to ourselves.
5. Our refusal to delay gratification of our desires can be simply stated as a failure to seek to be like God, and instead, disbelieving God, we do little to control our appetites.
6. Israel is indeed religious, but it is not and never has been the Christian nation it has advertised itself to be.
7. Once stripped of their veneer of Christianity, Israel's religions are nothing but neo-paganism, ultimately derived from Babylon, Egypt, and Gnosticism.

## **Does Divorce Mean Abandonment?**

Jeremiah 3:1-5, 8 helps to introduce the subject of this article:

"They say, "If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again?" Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me," says the Lord. "Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; you refuse to be ashamed. Will you not from this time cry to Me, "My Father, You are the guide of my youth? Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?" Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, as you were able. . . . Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also."

Jeremiah wrote this over 400 years after Israel's rejection of God as King and about 840 years after making the covenant at Mount Sinai. Even though by the time of this writing God had divorced the Great Harlot Israel, He still continued to have a fractious relationship with her in order to continue the outworking of His purpose and to fulfill His promises to Abraham, including all the end-time prophecies. In other words, He was not yet finished with Israel.

Ezekiel wrote just shortly after Jeremiah, and he, too, hammered away at Israel's harlotry:

The word of the Lord came again to me, saying, "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They committed harlotry in Egypt, they committed harlotry in their youth; their breasts were there embraced, their virgin bosom was there pressed. Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; they were Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah. . . . Now although her sister Oholibah saw this, she became more corrupt in her lust than [Oholah], and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister's harlotry." (Ezekiel 23:1-4, 11)

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and especially Ezekiel and Hosea use this same metaphorical form to illustrate Israel's faithless relationship with God, connecting directly to the same usage in Revelation 17 and 18. Why is this important? Virtually the entire Bible is devoted to God's purpose for and relationship to Israel and the church. They are the focus of God's intention to reproduce Himself, beginning with His promises and then His covenant with Abraham. God went so far as to enter into a symbolic marriage with Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, revealing the intimacy He considered their relationship to have.

He did this with no other nation. Even when the time came to summon Gentiles into His purpose, the great bulk of those called into the church have been Israelites dwelling among fellow Israelites in Israelitish lands. A person even becomes a spiritual Jew when converted! God's pattern of focusing on Israel continues throughout the Bible to the end-time prophecies. We live in the end time, and God's concern in Revelation, the ultimate end-time book, does not turn from this pattern. God's purpose for the nation of Israel is not yet complete, as Romans 9-11 makes clear.

Thus Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, and the church, the Israel of God, Abraham's spiritual descendants, are still His major focus. Other parts of the Bible reveal that Israel has fully earned the title of "the Great Harlot Babylon" even as she has earned the titles of "Sodom" and "Egypt."

The Great Harlot of Revelation 17 and 18 is not a Gentile church or a Gentile nation because neither of these has ever qualified for that title by corrupting a covenant relationship with God as Israel has. Of this, God says in Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Having done only what comes naturally without the revelation of God, the Gentile world will have its opportunity to have a covenant relationship with Him following Christ's return.

In defiance of God, Israel has rebelled against her responsibilities and played the harlot with the world. She has embraced its ways to such an extent that she has outdone the Gentiles in their manner of life, becoming appropriately named "Babylon the Great." In Revelation 17 and 18, God is describing the influence and character of end-time Israel. He depicts all of Israel in close relationship with the Beast, influencing it, but with the two Joseph tribes, America (Manasseh) and Britain (Ephraim), as the Woman's strongest components—and perhaps America is the one primarily described, as it is the most influential at the end.

### **Root Cause of Israel's Transgressions**

The previous two articles digressed into an aspect of the Woman's identity that is important for us to consider as Christ's end-time house, lest we fall into the same error. These articles covered what the Bible reveals to be the cause and nature of the conduct that earned her the title, "The Great Harlot."

Israel solemnly entered into the Old Covenant agreement with God, saying in Exodus 24:7, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient." Yet, once away from the excitement of being in the actual presence of God at Mount Sinai and under the pressures of daily life, Israel's attitude drifted away from the one she had when she solemnly promised.

In Hebrews 3:12, the apostle Paul reports of Israel's "evil heart of unbelief," the fountain, the source, that gave birth to her irrational, erratic, unreliable spiritual and moral behavior. She could not be trusted to remain firm to her commitment to be faithful in keeping the commandments and thus God's way of life. Had the making of the covenant been a literal marriage between two humans, her conduct would have been as God called it, harlotry. However, this was an agreement between a holy, spiritual God and the human nation He chose.

Though she transgressed every commandment in multiple ways, collectively, the spiritual sin through which her unfaithfulness is most frequently demonstrated is gross idolatry. Israel simply serves herself, following the whim of the moment, so that she might "have fun." Her lack of belief grants her nature free rein to exhibit itself in the self-endowed liberty to follow the lust of her flesh, the lust of her eyes, and the pride of life. She rejects her divine Husband as her Ruler because she wants a king "just like" the other nations.

Except for the occasional times when Israel had good leadership, she conducted her affairs, whether personal, domestic, or international, in the Babylonian manner. Israel, despite her great advantages, became just another kingdom of this world. While God has remained faithful to His agreements and promises through the centuries, she has maintained a hypocritical "God's people" stance toward the world, palming herself off as a "Christian nation."

With the founding of the church following Christ's resurrection, God's spiritual focus turned to the church. Having made the New Covenant with God, our charge now is to be faithful while living surrounded by Babylon the Great. Though it is literally physically impossible, we have the

responsibility to come out of her, and we can come out spiritually by being faithful to God and His commandments. We must not fail as Israel did, for the stakes for us are much greater. The New Covenant is a better covenant than Israel made; it contains better promises, enabling us a much better opportunity to be faithful and grow. However, those greater advantages also render us more responsible than even Israel, God's only chosen nation, because the church of God is God's only chosen church.

### **More Marks of Identification**

A number of marks of Israel's identity as the Harlot of Revelation 17 and 18 remain to be covered. In Part Five, we briefly touched upon a handful of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By fulfilling those promises, God moved to make their descendants "great" in numbers and influence, as well as economically, politically, and militarily—eventually greater than any other nation or group of nations ever in the history of Planet Earth.

Historically, a significant step to this end occurred at the end of July and the beginning of August 1588, when the Spanish Armada of 125 ships was defeated in the English Channel by a number of factors, including poor weather and the failure of the Duke of Parma's army to rendezvous with the Spanish fleet in Calais, France. These factors, combined with the harassing defense of Queen Elizabeth's British navy, doomed the planned Spanish invasion of Britain.

Spain's intent was to defeat the Protestant Queen Elizabeth and restore Catholicism there, but God had other ideas. This victory for the Israelitish people altered the course of history by inaugurating their rise to world dominance. First Holland, then France, Britain, and finally America rose to political, economic, and military greatness on the heels of this major Spanish catastrophe.

John writes in Revelation 17:4, "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication." The elegant clothing, jewelry, and precious metals illustrate her wealth. It is a wealth as among nations, not merely a church. As a group, the Israelitish people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, grew to control around 60% of the world's wealth at the height of their prosperity.

Nobody else on earth is in the position to influence, persuade, and guide as Israel is. Through the misuse of these gifts, Israel has risen to worldly greatness in terms of evil too. Despite its material greatness, it is unfortunately also spiritually great in its immorality, great in its confusion, great in its deviance from responsibility, great in its polluted influence—so great in its power only it can hold the Beast in check and make it do its bidding until God's time comes.

In recent history, Israel—represented primarily by the Joseph tribes—has brushed the world aside politically and economically. No other nation of people on earth today fits the characteristics given in Revelation 17 and 18. However, there are yet more clues to clarify the Great Whore's identity.

In Revelation 17:1, the Woman sits on many waters; in verse 3, she sits on the Beast; in verse 9, she sits on seven mountains, symbolic of nations (Isaiah 2:2-3); and in verse 15, the "waters" are defined as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. The term "sits" appears more than 300 times in Scripture, and most of the time, it merely indicates a posture contrasting to "stands." However, sometimes it indicates qualities of far greater importance.

Proverbs 31:23 says, "Her husband is known in the gates, when he *sits* among the elders of the land." This is a common positive usage and implies a measure of respect and authority. In contrast, Psalm 1:1 reads, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor *sits* in the seat of the scornful." Here, sitting is shown in a negative usage. Matthew 8:11; 23:2; and Acts 23:3 all show that "sit" indicates a position of prominence, authority, and influence for good or evil. One in this position is influential enough to teach, persuade, guide, or force another to follow, imitate, or submit.

This description of the Great Harlot "sitting" in Revelation 17 opens clues to help identify her among the nations: First, even as a person sits on a horse's back and influences it to go this way or that, walk, or run, the Woman teaches, guides, or coerces many nations, perhaps worldwide, to do her bidding.

Since the Beast is clearly an awesome, frightful entity, this fact suggests that her powers are vast. Adding to this evidence of strength, the Beast is described as consisting of peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. The Beast is no pushover, yet at this time in the prophecy, the Woman is in control. Only Israel in the entire world possesses this combination of strength to control something as ferocious as the Beast. The Bible's description of the Beast having the strongest parts of several vicious, carnivorous animals adds to John's amazement over the Woman.

She is never described in any way as similar to the Beast. The Bible always depicts her as one unit. Because of this contrast between the Woman and the Beast, it is distinctly possible that God wants us to understand that the Woman in this end-time prophecy is one people, as contrasted to the Beast, which consists of many diverse, unrelated peoples.

Feeding this thought into present circumstances, God is describing all of Israel in intimate association with the Beast. The world does not conceive Israel in this manner, but God does. It is an association of support, strong influence, and even control. Consider how entwined the nations of Israel are with Europe through political, trade, and military agreements. As the history of the last two centuries prove, the Joseph tribes—America and the United Kingdom—in particular, are the clearest end-time realization of the Woman.

Notice how God specifically mentions the tribe of Joseph in prophecies written in the last decades before Israel fell to Assyria in 721-718 BC:

[Woe to you] who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; who chant to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. (Amos 6:4-6)

Why single out Joseph, even though all of the ten northern tribes were about to fall? Because "Joseph" is used here to represent the entire house of Israel just as "Jerusalem" is used to represent the entire house of Judah. Ephraim and Manasseh were the leading and strongest tribes just before Israel fell, even as they are today. Judah was the leading and strongest tribe in the south, and today, though small, it is again fairly strong and, interestingly, located to the south of the bulk of Ephraim and Manasseh.

In Amos 5:15, God adds, "Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." God may intend these prophecies for all of Israel, but He singles Joseph out because it was the leading tribe politically, economically, and militarily. Interesting, too, is the fact that most of the end-time church resides in Joseph.

Amos 6:1 adds yet another characteristic of Israel that helps identify her by revealing what some of her citizens were saying: "Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria, notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes!" In modern language, God is saying that the average, reasonably well-off Israelite boasted, "Look at the other nations. None are greater than we are." This arrogance echoed what their leaders, the notable persons, said. This boast was probably true, but beneath it, the cancer of their immorality and false spirituality was eating away at their vitals, and God would soon bring this powerful nation down. Amos paints a picture of a people so self-absorbed with pleasure, so self-confident in their power, that they feel free to indulge themselves, ignoring the fact that the entire nation is, in reality, walking on eggshells in every vital area of well-being.

Amos and Hosea, both prophets to the northern kingdom, were contemporaries during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel. Amos began preaching before Hosea, but Hosea preached for a longer time, ending his ministry just a few years before the northern tribes fell to Assyria. In Hosea, "Ephraim" appears 37 times, using it the same way Amos uses "Joseph." Sometimes, it is clear that God means all ten northern tribes, but at other times, He means Ephraim alone. Hosea 10:11 is typical: "Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain; but I harnessed her fair neck, I will make Ephraim pull a plow. Judah shall plow; Jacob shall break his clods." He means all of Israel here, but "Ephraim," the leading tribe's name, is used.

It is Israel, primarily the Joseph tribes, to which the Beast is currently submitting, but the time is coming when events will take a stunning turn, as Revelation 17:16-17 shows:

And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

Within the practical realities of international political, economic, and military affairs, the Beast may be resentful and unwilling to do as the Woman directs. As a wild animal would, it will undoubtedly buck and resist, but until God is ready, it ends up most of the time doing what the Woman wants. The Beast submits to the Woman because she possesses power greater in certain areas than the Beast, a power the Beast resents, envies, and plots to have for itself.

### **What Nations Do**

Babylon's spiritual component indeed influences the Beast, but more than religion affects it, as Revelation 18, a continuing description of the Great Harlot, illustrates. Revelation 17:18 clearly calls the woman a city, not a church, and symbolically, God uses a city to represent an entire nation. At the end time, the original Babylon no longer exists as either a city or a nation. But for the end time, God prophesies of a Babylon, which He calls a Great Harlot, to exist as a city/nation. It certainly has a religious aspect to it, but it is not solely a church.

Revelation 18:9-11 adds to the description of a nation, not a church, as it describes a huge, worldwide merchandising and manufacturing entity that men weep over when destroyed. Religious entities do not manufacture and merchandise. This is vital to understand because Revelation 18 must coordinate with the identity of the Woman in Revelation 17. Thus, Revelation 18, describing what nations involve themselves in, provides another major reason why the Woman cannot be a church.

The Woman of Revelation 17-18 may be religious, but she is far more interested in what produces power and influence in this world. Remember, Israel rejected God, becoming a nation of this world. In chapter 18, the emphasis is on her financial aspects, as the merchants, manufacturers, and shippers of products bewail her destruction, seeing their wealth going up in smoke. No church is manufacturing and merchandising as chapter 18 describes.

The Woman's wealth is a major foundation of her power, enabling her to influence so readily; her economic power adds strength to its other worldly powers. Follow the money, verses 9-11 urge. They clearly portray globalization and all the outsourcing it implies. The Woman is depicted as a huge, worldwide merchandising powerhouse that has promoted the spread of industry all over the world so she might consume what others have manufactured through their craft.

Verses 16-19 show the political figures, merchants, and transportation industry figures weeping because, when the Harlot falls, no one is left to buy or, as we say today, consume, what they produce from afar. They weep because their power, too, has crumbled, and their hopes for even greater wealth have been dashed in her destruction.

Like all worldly nations, the Beast is driven by self-interest, and it is interested in far more than religion. The power of money that merchandising generates drives it. Ezekiel 28:16 says, speaking of Satan, "By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones." In this verse, we find the source of both the Woman's and the Beast's interests and power, and it agrees with Revelation 13:4, which shows the Beast derives its power from Satan. The timing of the prophecies shows the Woman already possessing these powers, and because the Beast undoubtedly greatly covets them, it will make war with the Woman to be free of her domination and take them for itself.

That Revelation 17:1 shows the Harlot sitting on many waters may be intended to show that she is located near an ocean and is thus a seaport city. Another possibility is that God intends us to understand her to be both a seaport metropolis and a powerful merchandising city consisting of many ethnic groups.

Since Rome, formerly a seaport city, and once the administrative, economic, and religious continuation of the Babylonian system, spread beyond the bounds of Europe, could we not consider New York City to represent Babylon in this prophecy? In news reports today, it is not at all uncommon for a city to represent the entire nation. The Bible uses the same device, and most frequently the city named is Jerusalem. Here, though, the city of Babylon represents the entire world's political, economic, religious, and commercial *system*. New York City, the location of Wall Street, is the financial capital not only of the United States, but of the world.

In the recent past, New York City's Mayor Bloomberg has twice called it the capital of the world because of its cultural and financial power, as well as because the headquarters of the United Nations is located there. This is not a major point, as it cannot be proved from the Bible, but it is plausible. Israel contains a city that appears to qualify as "that great city."

### **The Blood of Saints and Martyrs**

What about the blood of the martyrs mentioned in Revelation 17:6? When people read this verse, their thoughts immediately turn to the Roman Universal Church of the Dark Ages. Indeed, that organization's record is a sorry one, but Israel's record against the people of God is not any better.

Jesus cries in Luke 13:34, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!" The Bible is replete with examples of the persecutions of God's people.

It is easy to read the histories of modern Israel over the last two hundred years or so and conclude that today's Israelites would never do such a thing. Since they are nominally Christian, one would like to think that they would never stoop to that. However, human nature never changes. All it takes is the right set of circumstances, and persecution will happen again in Israel, even as the book of Acts witnesses threats and murders occurring among Israelites in the first century!

One may perhaps think that persecution occurred then, but it stopped with the end of the first century. Not so! Many are familiar with *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, which focuses on numerous persecutions, including martyrdom, that raged against Evangelical groups. Another book, *Martyrs Mirror*, as large as *Strong's Concordance*, contains a comprehensive history of 1,600 years of the persecutions, including martyrdom, perpetrated against Anabaptist groups.

"Anabaptist" is a name attached by the world at large to any professing Christian group that opposes infant- and child-baptism because the biblical requirements for baptism are repentance and faith, which no infant or child can meet. One must be an adult of considerable living experience to consider baptism seriously. The most prominent Anabaptist groups in the Western world are the Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites. Many of these and other, smaller groups were quite active even up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

The terms "Evangelical" and "Anabaptist" can and did include the Baptists and, most importantly for us, the church of God. *Martyrs Mirror* begins with the martyrdoms of the apostles because they were, by definition, Anabaptists. Religious persecutions periodically raged in Holland, France, and England, all Israelitish countries, during the Middle Ages. It waned only after the Protestant Reformation had been underway for a century or two, and the Catholic Counter-Reformation joined it.

Anybody who has read American history should know that many of the original settlers to this country came to escape religious persecution in northwest Europe. The Puritans and Pilgrims are prime examples. They fled England for Holland and then left Holland for America.

To think that the Israelitish people are somehow above perpetrating religious persecution is not historically accurate. The Bible clearly shows it happened before and will happen again. Just eleven

years ago, the entire nation witnessed the Branch Davidian massacre in Waco, Texas. This is remarkable to us because the Branch Davidians kept the Sabbath.

Jeremiah 30:7 warns us that a horrific time of trouble lies just around the corner: "Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." This period of trouble is greater than any before it. Persecutions of true Christians will happen again. Revelation 13:15—in this end-time book—confirms that persecutions are just beyond the horizon: "He [the beast from the earth] was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed." This persecution is instigated by a religious figure, the False Prophet, who will arise and promote his competing religion so vigorously as to kill those who do not submit to his idolatrous, pagan brand.

Revelation 6:9-11 verifies that this persecution will be aimed directly at the true church:

When he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

The blood of the saints is already staining Israel's histories, and more will be added afresh to her descendants' despicable and hypocritical anti-God record.

## **Summary**

The Great Harlot is a major player in the biblical record. Virtually the entire Bible, including Revelation, is devoted to Israel and the church. The Harlot is not a Gentile nation or church because neither had a covenant relationship with God. The elegant clothing, jewelry, and precious metals illustrate Israel's wealth and therefore power among the nations.

The Harlot is depicted as one people led by the Joseph tribes and the Beast as many diverse people in a loose confederation. The Woman is pictured as a huge manufacturing and merchandising power. She is hypocritically religious, calling herself Christian but conducting life as immorally as any pagan people. Martyrs' blood was on her hands in the past and will be on her hands again in the near future. More to come.