

## **The Beast And Babylon (Part Nine): Babylon The Great**

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Before leaving the identity of the Harlot of Revelation 17 and 18, we should take a final look at how the Bible describes prostitution, harlotry, or even fornication, as the King James Version may translate the term. We will be able to see more specifically how an entire nation can be guilty of heinous betrayal of a sacred trust that it solemnly vowed to uphold when making a covenant with God.

We need to grasp more fully what motivates the betrayal, what it appears to promise, and what it actually delivers. Then, by comparing these things with what nations do, the harlotry will be clearer. Always remember that at the foundation of Israel's relationship with God is the Old Covenant.

The Bible actually names very few prostitutes. Delilah is certainly the most prominent, and Gomer, Hosea's wife, who symbolizes Israel in its relationship with God, is directly called "a wife of harlotry" (Hosea 1:2). Tamar may have only been playing the part in order to entrap Jacob, and the final verdict is still out on Rahab of Jericho. Whether these two were actually prostitutes is moot because the Bible treats both with sympathetic dignity; if they were harlots, it appears they overcame its pulls. However, such is not the case with prostitutes in general. Scripture views them as dangerous and strictly to be avoided.

### **An Evil Heart of Unbelief**

On this list of biblical prostitutes is the most prominent one in the entire Bible—Israel. By looking at these harlots, we can understand what is driving much of the Israelitish culture. Undoubtedly, the fount of Israel's despicable behavior is what Paul concludes in Hebrews 3:12: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

Israel, despite the fact that God voluntarily revealed much about Himself to her, simply does not believe what He says. The fruit of unbelief is betrayal expressed as departing from the relationship. However, an "evil heart of unbelief" is quite general. To begin, we need to explore one particular step in the process of sin beyond the "evil heart of unbelief."

In addition, we need to understand that our subject is not women who have been forced by their cultures into prostitution. Such a circumstance is far more understandable; women trapped in such a situation are truly victims and elicit our pity. We will be exploring those women who were free to pursue other courses in life yet deliberately chose to prostitute themselves, whether in service at a pagan temple as part of the worship of a god or in making a living. Israel deliberately chose to prostitute herself.

A *prostitute* is "a person, usually a woman, who provides sexual activity in exchange for material security." Dictionaries also define *prostitution* as "debasement for personal gain," and this usage applies to either gender. Additionally, it is "a misuse of one's gifts, talents, or skills," and this too applies to either gender.

Because of these usages, in its broadest sense, prostitution is not confined either to sexual activity or to women alone. The selling of sex by a woman is only its best-known form. A prostitute is anybody who, as we would say today, "sells himself out" or makes compromises for personal gain. The gain does not have to be in the form of money. However, biblically, its descriptions and examples are confined to the illicit sexual activity of women because of Israel being symbolized as a woman. This will be our focus in this article.

A female prostitute is generally distinguished from an adulterer due to her lack of discrimination in choosing her partners. This lack of discrimination is important because it reveals a mindset, an attitude, that approaches what we today might call an "airhead," one who seriously ignores the harsh realities of sin. The attitude also exposes a stubborn addiction to gambling on sin's outcome. The prostitute usually justifies the sin because of her immediate needs.

All sin follows a pattern. The actual act is the next to the last step in a process that, once it starts, often does not take a great deal of time to complete. James 1:13-15 shows:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Here, simply stated, is the process of sin:

1. Temptation triggers desire.
2. Desire stirs the yearning for gratification.
3. Failure to consider the end and to discipline oneself prompt the sinful act.
4. The sinful act brings forth death.

Repeated frequently enough, this process becomes habitual. The Bible pinpoints the source of sin in another way in Matthew 15:18-20:

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

This is another way of saying that it is within mankind's nature to sin. However, this does not justify sin because man's nature can be disciplined far better than mankind exhibits.

If sin is to be stopped, these two areas simply must be dealt with, or sin will continue unabated. The carnal mind—man's normal nature—is at war with God (Romans 8:7), and it is not subject to God's law because, out of sheer unbelieving stubbornness, it will not permit itself to submit completely. This is why God says that He will give us a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26).

The Bible uses the word *heart* to represent all the internal intangibles of human personality. Today, we might say this heart is what makes us "tick." It is the spirit in that heart that lures us—indeed, drives us—to conduct ourselves in a way that is hostile to God. The Bible shows the prostitute having a specific spirit or heart driving her.

God says in Hosea 4:12: "My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God." He adds in Hosea 5:4, "They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the Lord." In a context like this, the Bible uses *spirit* to indicate an immaterial force or power, an attitude, leaning, inclination, outlook, position, propensity, or proclivity to move, act, or conduct oneself in a certain manner or direction.

In Hosea 5:4, the conjunction "for" shows the direct connection between the people's sinful, idol-worshipping conduct and "the spirit of harlotry." This spirit is one of the intangibles that comprise human nature, and its direction of conduct is to be disloyal and unfaithful to her commitment to God ratified in the Old Covenant, in which she vowed, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient" (Exodus 24:7).

Remember, what we are considering is something the entire nation is guilty of, both men and women. We are looking at the streetwalker-type of prostitute only because the Bible provides a clear picture of what motivates her. Once we grasp her motivations, we can extrapolate them to illustrate the whole nation—and ourselves individually because we have participated in the same system, and its drives linger in us.

This, of course, is not to accuse anyone of being a streetwalker. Recall that two of the definitions of *prostitution* are "abasing oneself for personal gain" and "abusing one's gifts, talents, and skills" for the same. For instance, biographers of famous personalities, especially of artists, occasionally write that their subjects felt they had prostituted their gifts to become wealthy.

This is what God implies 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." He expected more and better from them than from any other nation. In terms of the knowledge of God and their access to instruction in the way of life that would produce the most and best toward physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, no other nation came even close to what Israel had because God had chosen them to be His people. Nevertheless, in following the examples of pagan nations who did not know God, Israel frivolously prostituted herself for what she considered personal gain.

Have we not all debased ourselves by indiscriminately accepting the personal gain of the immediate gratification of an unlawful desire, and in the same process, ignored or consciously shoved aside our knowledge of the truth of God? Once we have knowledge of the truth, thus removing our ignorance of God, His way, and His law, if we did not prostitute ourselves, there would be no sin in our lives. The sad truth is that we do not discipline or control ourselves, but instead, we indulge ourselves, and sin occurs. We have prostituted ourselves. We must do better.

God gives us a clear picture of how He perceives a prostitute's characteristics and motivations. While exploring these traits, we need to transfer them to Israel because she is the worst prostitute in the history of mankind.

## The Mind of a Prostitute

Solomon advises in Proverbs 6:20-21, 26:

My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. . . . For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life.

This begins a long section of instruction regarding adultery and harlotry. The first warning is to protect one's heart—not one's body—from her because the body follows the heart's lusts. Since Babylon, the Great Whore, is our spiritual temptation, this is a veiled admonition to steer clear of Babylon. Verse 26 reveals her predatory nature; she preys upon the precious lives of her victims like a cat preys on birds. Satan, the father of Babylon and its ways, "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8).

Proverbs 7:10-21 details some of a harlot's characteristics. A careful study would find that she is described as deviously sly and cunning in that she feigns love, knowing how to pull a man's strings. Her "love" is strictly business—it is nothing but window dressing. Part of her eye-appealing attraction is her purposeful seduction and immodest dress, arousing lust. She is described as "loud," which might be better rendered as turbulent, flighty, confused, inconstant, and unstable. She lacks dignity and gravity, and she is stubborn, defiant, brazen, deliberately obstinate, and headstrong. Further, she is aggressive, impudent, contemptuous, presumptuous, and disrespectful.

Apart from Israel, the biblical record relates the story of one woman, Delilah, who exemplifies the harlot, helping us to zero in on what drives most prostitutes. Only two verses, Judges 16:4-5, are needed to isolate her reason for living as she did:

Now afterward it happened that [Samson] loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver."

What motivates Delilah's harlotry, and what does it teach us from God's perspective? Harlotry has its base in lust, deceit, and treachery, entered into, executed, or performed for what the perpetrator believes is an immediate gain. Not every case of harlotry follows Delilah's exact pattern, but the motivations center on sinning for personal gain, an element that never seems to change.

Delilah illustrates a greedy, smooth-talking temptress. Biblically, she becomes a metaphorical image for the Israelites, who reject God's provision for her as Husband to seek personal, "more satisfying" gain by other means. The driving forces are unbelief and distrust combined with self-indulgence primarily expressed through greed.

The term "greed" may sound harsh, considering the circumstances some women get themselves into before choosing to prostitute themselves. However, we have to learn that nobody has to sin—but something motivates us to do so. *Greed* is "expressing excessive desire, especially for food, drink, or

wealth." We give ourselves and others an almost endless stream of justifications for sinning, but the bottom line is that we are simply unwilling to pay the price to discipline ourselves to do what is right. In our impatience, we convince ourselves that righteousness will not get us anything.

Recall the Great Harlot's boast in Revelation 18:7: "I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow." This is the statement of one who would compromise rather than suffer the loss of what she felt is her due. Greed is a synonym for lust or covetousness. However, it is especially applicable here because of Israel's well-known desire for wealth and comfort.

Notice how clearly Hosea expresses this:

For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully. . . . She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now." For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold—which they prepared for Baal. (Hosea 2:5, 7-8)

### **How Israel Prostituted Herself**

The Bible leaves a clear record that Israel aggressively sought after sin. It was not through mere weakness that she gave in to sin, but she pursued it with intense desire. It is helpful to remember that we are looking into Israel's relations with other nations and their anti-God cultures. Instead of Israel trusting God to provide for her, she used the Babylonish systems of religion, justice, government, education, culture, economics, trade, negotiation, and contracts.

Notice Ezekiel 23:5, 11-12, 16-17, written about 75 years after Hosea:

Oholah [Israel] played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians. . . . Now although her sister Oholibah [Judah] saw this, she became more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister's harlotry. She lusted for the neighboring Assyrians, captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. . . . As soon as her eyes saw them, she lusted for them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. Then the Babylonians came to her, into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their immorality; so she was defiled by them, and alienated herself from them.

Israel vigorously pursued relationships with foreign cultures because she thought she saw a way to benefit from them. However, those who prostitute themselves become entangled in a web of greed and deceit that obscures realities essential to a clear understanding of what is really happening. Eventually, though, alienation occurs, as it did with Amnon in his lustful, one-sided relationship with his half-sister, Tamar (II Samuel 13:1-15). But it was too late. The dirty deeds had been done, and the painful penalties began to be exacted.

Like Gomer in Hosea, Israel prostitutes herself before her lovers/idols, who seem to promise much without demanding as much as God seems to require. She is pictured as throwing herself at what she thinks is easy gain—a quick profit without the hard work.

Israel has followed the pagan prostitutes' habits. Hosea saw this and declares in Hosea 9:1, "You have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute" (NIV). Here, clearly stated, is cause and effect. As a whole, Israel loves the way of the heathen; she has made it hers.

II Kings 17:14-16 tells us dogmatically why God sent Israel into captivity:

Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their father, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

This was Israel's great sin, typified as prostitution: debasing themselves and God through the adoption and practice of the way of the heathen, and rejecting the way, providence, and sovereignty of God for something far inferior, corrupting, and shameful.

In the midst of His law, God warns Israel—and thus us as the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16)—that to do things as the heathens do them constitutes harlotry. Notice how clear His terminology is in His instructions to Israel in Leviticus 20:2-8:

Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech. And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. And you shall keep My statutes and perform them; I am the Lord who sanctifies you.

Isaiah 23:15-18 records another specific harlotry of the heathen world, which Israel adopted as her own:

Now it shall come to pass in that day that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king. At the end of seventy years it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the harlot: "Take a harp, go about the city, you forgotten harlot; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that you may be remembered." And it shall be, at the end of seventy years, that the Lord will visit Tyre. She will return to her pay, and commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. Her gain and her pay will be set apart for the Lord; it will not be treasured nor laid up, for her gain will be for those who dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for fine clothing.

Tyre was the New York City of its day, and here God is prophesying of its defeat. Though it would survive, it would be brought into line with God's purpose for Israel. He depicts the commercial merchandising system of this heathen city as harlotry. Tragically, Israel adopted these heathens' attitudes and ways of doing business. Israel has a proclivity for taking an idea or concept from others, refining it, and making it work better than it did for its originators—yet in so doing she rejects God's economic systems.

Nahum 3:1-4 opens the way to understanding Israel's harlotries from another angle:

Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery. Its victim never departs. The noise of a whip and the noise of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of clattering chariots! Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear. There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses—they stumble over the corpses—because of the multitude of harlotries of the seductive harlot, the mistress of sorceries, who sells nations through her harlotries and families through her sorceries.

God directs this prophecy against Nineveh, not Israel, but it gives us insight into the way God perceives matters and their uses. He considers as harlotry their military power and its use against others. In addition, God repeats His earlier statement that dealing in the occult, sorcery, is harlotry.

Ezekiel 23:5-7 carries this principle of sin into yet another area:

Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians, who were clothed in purple, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. Thus she committed her harlotry with them, all of them choice men of Assyria; and with all for who she lusted, with all their idols, she defiled herself.

Though not clearly stated within these three verses, God refers to political alliances throughout this chapter as harlotry. Israel entered political alliances with neighboring nations rather than trusting God to provide for them in their dealings.

Isaiah 1:21-26 is especially interesting because it describes the harlotry principle working within the social justice system:

How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them. Therefore the Lord says, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies. I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy. I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

Judges were selling themselves out through accepting bribes or for personal advantage in some other area of life, and counselors—lawyers—were giving bad advice to tip the scales of "justice" favorably for their careers. Under such corruption, justice in Israel was difficult to find, so difficult that "the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time" (Amos 5:13).

God makes the contrast between harlotry and faithfulness clear. "Harlotry" is the Bible's code word for faithlessness to God regardless of the area of life in which the faithlessness occurs or of which gender is sinning.

Perceiving Israel's faithless proclivity, God warns Israel as early as Exodus 34:14-16:

. . . (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods, and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.

God does not stop with one form of idolatry because He again specifically warns in Leviticus 17:7: "They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations." And again in Leviticus 20:6, "And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people."

Are the modern Israelitish nations guilty of utilizing and promoting a rapacious merchandising and economic system? Do they use international diplomacy to make treaties and trade agreements against the will of God? Do they employ their militaries to intimidate other nations into submission to their will for political or economic purposes? Are their justice systems shining rays of hope for the weak, or are they corrupted by foolish decisions and strongly influenced by money? Are their religions holy and pure in their spirituality and morality, or do they pander to demons and man at the expense of God?

## **We Must Not Fail**

Idolatry is the sin most frequently mentioned in relation to harlotry—seven different times—and is directly called "whoring." The concept undergirding this subject is the monogamous marriage of the nation of Israel to her Husband, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is in direct contrast to the polytheistic approach of Babylon's religions, which say, "We are all worshipping the same god," but it is an outright lie. How can all these religions, which believe and practice different things, derive from the mind of one pure and holy Being? If they do, that Being is terribly confused!

The Old Covenant lifted Israel to a place of honor as the only nation with whom God had entered into such an agreement. Her proper response should have been gratitude, love, and obedience, but she turned from God's provision to pursue the empty promises of other gods. She sought her own pleasure rather than her Husband's. She failed, and therein lies the major lesson for us. We must not fail! We are in a similar position as Israel. Like her, we vowed to God at baptism to do what He says.

However, there are differences between Israel and us. Hebrews 8:6-7 confirms, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." In contrast to the Israelites of old, we have been given far better promises under the New Covenant, made to ensure that we enter God's Kingdom. In other words, we have far fewer excuses than they did.

Though we have already entered into the covenant, the marriage is not yet "consummated." Like Mary and Joseph before Jesus' birth, we are promised to Christ, but we have not come together. It will not officially be so until His return, as the Parable of the Ten Virgins and other passages show. Unlike Israel, we must prove our loyalty first, before the marriage actually takes place. Under the Old Covenant, the flaw was in the people—they failed. Under the New Covenant, the flaw is still in the people, but God will remove it before the marriage is fully formalized. We are the Bride of promise.

Hosea 1:2 provides the shortest, easiest Bible definition of spiritual prostitution: "When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.'" It is being unfaithful to the Lord in transgressing His way of life for personal gain. It may indeed involve illicit sex, but in principle, unfaithfulness involves breaking any of His commandments, which He gave to guide us through life.