

The Beast And Babylon (Part Seven): How Can Israel Be The Great Whore?

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Daniel 3:19-20 illustrates an important pattern of God:

Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Therefore he spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

The Bible shows that our God follows a pattern of throwing His people right into the heart of the fire, so to speak, at important junctures in history. For His glorification, for a witness, and for our preparation, He positions them in the midst of the issues that pertain to His purpose. God placed Noah as the central figure in the Flood. He told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. He caused Joseph to be sold into Egypt. He called Moses to face Pharaoh, and made Israelites endure the pilgrimage through the wilderness. To witness to Darius, God deemed it necessary for Daniel to spend the night in a den of lions.

We sons of God now find ourselves living in the end-time Babylon, which is growing to the greatest extent of its evil, anti-God influence. We are commanded to come out of her (Revelation 18:4), but that is no longer literally possible due to Babylon being a worldwide system. Our only viable choice is to come out *spiritually* by resisting its destructive influences to depart from God's way of life. What trials might we face, then, that parallel the above examples?

We receive comfort in the fact that God's people of old came through their trials because He delivered them. We have read of God's encouraging victories on behalf of His people, yet we have also seen plenty of evidence of Israel's weaknesses and failures. In our similar situation, it helps us greatly to understand Israel's weaknesses since we are cut from the same cloth.

Hebrews 3:12, 17-19 records the basis of Israel's failures:

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. . . . Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

The apostle Paul points out the fountain that disgorged all the fickle-minded disloyalties of the people of Israel: an evil heart of unbelief. Like an inexperienced and immature teenager, Israel usually believed she knew better than the Creator.

Her sinful, unbelieving heart stands in marked contrast to the faithfulness of Jesus and Moses as noted in verse 2, ". . . who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all

His house." Additionally, "departing from" in verse 12 is a rather weak translation; "rebellious against" is more appropriate. Israel did not merely depart from an obscure set of doctrines, but she rebelled against a living, dynamic Being whom she in her blindness did not really "see" as part of the Exodus and pilgrimage.

Paul's entire exhortation is tied directly to verse 6, ". . . but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." *Whose house we are* is a solemn reminder of our responsibilities to Christ in this deceptively perilous time. We are the people of God, and it is our responsibility to glorify Him by being tenaciously faithful in every circumstance.

Curiosity Killed the Cat

God informs us in Psalm 78:56-57 of a devious characteristic He found in Israel: "Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God and did not keep His testimonies, but turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow." A deceitful bow is one that gives every appearance of being good and true to its purpose until put to the test. In the pressure of battle, it fails to shoot arrows where the archer aims them.

This illustration is one of the many ways God describes His marriage relationship with Israel. He describes her in Ezekiel 16 as being like a beautiful woman, full of promise, who eagerly entered into marriage with Him, vowing to Him as she agreed to the covenant, "All that the Lord has said we will do and be obedient" (Exodus 24:7). However, under the tests of life, she did not behave like a faithful wife. She quickly broke her vows to be submissive to Him and Him only, unfaithfully behaving worse than a common street harlot! Notice this description of their relationship in Ezekiel 16:27-30:

"Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied. How degenerate is your heart!" says the Lord God, "seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot."

Israel's unbelief was the breeding ground for her capriciousness, and her insatiable curiosity and desire for variety continuously led her astray. In turn, this produced the mistrust and unreliability that characterized her relationship with God. We must not follow her example in this—our stakes are so much higher!

Where Do the Clues Point?

In the last article, we digressed to cover a specific area of Israel's identity as the harlot Woman of Revelation 17-18. This article continues that digression. Israel's behavior, as revealed in the Bible, is part of how we can identify her. Though the world may not recognize her, we should be able to because we know how she should have conducted herself. Her behavior is the major fruit of her faithless, rebellious departure from her responsibilities within the Old Covenant.

In Psalm 78:57, God illustrates her as a deceitful bow. To every outward appearance, she was full of promise of success, but when put to the tests of life, she performed badly and failed to carry out her

responsibilities. Thus, her conduct continually missed the mark. God calls her "weak of heart," insatiable, unsatisfied, and contrary in a variety of contexts. Notice how strongly God describes this drive in Ezekiel 6:9:

Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations.

"Idols" represent what she greatly desired and expended her efforts to possess. As the context shows, what she greatly desired God, her Husband, prohibited. These fickle lusts led Israel into relationships with ways of life other than God's. Her drive for the "excitement" of experiencing some new thing led her to make those other ways her ways. God labels this as adultery because she abandoned Him for them.

Usually what Israel chased after was outside the guidelines God gave in His commands. However, to her His commands always appeared to be denying her pleasure. Hosea, though the earliest of the prophets to connect spiritual idolatry to the sexual sin of adultery, was far from the last.

Jeremiah 2:9-26 presents us with a scathing survey of Judah's behavior in the period just before she went into captivity:

"Therefore I will yet bring charges against you," says the Lord, "and against your children's children I will bring charges. For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see, send to Kedar and consider diligently, and see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be very desolate," says the Lord. "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

"Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he plundered? The young lions roared at him, and growled; they made his land waste; his cities are burned, without inhabitant. Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes [Egyptian cities] have broken the crown of your head. Have you not brought this on yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord your God when He led you in the way? And now why take the road to Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? Or why take the road to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River? Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will reprove you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the Lord your God, and the fear of Me is not in you," says the Lord God of hosts.

"For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, 'I will not transgress,' when on every high hill and under every green tree you lay down, playing the harlot. Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine? For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me," says the Lord God.

"How can you say, 'I am not polluted, I have not gone after the Baals'? See your way in the valley; know what you have done: You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways. A wild donkey used to the wilderness, that sniffs at the wind in her desire; in her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they will find her. Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, 'There is no hope. No! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go.'

As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets."

This is an exceedingly intense drive! God compares Israel's urge to show disrespect for Him to a camel or a wild ass in heat! In the next chapter, God divorces Israel (Jeremiah 3:8)!

We need to heed these things because most of us have been called from a nation cut, as it were, from the same bolt of cloth. In us is the same proclivity for unbelieving, stubborn fickleness whose fruit is immature, irresponsible faithlessness to obligations. This wayward drive is actually in all of mankind, but Israel is more responsible because God has revealed Himself to her to such a great extent (Amos 3:1-2).

Satan has succeeded in deceiving the whole world (Revelation 12:9). Among these deceptions is that modern Israel is Christian, but it really practices pseudo-Christianity. She has nonetheless spread her "wine" over the entire world, drugging it with its false religious teachings and poor example and inducing much of the world to follow her.

This deception is particularly dangerous to true church members since the vast majority of God's people live in Israelitish nations. This close proximity has the power to make us feel an affinity with Israel's brand of false Christianity, luring us into producing the same tolerant, nonjudgmental, politically correct, multicultural Laodiceanism commonly displayed in Israelitish countries. It can hinder the required separation from the world by making us feel a lingering oneness with them.

I John 2:15-16 is a basic guideline for avoiding entrapment by this alluring heart of the Babylonish system:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

Since this system has its basis in human nature, it feeds right into the desires for frequent change and variety of experience as the answers to fulfillment in life. The Bible, however, clearly reveals God drawing His children into His oneness, which is diametrically opposed to the world's system. It promotes fulfillment in material things, excitement, gratification of the flesh, and variety of religious experience. Its major fruits are easily seen in the world around us as confusion of purpose, competition, disharmony, disunity, separation from each other and God, and death.

The result is that this world is not a happy place to live in. None of these factors can give a lasting sense of peace, fulfillment, and abundant living because none of them harmonizes with the purpose of God. They can only produce a temporary burst of emotional well-being.

God instructed Israel often and in many ways against this proclivity. They were to seek only Him in His only habitation in Jerusalem. Israel, though, is disastrously curious and incautious and filled with discontented, unsettled, impatient, "grass is always greener" yearnings.

Are We Gamblers Too?

Psalm 11:4-5 reminds us: "The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates." It is good to remember that, just because He makes something available to us—even things that might ordinarily be considered "good"—it does not mean it is good for us! God is continually testing us to see whether we understand how intimately He is working with us.

We are to be self-controlled people, our conduct motivated by faith, because we are a distinct people summoned by the great God for His purposes and His purposes only. God is drawing us into oneness with Him, which is why His Word so frequently stresses His *one* way.

A man was once asked why he risked life and limb to climb a mountain. He replied, "Because it was there." This illustration is supposed to indicate that he rose to the challenges of life and overcame them. What is not often explored is that he did not need to risk life and limb to climb the mountain. He took this risk, this gamble, on himself; God did not require it. His vanity drove him to do it so he could be personally satisfied and tell others he did it.

Exercising faith in God and His Word is not a gamble. Babylon's system is a way of life that promotes gambling, betting that one will be able to beat the odds. It began with Adam and Eve in the Garden and today contaminates virtually every area of life.

Despite our wealth of knowledge concerning nutrition, we gamble with our health in what and how much we choose to eat. How can smokers not know they are gambling with their health when statistics show that each cigarette takes about seven minutes from one's life? Consider the AIDS epidemic. In spite of all the information regarding the dangerous potential of this disease, people willfully continue in their hedonistic lifestyles, gambling that a cure will be found before it strikes them down.

We often gamble in the way we drive our automobiles. People sky dive from airplanes or bungee jump from high bridges spanning deep canyons. Men and women involve themselves in a whole host of life-threatening experiences, risking their survival for the sake of a thrill.

Many have gone heavily into debt wagering that the nation's economy, their employment, and their health will continue to be positive and that they can somehow manage to keep their noses above the financial waters. Yet, the nation's economy, which affects jobs, never stays the same for long. Various factors are in constant flux, making financial speculation risky business.

The solution to each of these gambles is to control ourselves through faith in God and His purpose. We must stop indulging ourselves and begin making whatever sacrifices are necessary to keep to the strait-and-narrow course God has placed before us. It is our responsibility to glorify Him, and we most certainly will not glorify Him by gambling on some other way of life!

But Israel does not want to sacrifice. She wants satisfaction—her way—which so frequently comes at the expense of godly conduct. We cannot allow ourselves to be dragged along in her self-centered depravity, as seen in her boast, "I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow" (Revelation 18:7).

Albert Einstein was once asked for his definition of insanity. He replied, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." This entire creation works according to laws, and those laws cannot work any other way than they do. They always bring the same results.

The solution is to quit disbelieving God and obey the laws He counsels us will produce the abundance, satisfaction, and peace we so desire. Israel would not and will not do this. It remains to be seen whether we, after being given the opportunity, will follow Israel's fickle example or that of the heroes of faith.

Israel's sin is driven by an overweening self-concern, which forgets that God is working out a purpose and plan that oversees everything in our lives. He bought and paid for us with Christ's sacrifice, and we vowed to submit to His authority when we gave Him our lives. God's track record is clear, and what He is providing is more than fair. He promises to supply our every need, but in Israel's fearful and fickle discontent, she did not seek Him to understand what He was doing. Instead, she sought for something different from the experiences He was providing to prepare her for His Kingdom.

Individuality, Uniformity, and Spreading the Wine

Noted conservative radio commentator Rush Limbaugh made an insightful comment when he declared that people are saying, "Multiculturalism made America as rich and powerful as it is today because people came here from all over the world." That is not so, he continued. "It is the 'melting pot' principle that did it. Yes, indeed, people came here from all over the world, but when they arrived, they strove with all their being to become Americans."

This is what helped to produce this economic miracle. Immigrants made the American way their way. They did not remain separate, isolating themselves in their own little ethnic ghetto, never to come out. They strove for oneness with the American system, and this is what we must do spiritually.

God demands uniformity with His way and shows this principle in many ways: He commanded the priests to wear one and only one kind of uniform when serving. The coals for the incense altar were to come only from the brazen altar, and there was only one brazen altar located at only one Tabernacle or Temple. There was only one place for worship and for feasts. The high priest had only one uniform. Only certain animals were acceptable for offerings, and no variations in the rituals were permitted.

Deuteronomy 12:31-32 clarifies that He permitted no deviations whatever from His laws:

You shall not worship the Lord your God [as the pagans worship their gods]; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

This is obviously a directive aimed at Israel's proclivity to look into foreign religions. Curiosity killed the cat! There is a lesson in that cliché.

Deuteronomy 23:6 reinforces how firm God was in impressing this upon them: "You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever." Israel was to keep herself so separate from neighboring nations and their cultures that she was not even to make any peace treaties with them.

Nehemiah 9:13-17 is a vivid reflection on what literally happened in real life and real time to Israel:

You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses Your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, and brought them water out of the rock for their thirst, and told them to go in to possess the land which You had sworn to give them. But they and our fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks, and did not heed Your commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.

The record is clear. Israel rejected God and His way right from the beginning of their relationship. They not only rejected Him and His way but also became a major vehicle for facilitating the spread of the false ways of the heathen all over the world. Modern Israel has followed the same path as her ancestors. As Israel migrated and settled into the lands God had set aside for them, becoming wealthy, she has given the world a poisonous cultural brew to drink, influencing them through the power of her example. She has the wealth to enable her people to export it to other nations for their consumption and inevitable emulation.

God calls Israel's sins "fornication" because sexual sins are the most common way unfaithfulness in marriage is revealed to the public. Everybody can relate to it. However, the real spiritual sin behind all these sexual terms is gross idolatry. Israel simply did whatever she wanted to do, whenever and however she wanted to do it. The harlotry implied is clearly the breaking of the terms of the marriage covenant. Her harlotry is unfaithfulness and disloyalty, which are spiritual in nature. Her sin is primarily idolatry, but all other sins are included.

Israelites were unfaithful in conducting business both domestically and internationally, unfaithful in managing God's great, green earth, unfaithful in forgetting who their great blessings came from, and unfaithful in the way they treated one another in their personal marriages.

Rejection and a Change of Government

I Samuel 8 records one of the most telling and significant events in all the history of Israel. It exposes Israel's powerful and seemingly irresistible bent to be just like everybody else, and contrarily, to throw off the things that make her different, peculiar, and indeed holy.

And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them

up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also." (verses 7-8)

Israel had already deviated from faithfulness, but here, she formally rejects God as her ruler, taking a major step toward being exactly like all the nations around her. This occurred between 1100 and 1000 BC or roughly 350 years after the original making of the covenant. Except for brief periods when Israel had a judge or king who did right in the eyes of God, the spiritual harlotry continued unabated until God formally divorced her, sending Israel and Judah into captivity.

We frequently gloss over the truly important part of this as we read through it. It is clear from Genesis 17:6 and Deuteronomy 17:14-20 that God anticipated Israel having a king or judge. The title is of little importance. Having a king was not the real issue because God had already planned for Israel to have a king. Every organization must have a leader, so God lays down instructions as to how the leader should conduct himself in office. They are designed to ensure that the king does not elevate himself above the people and rule as a despot. Instead, he is to be thoroughly familiar with and guided by the attitudes and laws of God. He must comprehensively know that his own nature is just like those he serves and be humbled.

However, the key to understanding the significance of Israel's demand in I Samuel 8 is that she desires a king *just like the other nations*. Spiritually, this demand confirms Israel's whorish behavior, and thus God tells Samuel to describe the national effects of her demand. On Israel's part, it is a complete rejection of her marriage vows; she wants her Benefactor and Husband—God—to have no say in her life, declaring herself free of Him and to be completely and totally a nation of this world, no longer the type of God's Kingdom on earth.

Herbert Armstrong had a wonderful gift: He was able to cut through a jungle of confusing information and penetrate to the heart of a matter. He wrote and spoke in simple, plain terminology, and thus the learned tended to minimize or outright reject what he said as not "academic" enough for them. He said the issue between God and man is simply a matter of government—of sovereignty and providence. This appears as early as Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve reject God's rule over them.

Once God reveals Himself through His calling, the issue of government comes to the fore. This is what we confront in decision-making. As the Bible has recorded in great detail, mankind has shown that it wants to retain this authority to itself. Yet, the naked truth is we cannot retain sovereignty to ourselves and still have what God is offering, entrance into the spiritual Kingdom of God. We cannot have it both ways. We will be submissive either to God's will or to our own fickle drives. Many of us do not get it!

Earlier, we read from Psalm 11. In the hymnal, Dwight Armstrong renders one line of this psalm, "His eyes behold the children of men; testing and proving the upright in heart." Israel failed when He tested her. What is He testing in us? As He tested Israel, God is testing our loyalty, our faithfulness to Him, to see if we will keep the covenant across a wide spectrum of situations. These tests never come at a convenient time, do they? Do they not always seem to hit when we are in a bind of some kind, making the choices all the more difficult? They make us decide who comes first in our life—God and faithfulness or our own nature and flesh?

What are we to do when the issue is whether to break the Sabbath by working or keep it by refusing? What should we do when we are in a financial bind and in debt—submit to men or pay God His tithes first? Can God, will God, provide our needs in such a tight financial situation? What will we do

when we desire to cover a failure—brag and lie or tell the truth? What should we do when we are sexually enticed—flee or commit sexual immorality?

What will we do in any case when submitting and the glorification of God are at issue? Should we expect God to bless us when we choose to take sovereignty to ourselves? When we take sovereignty to ourselves, we introduce idolatry into the relationship.

Once we are no longer ignorant of the choices before us and choose to take sovereignty to ourselves, sin becomes exceedingly more serious in its consequences—we become our own idol because that is whom we are serving. Paul tells us what to do in Romans 12:1-2:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Ancient Israel would not do this, and neither will the modern version.

This is in no way easy. If it were, there would be no test. It must be this way because, if there were no test, there would be no evaluation. Without an evaluation, neither God nor we know where we stand.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 reminds us how God worked with Israel:

And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

God deliberately made difficulties for the Israelites to face. The stakes are so high, He cannot just guess about the nature of our character. The more difficult choices come in times of hardship, when our loyalty is really in question, for it is much easier to serve ourselves then.

Psalms 53:2 declares, "God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God." This verse provides an overall solution to this unbelieving, stubborn, and debilitating proclivity toward fickleness that draws one right into the maelstrom of Babylon to seek its brand of fulfillment. Do we truly believe God is working with us and judging our responses? Do we respond by truly seeking Him?

Isaiah 55:6-7 emphasizes the importance of seeking God, showing a way to prove that we indeed are:

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

The very wording in this exhortation implies that Israel did exactly what He did not want them to do. They sought satisfaction and fulfillment in the world—things that do not satisfy. They believed the world's word and practiced as it did, thus rejecting God and His Word.

But we must not follow their example. What does it mean to seek the Lord? Amos 5:4, 14-15 trumpets to us:

For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: "Seek Me and live. . . ." Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. 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.

Note that this is written to Israel, to whom God had already revealed Himself. Therefore, *Seek Me* most certainly does not mean, "Look for Him in order to find Him," but "Seek Him in order to be like Him in the conduct of His life, to know His will so one can submit." Instead of being like a normal wife, Israel eagerly pursued ways to be unfaithful to her Husband, God, which is why He calls her "contrary" in Ezekiel 16:34.

Ezekiel 33:10-11 clarifies and adds emphasis to this:

Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: "Thus you say, 'If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?'" Say to them, "As I live," says the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

The phrase "as I live" in verse 11 appears many times in Ezekiel. In all other cases, it is an oath, but in this one case, there is an alternative meaning: It is simply the answer to the question asked in verse 10, "How should we then live?" The answer: "'As I live,' says the Lord."

It does not mean to live on the same level but to live as God would live if He were a man. This way is spelled out in great detail in the commandments, statutes, and judgments. In addition, God gives many examples from the lives of others to clarify exactly what He wants, especially the life of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh (John 1:14).

What God proposed to Israel and to us is an entire way of life that covers every possible choice that might confront us. This way is the only way, the one way that will produce abundant life and at the same time prepare us for God's Kingdom.

God says in Amos 3:2-3, "'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.' Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" God entered into no other like relationship with any other nation or people in all the history of mankind.

A person may have many friends, many family members, many business, fraternal, and professional relationships, but the biblical standard for marriage is one spouse until death. The relationship God entered into with Israel—and now with us—involved an intimacy normally associated only within

marriage. Yes, God had relationships with other nations and people, but none even close to what He entered into with Israel and us. We are favored with gifts greater than any other nation or people because of that intimacy. Our judgment is therefore sterner.

Perhaps the greatest gift of all is the revelation of God Himself and the knowledge of His purpose and how to live life at its fullest. But because of these gifts, Israel's responsibility and deviancy were also the greatest on earth. This is the basis for understanding Israel to be the Great Whore of the Bible.