

Where Is the Beast? (Part 5)

The Identity of the Woman

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We're going to begin the sermon today in Matthew 16:1-3.

Matthew 16:1-3 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came and tempting desire him that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto, When it is evening, you say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O you hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky; but can you not discern the sign of the times?

Let's look at another place where something very similar is said.

Luke 19:41-44 And when he was come near, he beheld the city [Jerusalem], and wept over it. Saying, If you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things which belong unto your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you that your enemies shall cast a trench about you, and compass you round, and keep you in on every side, And shall lay you even with the ground, and your children within you: and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another; because you knew not the time of your visitation.

At both places He was obviously talking about the time that He was living in. We might extend that time out to maybe even 70 AD, but I think there is ample reason for us to look to our time and pick up the principle that He was talking about in both of those scriptures.

Are you aware of the times that you are living in? Are you going to be in a situation like these people here in Jerusalem that Jesus predicted that the time was going to come that they died because they didn't take advantage of the time that they were living in? There is no one on earth who should be more attentive to the times that we are living in than members of God's own family.

I showed you toward the end of my Pentecost sermon (given 06/08/03), that the vast majority of people will misunderstand the end-time. Jesus' warning in this Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 24, and Luke 21, and Mark 13 was to the *church*, that it recognize and be alert and urgent, not thinking like the Laodicean who says by his conduct that "he is rich and increased with goods and he has need of nothing." The signs of the times should give us hope and stir us on, because our redemption is near.

One of the elements that is critical to interpreting prophecy is whether we are *living* in the end-time. I'm not saying this because I don't believe that we are, because I *very much* believe that we are in the end-time, but I'm saying this because it affects how we interpret these prophecies. This is because the interpretation is a combination of what the Bible describes in its symbols, plus what is happening in the world *during* the time.

What the interpreter does is attempt to match the two of them. This is not always easy, and this is why all interpretations, including mine, are speculative by nature. A different understanding of the Bible's symbols, or changes in the world scene, can change one's understanding, and that is why we are going through this subject. *Things have changed*, especially in the world since most of us were taught, and it is time for a fresh look at some of the things pertaining to the book of Revelation.

I thought it quite interesting of one of the abstracts David Maas wrote just this week. I don't know whether you ever follow these things, but they are up there on our web site. David wrote this concerning one of Herbert Armstrong's radio broadcasts in which Mr. Armstrong said, "The key to biblical prophecy is found within the pages of the Bible, not by reading extra biblical interpretation." That is why we're taking a hard look at the symbols used in Revelation and comparing them with their use in other locations in the Bible, as well as looking at what is happening in the world.

In the last sermon in this series we received clear evidence that Israel is not ignored in the book of Revelation—it appears symbolically in Chapter 12. Looking further, we began to explore the characteristics of the woman named "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT" in chapters 17 and 18. We've been taught in the past that this referred to the Roman Catholic Church. But can this truly be referring only to a church, or is it possibly referring to something more political, economical, militarily powerful and influential?

Notice that the identification contains the term "*mystery*." This appears in Revelation 17: 5, but I want us to look at I Corinthians 2: 7-10.

I Corinthians 2:7-9 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they wouldn't not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him.

The Apostle Paul identifies "*mystery*" as being "the hidden wisdom,"—implying the *hidden wisdom of God*. He says right in that same context, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man"—that mystery of the Bible, the mystery of God. The hidden wisdom of God is *not* something that is right out on the surface of things that anybody just picking up the Bible will immediately understand. We are dealing with a *mystery*.

Almost all of the Protestant commentaries say that Revelation 17 and Revelation 18 are referring to the Roman Catholic Church. There is no mystery in that conclusion if virtually all of

them see it so easily.

The *Barklay Commentary*, Page 26 on I Corinthians 7: 2-9, says of "mystery": "something whose meaning is hidden from those who have not been initiated, but crystal clear to those who have." You need to ask yourself a question. Have the Catholics and Protestants been initiated? Commentaries are of virtually no help toward identifying the woman of those two chapters.

Romans 16:25 Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the *revelation* of the *mystery* which was kept secret since the world began.

Here he is not talking about the mystery that appears in Revelation 17 and 18. Mystery is a term that is used in quite a number of contexts in the Bible, and it is not always referring to exactly the same mystery, but always it is referring to something that has to be revealed by God.

Romans 16:26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations *for the obedience of faith*.

Now here I want to just refer briefly back to the opening of this particular sermon when I was talking about how if *anybody* should be *stirred*, should be *excited* and *urgent* about the times that we live in, it ought to be *us*, because we understand the times, and because we *know* what God is doing. We *know*, and we *know that we know* that we are a part of what He is working out. We see, like Jesus said there in Luke 21—"When you *see* all these things happening, ... then know that your redemption is near." *Is that exciting, or what!*

But Paul says here in Romans 16:26 the reason God reveals mysteries is so that *we will obey*, that we will be *motivated* to obey Him, providing us with incentive to do what is necessary what we do. That is why He gives us insight into some of the mysteries of the prophecies. He doesn't do it because we're good people, but rather He wants us to become good people. This will play some part in motivating us to do what is needful, and not be like the Laodicean who says, "I'm already good. I'm rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." And so the Laodicean wiles away the time, wasting it, when he should be redeeming it. Remember, mysteries are revealed in order to stir a person to good works.

If you have paid attention, as I have, to what the Protestant biblical commentators write, you would know that *none of them* pays any attention to *end-time* Israel. They give a small amount of attention to the tiny nation of Israel in the Middle East, but this woman in Revelation 17 and 18 is *much more* than what is displayed by that tiny group of Israelis there in Jerusalem and Israel. The commentators completely ignore God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to make Israel into a powerhouse nation both physically and spiritually.

Those promises He gave to those men impact both upon race *and* grace, and the commentators almost completely ignore the race aspect's application to end-time events. But God, as a blessing to His church, revealed the knowledge of the end-time location of Israel to Mr.

Armstrong so that the church can make better sense of what is going on and be incited to do something with this knowledge, to make practical use of it. He promised in Daniel 12:10 that *thaw/ise* would understand, and those who are wise are identified as "those who keep His commandments."

Only one Protestant source gave me any help at all in this. It was not because they pointed me toward end-time Israel, but because they pointed me toward the fact this woman in Revelation 17 and 18 is a *HUGE* system. Revelation 17 and 18 are a continuing revealing of the same woman—Israel—who shows up in Revelation 12, and we know who that Israel is. Do you get what I'm saying? I'm saying that the *woman* in Revelation 17 and 18 *is Israel—the great whore!*

Now do you think that's really wild, unjust, perhaps outright wrong that God might refer to Israel as a great prostitute—"MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS"?

Let's go back to Revelation 11, verses 7 and 8. Verse 7 will give us the sense of the context a little bit better.

Revelation 11:7 And when they [the Two Witnesses] shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

We see protagonists here. We have God and His kingdom and the church on one side, and on the other side we see the False Prophet and the Beast—the Dragon (the Beast being this human representation of him).

Revelation 11:8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

That identification is pretty clear: Sodom—Egypt—Jerusalem, all in one hand, each describing the other. God is giving evidence here to solve the identity of the prostitute by comparing Israel to Sodom and Egypt. Sodom is noted in all of the history of mankind for its sexual sins, and Egypt is known to all biblical students of a harsh and innervating slavery of the Israelitish people.

These two stunning and dramatic comparisons are of Israel's immoral characteristics, so why not compare Israel to Babylon? He's already compared Israel to Sodom and Egypt. Could it get any worse? None of those is a beautiful comparison. Every one of them is putting Jerusalem and Israel on the spiritual and moral level that they deserve, to be compared to Sodom, and to be compared to Egypt. God reserved His most harsh judgments for those who should know better, but waste their gifts in prideful self-indulgence.

Let's go back to the Old Testament to Ezekiel 16:44-51. We'll begin with verse 44 because I want to get this in its context so it will be established whom I'm talking about here.

Ezekiel 16:44-46 Behold, every one that uses proverbs shall use this proverb against you, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter. You are your mother's daughter that loathes her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, which loathed their husbands and their children: [Notice the relationships that God is making here.] Your mother was a Hittite, and your father an Amorite. And your elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at your left hand: and your younger sister that dwells at your right hand is Sodom and her daughters.

Who's He talking about here? Jerusalem is again being compared to Sodom.

Ezekiel 16:47 Yet have you not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as if that were a very little thing [that is, Jerusalem doing what Sodom did] you were corrupted *more* than they in all your ways.

We don't like to think of Israel in this kind of terminology, but God judges fairly. God judges without prejudice. He sees things *exactly* as they are, and He says we are worse than Sodom ever was. Let that sink in. If you think that you are living in a beautiful place—by place I mean civilization, culture—you had better think again, because the way God looks at it you are living during a time and in a culture that is *worse* than Sodom ever was.

Ezekiel 16:48-51 As I live, says the Lord GOD, Sodom your sister has not done, she nor her daughters, as you have done, you and your daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy, And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good. Neither has Samaria committed half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters [Samaria and Sodom] in all your abominations which you have done.

Ezekiel 16:55-57 When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to *their* former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to *their* former estate, [God is looking way ahead into the Millennium.] then you and your daughters shall return to *your* former estate. For your sister Sodom was not mentioned by your mouth in the day of your pride, Before your wickedness was discovered, as at the time of your reproach of the daughters of Syria, and all that are round about her, the daughters of the Philistines, which despise you round about.

Even the Philistines looked down on the Israelites.

Ezekiel 16:58 You have borne your lewdness and your abominations, says the LORD.

Let's go to the book of Isaiah, chapter 1. I bet not too many of us really recognize what a cesspool we're really living in. Maybe some of us who are a little bit older can remember times when it wasn't like it is now, nowhere near as bad. But now people make fun of the morality of the 30s and 40s and 50s. We have dropped like a rock in terms of morality.

Isaiah 1:8-10 And the daughter of Zion [another name for Jerusalem] is left as a cottage in a vineyard [that is abandoned and run down], as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. Hear the word of the LORD you rulers of Sodom:

Who is God speaking to here in verse 10? He's not speaking to Sodom. Sodom was already gone. He's speaking to end-time Israel.

Isaiah 1:10-11 Hear the word of the LORD you rulers of Sodom: give ear unto the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? says the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts: and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

God is sick. He has had it up to here with the hypocritical sacrifices that we make in mention of His name and so-called worship of the God of heaven. Our conduct on the streets and in business and in our homes doesn't anywhere near measure even to Sodom. Now what's so weird about God comparing Israel to Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon? There's nothing weird about it at all. Thus God calling Israel 'BABYLON, MYSTERY, THE GREAT HARLOT,' continues to give evidence of the magnitude of Israel's unfaithfulness to her Husband and Benefactor—GOD.

Revelation 11:8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the *great* city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

This is not a major point, but it also does give some more evidence in the use of the word "great."

Revelation 14:8 And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that *great* city, ...

Babylon is called *great* in the same way that Jerusalem was called *great* in Revelation 11: 8. Everybody knows that Babylon is not a nice place. In Revelation 16: 19, again it is talking about Babylon.

Revelation 16:19 And the *great* city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and *great* Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

So Jerusalem, Israel, and Babylon are *great*. When this word *great* is used in this manner in this kind of a context, it is not complimentary. The word in the Greek is *me-gas*, and it literally means *big*. It can mean big or great in size, magnitude, intensity, or rank, in either a good or a bad sense. It depends on what kind of a context it is used in. This is interesting, because when God symbolically dwelt in the Holy of Holies, Jerusalem was known by its citizens as the "*Holy City*."

Tradition tells us (especially through Josephus) that God departed His residence there shortly before 70 AD. The "Holy City" title for Jerusalem doesn't come back into the story flow of the book of Revelation until Chapter 21: 2.

Revelation 21:2-3 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

In Revelation 21, the title "Holy City" is once again going to be applied to Jerusalem, but until that time when God dwells there, it is known as the "*great*" city. It is *great* just like Babylon in its anti-God sinful influence, economic, political, and military power. But most certainly it is not *great* in holiness. Israel's conduct puts its place next to Sodom, Gomorrah, Egypt, and Babylon in *great* defiance against God, against His message and His messengers, and thus it lost its identification as "the Holy City" and became "*great*."

We're going to go back to Revelation 18: 7. This is a little bit of a reminder of something in the previous sermon when we went through it.

Revelation 18:7 How much she has glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

Revelation 18: 7 provides three important characteristics: (1) she glorified herself and lived extravagantly, and (2) she proclaimed herself as being a queen and not a widow, and (3) that she would see no sorrow.

We are looking here at an entity that is exceedingly wealthy, influential, disdainful in attitude, contemptuous, and mocking. She is portrayed as being proud to the point of arrogance, self-confidence in her security, thinking that she has produced the power by her own means. She lives extravagantly relative to the levels of the rest of the nations, seeking yet *further* gratification, while at the same time compromising with no standard.

In brief, we see three remarkable characteristics:

(1) *Arrogant pride*

Satiety or fullness of bread (as God called it in Ezekiel 16). Maybe we could put it another way and say "an overflowing abundance of all of the good [as she terms "good"] things in life."

(3) *An avoidance of suffering*. A compromising self-absorbed self-indulgence.

I'll tell you, God has an awful lot against us.

When we began exploring whether the woman of Revelation 17 and 18 is a church, we found evidence that it is not. We found much Old Testament evidence that God uses a woman the overwhelming majority of times to symbolize a city/nation, not a church. Most of the time that city is Jerusalem, and Jerusalem in turn then represented the entire nation of Israel.

Even as today, in the nations of this world, their capital city represents the entire nation. Washington, D.C. is given, meaning the entire United States. It is the seat of government and represents the entire country. Pretoria does the same thing for South Africa, and Ottawa does for Canada, London does for the UK, and Paris does for France, and Bonn does for Germany, and so on. In *one* case a "woman" stands for a church—that is, the *true* church; not a harlot church. But even here the representation does not lose its sense of city/nation, because right in the context "Jerusalem above—the mother of us all" is named. That is in Galatians 4: 26. In I Peter 2: 9 Peter refers to the people of God as being "a holy nation."

As we moved through other defining characteristics, we saw that the phrase "mother of harlots" in Revelation 17: 5 might be misleading, and therefore misinterpreted because of the Bible's peculiar practice of frequently using terms such as daughter, son, seed, adulterer, idolaters, and so forth *collectively*, fully intending *both* genders.

In collective usage, the term "daughter" includes male. The word "son" includes female. Words like harlot, adulterers, idolaters, seed, includes both males and females. This is what *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* calls a double metaphor. A double metaphor is one word which may well be in a specific gender, and it is in a specific gender because the context calls for it, but in actual interpretation and practice, *both* genders are intended.

But in Revelation 17: 5, *harlot* is to be understood as including men too, involved in what the Bible specifies as "harlotry,"—something that in normal circumstances would only be said of a female, but biblically it includes both men and women. Therefore, "MOTHER OF HARLOTS" in Revelation 17: 5 specifically refers to *unfaithfulness* within a covenant relationship with God, not a specific *human* sexual sin.

The Protestant churches that revolted from the Catholic Church were certainly not unfaithful to God as churches. Neither was the Catholic Church unfaithful to God as a church. Do you know why? Because they never entered into *a covenant* with Him! They were *never His church!* But the citizens of the nations of Israel *were* certainly unfaithful to God within a covenant relationship.

Revelation 17:18 says, "And the woman which you saw is that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth." Revelation 17 and Revelation 18 are describing a city/nation, not a church. Right there in the chapter it says that the woman is a city. Try to get around that one!

Revelation 18 is a continuing description of the characteristics of the *same* woman in chapter 17, so turn to Revelation 18:1.

Revelation 18:1-3 And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of demons, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

Was Babylon ever really a city? Yes it was. Was Babylon ever really a nation? Yes it was. Revelation is an end-time book, and just as Babylon of old was literally both a city and a nation, the Babylon at the end-time also is a city and a nation. I will keep giving you proof upon proof as we go through this.

Revelation 18:10 Standing afar off [after a disaster has taken place] for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is your judgment come.

Revelation 17 and 18 are not describing a church, but a city/nation that is involved in massive worldwide merchandising and manufacturing. You know what's in Revelation 18. We are looking at a prophetic picture of *globalism* (which is the term we use today), and this cannot describe a church organization.

The Catholic church has *never* been involved in manufacturing. They might have invested, to be sure, but to actually be the manufacturer, that's another thing altogether. To actually be the seller of the things manufactured, they have never done that either.

Revelation 17 provides no information whatsoever directly tying the woman that is riding the Beast to religion. There is a religious personage, as you know, prophesied of in Revelation 13. Please turn there, and we're going to see a couple of contrasts.

Revelation 13:11-14 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. And he exercises all the power of the first beast before him, and causes the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast whose deadly wound was healed. And he does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast.

Revelation 13:15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

Contrast 1: The one in Revelation 13 is described by God as a *man*. The one in Revelation 17 and 18 is a *woman*. There's a bit difference there.

Contrast 2: The two-horned lamb, the male, is deceiving those who are on the earth, to worship the beast. Nothing even close to that is given in Revelation 17 and 18. Instead we find the woman *riding* the beast; not deceiving [but] *riding* the beast. "Riding the beast" gives the impression of guiding, directing, over-powering, being in control. *The woman is controlling the beast!* That's a big difference between the two.

This woman (whoever she is, and I've already told you who I believe it is) has enough power, that at the time which is pictured in Revelation 17 and 18, she is *overpowering* that *all-powerful beast*, of whom it says, "Who can make war with the beast?" Let me tell you something. The beast is afraid to make war against the woman until such time, as you know that it says in Revelation 17, God puts it in their heart to do something with her. But until then, she has enough power to overpower *them*.

I bring to your attention that just recently you saw Israel just brush the rest of the world aside and do whatever it felt good to do in Iraq despite what anybody else wanted. If I can put it in graphic terms, Israel just shoved the beast aside, and the beast was afraid to do anything, and will not have the courage to do anything until God puts it in their mind, until He gets Israel into the place where it's time to execute judgment.

There is no religious context at all in Revelation 17 and 18. At least there is nothing directly there except for one thing—the woman is shown killing the saints. We won't get to that in this sermon, but we will get to it. Israel has a vicious record for killing the people of God, and we are incidentally moving in that direction again, if you are following the events as our government turns more and more fascist in its approach to things.

Revelation 17 and 18 show that she and the beast are in fact antagonists in competition with each other. Besides that, she is heavily involved in politics, influencing kings, in manufacturing, in merchandise. No mention of anything like that in reference to the two-horned lamb of Revelation 13. There is indeed a relationship with the beast, (I'm talking about the woman and the beast), but she is not part of the politics, economics, religion, or military of the beast. The woman and the beast are separate entities even though they are *both within* the overall

Babylonish system.

The Catholic Church has *always* been *part* of the Beast *internally*, and influences the Beast from within. The woman is portrayed as an *external* influence, competing with, riding, and exercising control of the Beast.

The ancient Babylonian empire, whose beginning is recorded in Genesis 10 and 11, is the model for what we see in Revelation 17 and 18. Babylon was anciently both a city and a nation. It was brought to the peak of its power under Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon became the biblical code name and the model for the cosmos—the world that John warns us not to love. It is the anti-God-Satan-ruled system of government, religion, politics, business, education that the nations of the earth have adapted to their own peculiar ethnic culture.

Now it is very important that you get this. Babylon is the *system* that is portrayed in Revelation 17 and 18, brought in the end-time to its very peak of worldwide influence, and epitomizes primarily in the woman a city/nation of exceeding great power, and the Beast—a group of strong nations. The woman and the Beast both are competing with each other, vying for control of the entire system.

The Beast is indeed a major player within that worldly anti-Christ system, but the woman is another separate city/nation—a political, economic, religious, and military unit—that exemplifies the epitome of the Babylonish system in all of its influence. At the time pictured at the beginning of the prophecy, she begins to arise in her greatness in the sixth resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire. This is the sixth, and another one is to follow. She has enough power and influence to control and direct the Beast externally.

Do you know which nation of Israel came to its power in the sixth resurrection of the Roman Empire? It was Britain. But Britain was preceded by both Holland and France, but neither of those two had as much power as Britain did. Britain's power extended into the 20th Century. According to Mr. Armstrong, he felt that sixth resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire ended with the defeat of Germany and Hitler in 1945. If that is true, then we are in the time of the *seventh*, and we find in Revelation 17 that the Beast is going to be *of the seventh*, but it is an *eighth*!

Who is the great power in the world that is holding the Beast in check now? It's primarily the United States, but I think that God is indicating that all of Israel is the woman, not just the United States, not just Britain, but the whole thing. I will give you some indication that is true as we go along. I don't know whether I will get to it today, but we eventually will get to that.

We are dealing with two things in Revelation 17 and 18 at the same time, while trying to understand the correct interpretation of this. There is a *mystical/spiritual* element that is the system, but there is also the *literal/physical* element that involves the *nation* that epitomizes the mystical/spiritual system, and that is *the woman and the Beast*.

Let's begin to nail down further the one nation that fits the description the Bible clearly identifies as "the harlot." Let's go back to Ezekiel 16 again. Just so we are sure about what we are speaking of here, verse 3 says:

Ezekiel 16:3 And say, Thus says the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem ...

Here is the identification of the one being spoken to.

Ezekiel 16:8 Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yes, I swore unto you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine.

Ezekiel 16:14-15 And your renown went forth among the heathen for your beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon you, says the Lord GOD. But you did trust in your own beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and poured out your fornications on every one that passed by: his it was.

We're obviously dealing with a marriage relationship between God and Jerusalem, representing all of Israel. The woman Israel was not faithful, and harlotry entered the relationship. From verse 15 on—from that point on—the marriage relationship described here, the harlotry, the fornication, and the adultery of the woman is either inferred or directly stated in virtually every verse remaining in this long chapter that goes all the way up to verse 63. In one verse after another God is telling *how* she committed harlotry, and *why* she committed harlotry.

The Liberal Interpreter's Bible Commentary says "Israel here is portrayed as a wife who became a pagan temple prostitute." That is a possibility, but I think the more conservative commentaries are more correct. She is portrayed as an unfaithful wife whose unfaithfulness is displayed in a far wider range of life and activities than just religious.

Israel—the nation and wife—is unfaithful in every area and activity of life that a faithful wife/nation would normally be involved in. The sexual orientation of what is written of her sin is used because sexual sins are the most common way unfaithfulness in marriage is shown to the public. It is something that everybody can relate to. However, the real spiritual sin behind all of these sexual terms is gross idolatry. In verse 59 of this same chapter it says, "For thus says the Lord GOD; I will even deal with you as you have done, which have despised the oath in breaking the covenant." She broke the marriage covenant and became a harlot.

Israel simply did whatever she wanted to do, when she wanted to do it, and in the manner that she wanted. The harlotry inferred is clearly the breaking of the terms of the marriage covenant, and the harlotry is unfaithfulness, disloyalty, and it is spiritual in nature. It is primarily idolatry, but all other sins are included. Israel was unfaithful in conducting business, both domestically and internationally. Israel was unfaithful in managing God's great green earth; unfaithful in forgetting who her blessings came from; unfaithful in the way they treated one another in their personal marriages; unfaithful in their childrearing practices.

We all know that the woman and the relationship being described here is between God and Israel, and the marriage entered into was the Old Covenant proposed and entered into at Mount Sinai. What God proposed to Israel, and to us under the New Covenant, is an *entire way of*

life. It's not just religion. It's *everything* that the church ought to be the teacher of things that are right and true.

Let's go back to Deuteronomy 7, and verses 1 through 11, and let's understand God's people Israel. Think of the way Israel acted.

Deuteronomy 7:1-2 When the LORD your God shall bring you into the land whither you go to possess it, and have cast out many nations before you, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and The Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you: And when the LORD your God shall deliver them before you; you shall smite them, and utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them.

Did Israel follow through? Israel did *not* follow through. Israel did what she wanted to do, when she wanted to do it, and in the manner she wanted to do it, and God was ignored. Who was her *real* master? Well, it was herself.

Deuteronomy 7:3-11 Neither shall you make marriages with them; your daughter you shall not give unto his son, nor his daughter shall you take unto your son. [They just went and did it anyway.] For they will turn away your son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy you suddenly. But thus shall you deal with them; you shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For you are a *holy* people unto the LORD your God: the LORD your God has chosen you to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you nor choose you because you were more in number than any people, for you were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, has the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God, he is God, the faithful God, which keeps covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repays them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hates him, he will repay him to his face. You shall therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments which I command you this day, to do them.

Pay-up time is just around the corner. We have disobeyed God's whole way of life as

represented by commandments, statutes, and judgments. We find evidence of this where there are summaries given in II Kings 17: 5.

II Kings 17:5-12 Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree. And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them: and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger: For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, You shall not do this thing.

I want to go to one more place.

Psalms 78:55-58 He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents [land]. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.

It doesn't matter where we turn to in God's word, we find Israel being unfaithful to God, and acting the harlot. In Matthew 17: 17 Jesus said this:

Matthew 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me.

Right on into Jesus' day (and as we find in Revelation, right on into our day), this is the way that Israel displayed their harlotry.

I want to carry this yet further to show you the seriousness of this. We're going to go back into

the Old Testament again in Amos 3: 1-3.

Amos 3:1-3 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, *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 except they be agreed?

Can two exist in a marriage relationship where one is constantly unfaithfully acting as a harlot? And yet of all the nations that have existed on the earth, the only one that God made a covenant with, did this to Him. God entered into no other relationship with any other nation in all of the history of mankind.

A person may have many friends, many family members, many business friends, fraternal friends, professional relationships, but by biblical standards for marriage—it's one spouse until death. God and Israel's relationship involved an intimacy normally associated only within marriage. Yes, God had relationships with other nations, but none even close to what He had with Israel. It was favored with gifts greater than any nation because of that intimacy, but perhaps the greatest gift of all was 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 was also the greatest on earth: *great Jerusalem; great deviancy*. The gift had never been given to any other people on earth.

I am seeing here that if I go into the next section it is going to be a little bit too long for me to fit it into the time that is left, so I think I will stop right here, and God willing, the next time that I speak we will have section number 6, and we will continue to reveal the characteristics of the woman in Revelation 17 and 18.