

**The Sage and the Seductress
Part I: A Background Study**

**Charles E. McLain, Th.M.
Professor, Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary**

INTRODUCTION

"O my son listen . . . receive . . . forget not . . .!" With these words the sagacious father prefaces his instructions for his young son. Ahead of the youth lies the road of life and the wise father knows that the youth will have to choose which path he will travel upon that road. Also known to the father is the reality that the young man will not travel the road of life alone. Along the way there will be others who will attempt to influence his choice of paths upon the road of life. Thus as he attempts to prepare the youth for the journey that lies before him, this father seeks to transmit, communicate, reproduce wisdom within the being and character of his son.

The sagacious father's purpose is to divulge God's created order in the universe to his young and naive son. This ordered creation that the Sage unfolds is composed of three spheres in which and through which the journey will lead. These spheres of orderedness envelope cosmology, society, and human nature.

The focus of this study is the Sage's instruction and admonition in the sphere of social relationships, particularly as it involves one of the strangers that will be met on the road of life. As the wise father speaks to his own son, he presents timeless, inspired truths for all youth. For full effect, this wisdom needs to penetrate through the ear channels to the heart, where finding rich, well-worked soil and adequate nurturing, it will take root and produce fruit in actions; thereby, assuring the blessings and rewards available not only along the path but also in the ultimate destination to which the path will lead.

The term "prostitute." In order to better understand the focus of this study it is necessary to have a better comprehension of the term

prostitute. Although in contemporary lexicography the term "prostitute" may have a rather specific definition, the ancient Near East did not necessarily share the same narrow definition.

Baab offers a definition and explanation,

"prostitution' is a term signifying sexual intercourse from which ensues no binding or enduring relationship. It is usually indiscriminate in nature. The purpose of the practice of prostitution, as far as the prostitute is concerned, is not primarily sexual passion or the desire for children. It may be either mercenary or religious."¹

Marglin claims support for this distinction of "mercenary" or secular and "religious" or sacred/cultic on both historical and ethnographic evidence.² Patai claims that the distinction though at times lost in terminology was not lost in daily life.

Although the use of two different terms, *zonah* for the profane, and *q'deshah* for the sacred, prostitute, would indicate that in popular consciousness -- at least as reflected in linguistic usage -- the two were viewed as fulfilling two different functions, it can be demonstrated that the dividing line between them was fluid, and that each one of the two partook to a considerable extent of the characteristics of the other.³

¹ O.J. Baab, "Prostitution," *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) 932. See also Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Volume 12 of *Word Bible Commentary*, David A. Hubbard and John D.W. Watts, editors (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1985) 59; "Both secular and cultic prostitution were widespread in the ancient Near East. From a moral and sociological point of view, there was nothing that was worthy of praise in this institution. Ancient prostitutes were generally slaves, daughters who had been sold by their own parents. Otherwise they were poor women who had never had the opportunity to marry, or who had lost their husbands. . . . Women who had to support themselves by yielding to the lust of strangers . . . were wretched and altogether to be pitied."

² Frederique A. Marglin, "Hierodouleia," *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987) 6:309.

³ Raphael Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959) 145.

The Seductress in the book of Proverbs is variously described as a foreign woman, as an adulteress⁴, as married, as an evil woman. The Seductress is one woman; described and presented in various guises as she confronts the young man on the road of life.

Purpose and Method

The purpose of this study is to investigate and analyze the instruction and admonition of the Sage as he prepares the youth to encounter the seducing woman on the road of life. In order to arrive at this purpose, this study will attempt first to establish the cultural background in which these instructions and admonitions were given. In establishing the cultural context it is necessary to examine both the broad context of the ancient Near East and more narrowly the context of pre-Solomonic and Solomonic Israel. By examining the cultural context of the ancient Near East, attitudes toward and practices regarding prostitution in the countries, both large and small, distant and near-at-hand, influential and weak, will be discerned. Secondly, in addition to discerning the cultural setting during Solomon's time, it is also necessary to discover Solomon's perspective concerning prostitution. That is, did Solomon promote or discourage, whether consciously or unconsciously, attitudes and practices favorable to prostitution during his reign? Finally, with this background, an exegetical examination will be made of the verses involved in order to discover the principles and precepts with which the sagacious father confronts the danger of the beguiling woman.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

In attempting to establish the social background in which the Seductress is encountered it is necessary to survey two sets of cultures. Both a broad look into the cultures of the ancient Near East and a more narrow look into Israel's culture and their attitudes and dealings with seducing women are needed. In attempting to establish the cultural context in which prostitution was practiced attention will be given to 1) attitudes in relation to marriage; 2) references to religious practices and attitudes concerning prostitution;

⁴ Due to space limitations investigation into "adultery" proper will be omitted.

3) legal codes; 4) literary indications of cultural actions and reactions to the prostitute; and 5) for Israel, historical events and references.

Ancient Near Eastern Cultures

Prostitutes were a fact of life in the histories and societies surrounding Israel. Patai points out that "in the Middle East prostitutes have always been accepted constituents of the social stratification, in rural as well as in urban life."⁵ Marglin makes the same observation for sacred or temple prostitutes; stating, "some form of cultic sexual activity was practiced by temple servants . . . in most of the cultural areas of ancient West Asia."⁶ In establishing the ANE cultural context of prostitution attention will be given individually to three nations whose influence was both chronologically and geographically extensive in the ANE (i.e., Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt) and also to the cultures of Canaan and Phoenicia as those of Israel's immediate neighbors.

Babylon

A brief survey reveals that evidence of prostitution, both sacred and secular, in Babylon is extensive and ancient.⁷

Marriage. Social mores in regard to marriage did not restrict the presence or practice of prostitution in Babylon. Saggs in explaining the "monogamous" state of Babylonian marriage explains:

Marriage (throughout the whole of Sumerian and Babylonian society) was monogamous in the sense that a man might have only one woman who ranked as a wife and enjoyed a social status corresponding to his. On the other hand, no stigma attached to

⁵ Patai, *Sex and Family*, 145.

⁶ Marglin, "Hierodouleia," 6:309.

⁷ Marglin, "Hierodouleia," 6:309; "Babylonian evidence indicates that a distinction between cultic and profane sexuality is both ancient and persistent." William G Cole, *Sex and Love in the Bible* (New York: Association Press, 1959) 175-176; "There were, however, numbers of temple prostitutes dwelling within the sacred precincts, and many of them became very wealthy. . . . The worship of the principle of fertility logically included the sexual act, and sacred concubines . . . were common. This practice by no means excluded secular prostitution, which also flourished in Babylon and in other similar cultures."

resort to temple prostitutes or to the keeping of concubines, and once slaves had come to occur widely as private property one of the chief uses, if not the chief use, of female slaves was for the latter purpose.⁸

Legal code. Babylonian attitudes toward sexual relationships in general and marriage in particular were delineated, regulated, and maintained by its law codes. For example, concerning prostitutes in general there is

a lengthy law dealing with the dress of women in public. Married women must be veiled, as must a concubine accompanying her mistress. But 'a harlot shall not be veiled; her head must be uncovered', and offence in this respect was heavily punished: 'she shall be beaten fifty stripes with rods, and pitch shall be poured on her head.'⁹

However, it should be noted that the legal code did not regulate the practice of prostitution. Only actions that blurred social classes and positions were regulated and punished.

On the other hand, apparently regulation of sacred prostitutes was not part of the legal code.

There is no indication in Hammurabi's code as to which, if any, of the classes of priestesses were cultic prostitutes nor is there indication of the relation between priests and priestesses. It is generally assumed that Babylonian worship paralleled similar worship in other places and did include cultic prostitutes, women through whose body a male worshipper might commune with the deity.¹⁰

⁸ H.W.F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (New York: New American Library, Times Mirror, 1962) 186.

⁹ Saggs, *Babylon*, 213. Not only was harlotry regulated, but legal codes for married women were prejudicial. Compare James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) 23; "Cases of infidelity within marriage centered . . . upon the wife. Illegal sexual relations with a married woman was a capital offense. Willing adultery resulted in the drowning of both partners, unless the husband chose to spare the wife, in which case the king spared the man involved, thereby maintaining a parity of punishment."

¹⁰ Hurley, *Man and Woman*, 25.

This failure to regulate sacred prostitution may simply reflect the relationship between the palace and the temple, or reflect that regulation of the "sacred" was beyond the concerns of the king.¹¹

Religion. Prostitution played a large place in Babylon's religion. Cultic prostitutes were associated with all the temples.¹²

A much circulated quote by Herodotus reports that by their custom, "Every native woman is required, once in her life, to sit in the temple of Venus, and have intercourse with some stranger."¹³

The character and action of cultic prostitutes seems but a dim reflection of the goddesses they mimicked.

Side by side with this reigning male divinity [Bel-Marduk] sat Ishtar, the goddess of fertility and creativity. Under her jurisdiction were both love and war, both motherhood and prostitution, both masculinity and femininity. . . . she was careful to keep herself unwed but by no means unbedded.¹⁴

Sacred prostitution was a real, daily, vital element of Babylonian religion.

Literature. The prevalence of prostitution in Babylonian society is reflected in its literature -- both in epic and in wisdom.

Consider the *Epic of Gilgamesh*

one of the oldest and most widely diffused works from ancient Mesopotamia . . . Gilgamesh, the ruler of the city of Uruk, abuses his people; a goddess named Aruru creates a half-man, half-animal creature named Enkidu to subdue Gilgamesh. . . . A harlot is sent

¹¹ A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977) 98ff. Oppenheim views the king's peace time responsibilities as primarily social including guarding the underprivileged; guaranteeing legal procedures and hearing appeals; regulating laws and prices; and overseeing contacts with foreigners.

¹² Saggs, *Babylon*, 332. Compare Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 193; Marglin, "Hierodouleia," 6:309; "In the temples of Ishtar, Astarte, Ma, Anahita, and Aphrodite, for example, women, often virgins, offered themselves sexually to strangers. Sometimes the temples were staffed by such 'sacred prostitutes.'"

¹³ Cole, *Sex and Love*, 175-176. Compare E. Capps, T.E. Page, and W.H.D. Rouse, editors, *The Loeb Classical Library*, "Herodotus," transl. by A.D. Godley, volume I paragraph 199 (London: William Heinemann, 1926) 251-252.

¹⁴ Cole, *Sex and Love*, 173.

to humanize him; she makes love to him and teaches him how to behave as a human being. He is brought into the city of Uruk and eventually tames Gilgamesh, who ceases to mistreat his people. Thus the active sexuality of the prostitute results in well-being for the inhabitants of Uruk.¹⁵

The theme is found again in the *Counsel of Wisdom*, which

takes the form of advice from a father -- possibly a vizier, certainly a highly placed gentleman -- to his son.

The kind of precepts given constitute good practical down-to-earth advice . . . on pragmatic considerations rather than on an ethical system. . . . The son is also advised to speak guardedly, avoiding blasphemy, falsehood and slander, and to avoid a slave-girl mistress of his house, nor marry a temple-prostitute, who besides being accustomed to accepting other men would prove an unsympathetic and intractable wife.¹⁶

Assyria

As in Babylon, its neighbor in the Fertile Crescent, prostitution in Assyria, both sacred and secular, was a fact of daily life.

Marriage. Attitudes in Assyria differed very little from those of her neighbor. Cole points out that "the virtue of women was zealously guarded, and their freedom was strictly limited. State-supported prostitution flourished, under both sacred and secular auspices, and men were permitted as many concubines as they could afford."¹⁷

¹⁵ Marglin, "Hierodouleia," 6:310. Note this prostitute is viewed as a heroine.

¹⁶ Saggs, *Babylon*, 416-17. For the full reading see Robert H. Pfeiffer, transl., "Akkadian Proverbs and Counsels," *ANET*, James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969) 427.

¹⁷ Cole, *Sex and Love*, 178-179. As in Babylon, the legal code also regulated the wife but in a prejudicial manner. Compare Hurley, *Man and Woman*, 27; "Adultery is treated as an offense against a husband's property and can be committed only by or with a married woman. A man accused of adultery could clear himself by swearing that he did not know that the woman was married. In a society which officially recognized prostitutes, the sexual act itself was not legally significant. Thus sexual relations with unmarried women, even by married men, were not construed as adultery. Adultery was viewed as the violation of a husband's rights."

Legal code. Again legal distinction in sexual relationships were noted and maintained.

The Assyrian laws include a discussion of veiling customs for distinguishing prostitutes and slave-girls from married women, concubines, and single women of high birth. The code stipulates that: 'women, whether married or [widows] or [Assyrians] who go out in the [public] street must not have their heads uncovered. . . . A harlot shall not be veiled; her head must be uncovered. He who sees a veiled harlot shall arrest her. . . . Slave-girls shall not be veiled, and he who sees a veiled slave-girl shall arrest her. . . .' The veil was not omitted by harlots as a means to greater seductiveness, although it may have had that effect. It was rather forbidden to them because it marked its wearer as a person of rank.¹⁸

As such the law code appears not to have regulated the practice of prostitution; instead, it regulated any practices that would fog the distinction of female social classes and positions.

Religion. There seems to be no reason to suggest that Assyria's religious practices were any different from her pagan neighbors in regard to the existence and function of sacred prostitutes.

There seem also to be indications of a period of sacred prostitution for women prior to marriage It is generally assumed that Assyrian women played roles similar to those of Babylonian women, bringing offerings to the temple of the various deities of the pantheon, serving as priestesses, and sometimes becoming sacred prostitutes.¹⁹

Egypt

At the opposite end of the crescent of civilizations bracketing Palestine lies the culture of ancient Egypt. Though geographically far removed from Babylon and Assyria and somewhat more isolated, the practices of secular and sacred prostitution infiltrated Egypt's culture.

Marriage. Breasted summarizes Egyptian family life and thus provides a view of their attitude toward marriage.

¹⁸ Hurley, *Man and Woman*, 29.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The social unit was as in later human history, the family. A man possessed but one legal wife, who was the mother of his heirs. . . . Besides the legitimate wife . . . the man of wealth possessed also a harem, the inmates of which maintained no legal claim upon their lord. The harem was already at this early day a recognized institution in the East, and nothing immoral was thought in connection with it.²⁰

A further indication from a later period of Egypt's history is found in *The Instruction of the Vizier Phat-hotep*.

If thou art a man of standing, thou shouldst found thy household and love thy wife at home as is fitting. Fill her belly; clothe her back. Ointment is the prescription for her body. Make her heart glad as long as thou livest. She is a profitable field for her lord. Thou shouldst not contend with her at law, and keep her far from gaining control. . . . Her eye is her stormwind. Let her heart be soothed through what may accrue to thee; it means keeping her long in thy house . . .²¹

As in other major cultures of the ANE, marital mores did not preclude the presence or practice of prostitution.

Religion. Egyptian religious practices also involved cultic prostitution.

Women enjoyed a special place in all fertility cults, and Egypt was no exception. . . . Woman thus became the Mother of God, as she was mother of everything else, the creative principle behind all things. . . . This belief had several consequences. In the first place, it gave rise to temple prostitution, though this seems to have been practiced on a small scale.²²

²⁰ James H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921) 85. Breasted is referring specifically to the Old Kingdom.

²¹ John A. Wilson, transl., "Egyptian Instructions," *ANET*, James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969) 413.

²² Cole, *Sex and Love*, 168. Compare W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1942) 75-76.

Literature. Egypt's wisdom literature contains admonitions pertaining to the beguiling woman.²³

In *The Instruction of the Vizier Ptah-hotep*, the wise father warns his son concerning the dangers of familiarity with women generally. He states:

If thou desirest to make friendship last in a home to which thou hast access as mater, as a brother, or as a friend, into any place where thou mightest enter, beware of approaching the women. It does not go well with the place where that is done. The face has no alertness by splitting it. [Marginal reading: "He who has a wandering eye for the women cannot be keen."] ²⁴

In *The Instruction of Ani* specific warning is given concerning the beguiling woman whether a married or unmarried prostitute. Breasted in commenting on Ani's remarks states:

. . . immorality was strongly condemned by the best sentiment. The wise man warns the youth, 'Beware of a woman from abroad, who is not known in her city. Look not upon her when she comes, and know her not. She is like the vortex of deep waters, whose whirling is unfathomable. The woman, whose husband is far away, she writes to thee every day. If there is no witness with her she arises and spreads her net. O deadly crime, if one hearkens!' To all youths marriage and the foundation of a household are recommended as the only wise course. Yet there is no doubt that side by side with these wholesome ideals of the wise and virtuous, there also existed wide-spread and gross immorality.²⁵

Though from a later period of history *The Proverbs of Ahikar* help portray the attitude toward prostitution that permeated Egypt and required warning by the wise to their youth.

²³ Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros," 600; "It is true that one can point to discussion of marital (in)fideliy as a topos in Egyptian wisdom literature, but it is only lightly treated in *Ptah-hotep* and in *Ani*."

²⁴ Wilson, transl., "Egyptian Instructions," 413.

²⁵ Breasted, *Egypt*, 86. The quote is footnoted as Pap. de Boulaq I, 16, 13ff.; Erman, *Aegypten*, 223. Cf. Wilson, transl., "Egyptian Instructions," 420.

Son, raise not up thine eyes to look on a lovely woman, rouged and antimonied. Desire her not in thy heart. For if thou shouldst give her all thy riches, thou dost get nothing the more out of her; but art condemned by God and by mankind. For she is like unto a sepulchre which is fair on the upper side and below is full of the rottenness and bones of the dead.²⁶

Though acceptable in society and religion in general, prostitution was a subject of warning among the instruction of the wise.

Canaan and Phoenicia

Turning now to Israel's more immediate neighbors it quickly becomes evident that attitudes and practices that were common in the leading powers of the ANE were common throughout all pagan cultures of the ANE.

Religion. As in other ANE religions the Canaanite pantheon was composed of deities who symbolized aspects of nature and who were profligate in their sexual exploits. "The Canaanite pantheon . . . included goddesses, such as Asherah . . . symbolizing sexuality and fertility."²⁷ In practice cult prostitutes reflected the character and actions of their patron god(desse)s.

²⁶ R. H. Charles, "The Story of Ahikar," *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1976) 2:728-29. Although this article dates from a period later than Solomon, it is included with Egyptian literature as an example of the continuing admonitions against the beguiling woman. Charles dates the earliest extant copy to the 5th century B.C. for a papyrus copy from Elephantine; that the story could not have occurred much earlier, perhaps 550-450 B.C. (p. 719) Compare D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents From Old Testament Times* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958) 272; who includes the following as part of Ahikar's advice: "My son, go not after the beauty of a woman, do not lust for her in thy heart; for the beauty of a woman is her discretion, and her adornment the word of her mouth." "The theme is generally current throughout the Wisdom Literature. For the injunction not to look upon *the beauty of a woman*, cp. Ecclus. ix.8 and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs In the book of Proverbs, however, the emphasis is different. Here it is not the beauty of a woman which is the stumbling-block causing the inquisitive to err, but rather the 'foolish woman' (Prov. ix.13) or the 'strange woman' herself (Prov. ii.16, v.3, vi.24, vii.5), who, by her words, rather than by her outward appearance, leads foolish men astray and is to be avoided (Prov. v.8)." f.n. p. 274.

²⁷ Cole, *Sex and Love*, 180.

The worship rites associated with this goddess [Ishtar] and with the Canaanite deities included fertility symbols . . . The rites involved intercourse. . . . female cult prostitutes served their gods at the shrines. When worshipers engaged in intercourse with these cult prostitutes, they participated in an act of holy communion with the god or goddess.²⁸

These practices of religious prostitution also saturated the Phoenician cult.²⁹

Literature. Although no explicit reference to prostitution could be found in Canaanite/Phoenician literature, it does contain an interesting account of an encounter between Anat, the goddess of love and war, and Aqhat the son of the wiseman Danel. Anat approaches Aqhat out of envy for the bow and arrows which he has received from Kothar-wa-Hasis. What follows is an attempt by Anat to beguile Aqhat from his possessions. Although the allurements is not sexual, the allurements is designed to turn the son of the wise father from his course.³⁰

Summary

The extent of prostitution in the ANE is seen as chronologically being found from the times of early Sumer³¹ to the cultures contemporary with Solomon. Its extent is confirmed as geographically occurring throughout the ANE as an integral part of social and cultic practices from Babylon to Canaan; from Assyria to Egypt. Not simply

²⁸ Gerald Larue, *Sex and the Bible* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1983) 28.

²⁹ Donald Harden, *The Phoenicians* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1962) 103. Albright, *Archaeology*, 75-76; "Sacred prostitution was apparently an almost invariable concomitant of the cult of the Phoenician and Syrian goddess, whatever her personal name." See also A. van Selms, *Marriage and Family Life in Ugaritic Literature* (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1954) 74-82.

³⁰ Michael David Coogan, ed. and transl., *Stories From Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978) 36-37.

³¹ Saggs, *Babylon*, 187; "The status of women generally was certainly higher in the early Sumerian city-state than it subsequently became: they could be in the service of the temples in various capacities, not only as priestesses or temple prostitutes." Marglin, "Hierodouleia," 6:309; "In Mesopotamia the earliest evidence (mostly textual) comes from Sumer . . . Sumerian texts show that temples to Inanna had at their service many temple prostitutes."

tolerated, prostitution was accepted,³² regulated,³³ and practiced. In the ANE cultic prostitution was a necessity of life and secular prostitution was an accepted fact of life.

The prostitute who was an official of the cult in ancient Palestine and nearby lands of biblical times exercised an important function. This religion was predicated upon the belief that the processes of nature were controlled by the relations between gods and goddesses. Projecting their understanding of their own sexual activities, the worshipers of these deities, through the use of imitative magic, engaged in sexual intercourse with devotees of the gods and goddesses to do likewise. Only by sexual relations among the deities could man's desire for increase in herds and fields, as well as in his own family, be realized.³⁴

In spite of the extent and influence of these attitudes, wise men of every culture in their instructions and admonitions warned their sons of the dangers of the beguiling woman. However, it needs to be recognized that these admonitions are few in number. Also most admonitions involve warnings against marriage to a prostitute (cf.

³² Joseph W. Gasper, *Social Ideas in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology, Second Series No. 8 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947) f.n. #49, 11; "Among the Nuzians virginity was not so highly treasured. Cf. Gordon, *op. cit.*, 148: "Prostitution does not appear to have been so disreputable a profession in Nuzi. The fact that a girl named Eluanza has been living as a prostitute does not lower her value in marriage. Her future husband is to furnish 40 shekels of silver (AASOR X, 31), which is all one ordinarily gives for a bride. Furthermore, Tapinitu, while testifying, does not hesitate to tell the court that her daughter is a harlot (Nuzi IV 397:20)."

³³ Marglin, "Hierodouleia," 6:309; "The distinction between the two [sacred and profane prostitutes] imposes itself on the basis of both historical and ethnographic evidence. One of the first legal written documents we possess for the ancient Near East is the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, which specifies a severe punishment for a female temple prostitute who goes to a tavern (the word *tavern* is considered by scholars to be synonymous with the word *brothel*)." Hurley, *Man and Woman*, 39; "Both the Babylonian and the Assyrian codes made specific provision for the regulation of prostitutes. They had no objection to sexual relations with such women, seeing them as in no way threatening the families of the land."

³⁴ Baab, "Prostitution," 3:932-933.

Counsel of Wisdom and Ani); even then the motivation is primarily the avoidance of personal grief.³⁵

Israel's Culture

As this portion of the background study draws its focus more crisply on Solomonic Israel's attitude and actions in regard to prostitution, attention will be drawn to finer details. Before arriving at the Solomonic climate and culture, the immediate background for that culture will be surveyed by viewing pre-Solomonic Israel's prescriptions and practices in regard to prostitution.

Pre-Solomonic Israel

Space fails for a detailed scrutiny of available material. A brief perusal will reveal attitudes and reactions that form the immediate foundation on which the culture of Solomon's time based (or deviated in) their judgment of prostitution both secular and sacred.

Legal Code. Although open to various interpretations the references to prostitution in the legal code of Israel appear to be all negative admonitions, warnings and strict prohibitions.³⁶ Moses warns Israel in Exodus 34: 15-16 concerning the inherent danger of cultic prostitution in Canaan. He states:

Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.

³⁵ *The Proverbs of Ahikar* do mention condemnation both by God and man; however, this instruction is from a later period and is subject to textual questions; compare Charles, "The Story of Ahikar," 2:715ff.

³⁶ The negative character and implication of harlotry is reinforced by the appeals of the prophets in Israel's later history and by the symbolic reference to unfaithfulness to Israel's covenantal faith as 'harlotry' throughout the Bible record. Compare Numbers 14:33; Psalms 73:27, 106:34-39; II Chronicles 21:8-17; Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 2:20; Hosea 4:14f, 5:3; etc.

Along with admonitions and warnings the legal codes contain specific prohibitions concerning cultic prostitution³⁷ and secular prostitutes.³⁸

The law makes it clear that a married woman may sleep with none but her husband (Dt. 22:22). The same restriction applied to a betrothed woman whose marriage had not yet been consummated (Dt. 22:23-24). It was a capital offense to have sexual intercourse with an engaged or married woman. Further, it was a criminal offense to have sexual intercourse with an unengaged girl (Ex. 22:16-17) and fathers were forbidden to prostitute their daughters (Lv. 19:29; 21:9). Further still, in contradiction to the practices of other nations which seem to have institutionalized sacred prostitution, Israelite law flatly prohibits it as an abomination (Dt. 23:17-18). It would seem that there were no Israelite women legally accessible to the would-be user of a prostitute.³⁹

The daughters of Israel⁴⁰ were not to be harlots, either secular or sacred.⁴¹

Some commentators would make these laws applicable only to Israelite women, thus exempting Israelite men to pursue such activities with 'foreign women.'⁴² However, this proposed

³⁷ Compare Leviticus 17:7; 20:5-6; and Deuteronomy 23:17-18 which reads "No Israelite man or woman is to become a temple prostitute. You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both."

³⁸ Compare Leviticus 21:7ff and Deuteronomy 22:21.

³⁹ Hurley, *Man and Woman*, 39-40.

⁴⁰ For a survey of the views regarding the status of women in Israel's culture see Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990).

⁴¹ Cole, *Sex and Love*, 239.

⁴² Compare Baab, "Prostitution," 932; "The common harlot -- i.e., the woman who offers her body to men for hire -- appears at an early period in Israel's life and continued to practice her trade throughout biblical history. She was less conspicuous, however, than her sister, the cult prostitute, although her social function was well established and generally recognized." Grace I. Emmerson, "Women in Ancient Israel," *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*, R. E. Clements, editor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 387; "Whereas adultery was a crime, prostitution was tolerated in Israelite society. . . The picture emerges of prostitutes touting for business in public places (Gen.

application of Israelite law seems to go well beyond the design and intent of the law as given by Yahweh to Israel (Exodus 19:6; Leviticus 11:44).

It is sometimes suggested that women from other nations might be used with impunity. Investigation shows that there are in fact no laws which prohibit harlotry with foreign women. It should, however, be noted that laws dealing with foreigners would not be the way in which a matter of this sort would have been handled. The Mosaic law enacted regulations applicable within Israel. It systematically eliminated all Israelite women from roles as prostitutes. Foreigners within Israel were not subject to a special set of laws, but were treated as the home-born (Ex. 12:49) and thus came under the protection and the jurisdiction of the civil aspects of the Israelite law. . . . Foreign women within Israel were thus not to be made prostitutes; this too would fill the land with harlotry and bring the judgment of God. Thus the law closed off the legitimacy of either native or foreign women as prostitutes. Sadly, Israel's history testifies that both native and foreign women did in fact work as prostitutes within Israel. We conclude, then, that while the law does not speak directly to the promiscuous man, neither does it leave him any legitimate partners.⁴³

Israel stood alone among ANE cultures in its ban on prostitution -- both sacred and secular.

Paganism could not lay down an absolute prohibition of harlotry, since it sanctified and even deified sexual desire. It consecrated men and women to cultic prostitution. By repudiating the divinity of desire the Bible did away with the religious basis of promiscuity and prepared the way for a new moral evaluation. Paganism . . . offers no parallel to the absolute command: "You shall not defile your

38.14; Ezek. 16.26), recognizable by their dress (Gen. 38.15; Prov. 7.10), and negotiating terms with their clients (Gen.38.16; Ezek. 16.31). In certain circumstances some embarrassment attached to the practice (Gen. 38.23), and strong disapproval is expressed in the laws of Lev. 19.29 and 21.9." "In discussing ancient Israelite society a distinction is generally made between common or secular prostitution and cultic prostitution, Secular prostitution, provided that the woman was unmarried, was not an offence but 'a recognized social institution with few moral inhibitions attached to it despite its being looked upon with mixed feelings.'" Cole, *Sex and Love*, 240-241; "But there was no law against a man's going to harlots. . ."

⁴³ Hurley, *Man and Woman*, 40.

daughter by causing her to be a harlot" (Lev. 19:29). . . . Nor is there any law outside of Israel that corresponds to the absolute ban upon cultic prostitution (Deut. 23:18).⁴⁴

Historic examples. In spite of the clarity of Israel's legal code and the uniform tone of warning, admonition and prohibition that it contained, prostitution was a frequent entry in Israel's historical record.⁴⁵ At times the record about prostitution like Israel's reaction to it is negative as in the case of Shechem's rape of Dinah (Gen. 34). At other times the record is negative while Israel's reaction is mixed. Such is the case of Israel's sojourn at Shittim and the occasion of Moab's seduction recorded in Numbers 25. While Israel's masses indulged, Phineas the son of Eleazer, a priest, was zealous for the Lord and His honor. At other times the issue of prostitution is mentioned in accounts which are exclusively positive in their tone. Such is the case of the spies' infiltration of Jericho just before the conquest and Rahab (Joshua 2-6). Throughout the rest of the Bible record Rahab is known as "the harlot" (Hebrews 11:31).⁴⁶

Solomonic Israel

The seeds which promoted or at least occasioned the presence of prostitutes in Solomonic Israel may have been planted well before Solomon's time. However, it is certain that Solomon did not hesitate, though unknowingly perhaps, to water these seeds with abundance. In viewing the circumstances and practices that promoted the presence and practice of both secular and sacred prostitution in Solomonic Israel, it is beneficial to view these influences as being either external or internal.

⁴⁴ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, transl. by Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960) 319.

⁴⁵ Patai, *Sex and Family*, 149; "To perform the sexual act in honor of a deity was a religious practice of the indigenous Canaanites and of the neighboring peoples to which the Hebrew tribes inevitably and repeatedly succumbed."

⁴⁶ The biblical references continue throughout the prophetic period. Forms of the root *zanah*, the common OT term for prostitute occur frequently in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea; and less frequently in Amos, Joel, Micah, and Nahum.

External Influences. Solomon's foreign contacts were extensive and undeniable.⁴⁷ These contacts undoubtedly in every area which he pursued whether economically, administratively, intellectually, and so forth must have opened avenues for intercourse between Israel and foreign cultures where prostitution was the accepted and expected practice. These pursuits of Solomon in the foreign arena no doubt accommodated foreign contacts and the presence of foreigners into Israel's very heart -- Jerusalem. With foreign contacts and foreign presence came foreign and pagan practices including sacred and secular prostitution.

(1) Diplomatic influences. Solomon's realm was neither small nor isolated. Solomon's kingdom bordered many lands and Solomon's influence and reputation extended even further.

The one consideration that must have overridden all others in the thinking of Solomon was the desire to establish diplomatic ties with the hundreds of city-states and kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean and the Fertile Crescent. The most effective way to confirm a commercial or political treaty with a foreign king was to marry one of his daughters and give her a prominent position in the court. . . . This was a common and accepted practice among ancient rulers, and Solomon . . . conformed to this standard.⁴⁸

Pre-eminent among these diplomatic alliances was the alliance with Egypt.

The marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter is something of great significance ([I Kings]3:1). 'As far as we know, there is no real example of Pharaoh's daughter given in marriage to a foreign royal house, although the pharaohs quite frequently married daughters of

⁴⁷ John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller, editors, *Israelite and Judean History* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977) 374; ". . . the sources refer to numerous international relations and far-flung diplomatic connections under Solomon." John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb, *A History of Israel: From Conquest to Exile* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980) 334; "Further proof of Solomonic prestige is seen in the dowry given to Solomon on the occasion of his marriage. The city of Gezer, which had been taken by the Egyptians, was used as a wedding gift."

⁴⁸ Davis and Whitcomb, *History of Israel*, 353-354.

foreign rulers.' . . . The marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter, therefore, has important political and military implications. . . .⁴⁹

In the matters of government and administration Solomon's contacts weighed heavily with Egypt and expanded from there.

There is plenty of evidence for cultural contact with the surrounding countries and foreigners are specifically mentioned as holding senior positions at the Israelite court. It has been suggested that some of Solomon's officials, listed in 1 Kings 4,3 might have been Egyptians or, at least, have Egyptian names and that the title Secretary of State in David's and Solomon's court may have been expressed by the Egyptian word for scribe, *ss*.

I think it is not at all unreasonable to suggest that in his search for wisdom Solomon would extend his interest beyond his national boundary. 1 Kings 4 demonstrates a knowledge of the existence of the wisdom of the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt and what could be more reasonable than that Solomon should question a cultured Egyptian at this court about this wisdom?⁵⁰

(2) Economic influences. Located not in a remote corner of the ANE, Solomon's kingdom straddled the avenues of commerce and thus through trade and traders was in touch with every major

⁴⁹ Davis and Whitcomb, *History of Israel*, 333. Quoting A. Malamat, "The Kingdom of David and Solomon in Its Contact with Egypt and Aram Naharim," *The Biblical Archeologist* (Dec, 1958) 21:97. See also Hayes and Miller, *Israelite and Judean History*, 375; "The biblical sources present Solomon as a lover of foreign women and women in general. . . . I Kings 11:1 refers to Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite (i.e., Syrian) women; that is, women from states with whom Solomon would have had political and trade relations. . . . many elements point to a friendly attitude of Egypt towards the Davidic-Solomonic state, and this attitude would be an adequate explanation for a marriage alliance among equals."

⁵⁰ John Ruffle, "The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs," *Tyndale Bulletin* (1977) 28:66. See also John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1959) 184 and B.D. Redford, "Studies in Relations between Palestine and Egypt during the First Millennium B.C.," *Studies on the Ancient Palestinian World*, J.W. Wevers and D.B. Redford, editors (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 144ff.

producing and commercial area of his world. In economic matters Solomon opened the doors of Israel to the world.⁵¹

Solomon's ships also went to Ophir . . . [which] probably includes most of the region of South Arabia and was commonly associated with the production of fine gold in the Old Testament (cf. I Kings 10:11; Job 22:24; Ps. 45:9; Isa. 13:12). Solomon was able to strengthen his ties with the Arabian merchants by virtue of the visit of the queen of Sheba (10:1-13). Many of the objects brought to Israel by Solomon's merchant fleet came from such distant places as Africa, Arabia and parts of the Mediterranean world.⁵²

Among other by-products, Solomon's trade no doubt brought contact with and perhaps imported foreign ideas and practices;⁵³ perhaps including prostitution both sacred and secular.

Internal Influences. Not only was the cultural climate influenced from without but internal influences also affected attitudes toward prostitution in Solomonic Israel.

(1) **Harem.** Solomon's multiplication of wives may have been rooted in his desire for widespread political influence; however, it augmented the importation of personnel and practices that propagated prostitution into Israel's heart -- Jerusalem.

Multiplying wives was only the beginning of contradictions and disasters. Each wife, as a true representative of her father's kingdom, brought with her the religious paraphernalia and the priests of her god. . . . So it was during Solomon's declining years. Shrines to pagan gods with attending priests and guardian queens

⁵¹ Hayes and Miller, *Israelite and Judean History*, 374-375; "Solomon functioned as the middleman in the Near Eastern trade. Solomon's power and the strategic location of Palestine gave him control over the trade routes between Egypt and southern Syria, and his friendly relations with Egypt no doubt made him an important figure in the international trade of his day."

⁵² Davis and Whitcomb, *History of Israel*, 346. Compare I Kings 5:1-12; 7:13ff.

⁵³ The importation of foreigners certainly occurred when Solomon began construction of the temple and his own palace. Compare Davis and Whitcomb, *History of Israel*, 342.

dotted the hills surrounding Jerusalem. And there they remained for *three hundred years* -- inviolable and untouched . . .⁵⁴

(2) Social changes. Even more basic to the cultural climate of Solomon's day was the by-product effect on Israel as a society. Solomon's reign forever changed daily life (and outlook) in Israel.

Far more significant than any single measure taken by Solomon was the gradual but inexorable inner transformation that had overtaken Israel, which by Solomon's day was virtually complete. Little was left of the old order. The tribal confederacy with its sacral institutions and charismatic leadership had given way to the dynastic state, under which all aspects of the national life had been progressively organized. In the process the whole structure of Israelite society had been profoundly affected.⁵⁵

. . . the framework of tribal society had been sprung. Onto Israel's traditionally agrarian and pastoral society an imposing commercial and industrial superstructure had been grafted. She was no longer merely a nation of small farmers. Solomon's projects drew hundreds from the country villages to the cities, thereby uprooting them from tribal ties and patterns. As the cities grew, as the economic 'boom' raised the living standard of the nation, and as foreign influence made itself felt, an urban culture theretofore unknown in Israel developed. . . . Meanwhile, the growth of a wealthy class increased the gap between the rich and poor. In short, tribal democracy had weakened, and there was the beginning -- if only the beginning -- of a schism in Israelite society. There were proletarians, hired laborers, and slaves; and there were those who fancied themselves aristocrats. At the court which by Solomon's day had nurtured a whole generation born to the purple, there were not a few who regarded

⁵⁴ Davis and Whitcomb, *History of Israel*, 353-354. Cf. Kaufmann, *Religion of Israel*, 139; "Neither in the days of Saul and David nor during the first part of Solomon's reign is there worship of foreign gods in Israel. . . . At the end of Solomon's reign a specific and localized foreign cult appears for the first time: the altars to Chemosh, Molech, Ashtoreth, and the other gods that Solomon erects at the instance of his foreign wives (I Kings 11:1ff.). . . . The foreign cults of Solomon's time are entirely a matter of the royal household."

⁵⁵ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, Third Edition (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1981) 223.

the people as subjects to be possessed body and soul (I Kings 12:1-15).⁵⁶

Inaugural confirmation. The biblical history contains one very significant reference to the presence of prostitution in Solomonic Israel. This reference in I Kings 3:16-28 gains significance from its position immediately following the account of Solomon's prayer for wisdom (vv. 4-15). It is in effect an inaugural confirmation of Solomon's wisdom. In this passage the historian recounts the incident of two prostitutes (*zonoth*) bringing their two sons, one alive and one dead, before Solomon. Each mother claims the living son. Solomon calls for a sword offering to give each mother one-half of the living child. While one prostitute accepts the offer, the other declines; thereby revealing her identity as the true mother of the living child. As a result "when all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice" (v. 28).

The connection between the two accounts is evidenced by the temporal adverb 'az which "directly links the narrative of God's gift of wisdom to Solomon with an anecdote illustrating the employment of that gift."⁵⁷ The inclusion of the story at this point seems primarily designed to illustrate the wisdom which Solomon had just received from Yahweh.⁵⁸ For purposes of this study the story evidences three things: first, the familiarity and acceptability of prostitutes in Solomonic Israel; second that "harlots also enjoyed civil

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ DeVries, *I Kings*, 57. The occurrence of the particle 'az may not necessarily signify a connection with the previous clause. Compare Bruce K. Walke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) #31.6.3, p 513; "The non-perfective verb form regularly (but not always) has a past time reference after 'az,"

⁵⁸ Burke O. Long, *I Kings, Forms of Old Testament Literature*, Volume IX, Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker, editors (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1984) 68-69; "The whole drama illustrates for the narrator the famous wisdom of this King Solomon. . . . The real interest of the storyteller falls on the dilemma and Solomon's extraordinary cleverness in forcing the truth out of the women." J. Robinson, *The First Book of Kings, The Cambridge Bible Commentary*, P.R. Ackroyd, A.R.C. Leaney, and J.W. Packer editors (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1972) 54; "The purpose of this story is to show how the promise God made to Solomon in the dream at Gibeon was implemented."

rights"⁵⁹ to some degree. This may primarily be seen in their access to the king for this judicial decision.⁶⁰ Third, these prostitutes apparently were not married.

Summary

Solomon forever changed the face of Israel's society. It became a more highly cosmopolitan and urbanized society; perhaps the reason for finding the seductress of Proverbs on the corner and the streets of the city. The population necessarily became integrated with foreigners who were essential for Israel's sustained economic and technologic development. The old established social underpinnings were no longer as evident. Tribal loyalties and old values faded as family ties were stretched by the urbanization and commercial revolution under Solomon. Jerusalem's skyline became dotted with foreign and pagan shrines and the smoke of deviant sacrifices accompanied by detestable practices being offered to strange gods.

⁵⁹ Larue, *Sex and the Bible*, 112.

⁶⁰ I. W. Slotki, *Kings, Soncino Books of the Bible*, A. Cohen, editor (London: The Soncino Press, 1977) 25; "Even the lowest classes could appeal to the king for justice." See also John Gray, *I & II Kings, The Old Testament Library*, P. Ackroyd, J. Barr, J. Bright, and G.E. Wright, editors (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976) 128.