

# Deuteronomy 23:17-18

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-23/deuteronomy-2317-18/>

*Moses prohibited the practice of cult prostitution. He also warned the Israelites against bringing the hire of a harlot or the wages of a male prostitute into God's sanctuary.*

Moses now dealt with the issue of pagan cultic prostitution in Israel by saying that *none of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute* (v. 17). The phrase *a cult prostitute* (Heb. "qādēsh," "to be set apart" or "to be holy") refer to males and females dedicated as prostitutes in the worship of pagan fertility gods and goddesses.

Pagan cultic prostitution was a sexual rite consisting of sexual intercourse performed in the context of religious worship. This practice was common in the ancient world, especially among the people groups of Syria and Canaan, especially in the worship of Baal. Temple prostitutes would have sexual intercourse with the worshipers in order to flatter the gods so that they would make their fields and flocks fertile. Unsurprisingly, this bred a culture of widespread sexual perversion. Leviticus 18 lists a group of behaviors common in Egypt and Canaan, including a vast array of incest, exploitation, and child sacrifice. It also led to a culture where the strong exploited the weak.

Because of its widespread use, it would have been tempting to include this practice in the worship of the LORD. But, as is the case in much of the Old Testament legislation, the worship of the holy LORD was to remain pure, not tainted by practices and attitudes of other religions. The worship of the Lord was to lead to loving others, not exploiting them. This was of crucial importance since the people of God were about to go in and possess Canaan, the Promised Land, where such practices were the norm.

Furthermore, Moses prohibited Israel to *bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord for any votive offering* (v. 18). The word *harlot* (Heb. "zānā") refers to a secular (i.e. non-cultic) female prostitute. The word for *dog* (Heb. "keleb") is a reference to a secular male prostitute.

The term *dog* is probably used here in a derogatory sense since a dog is always regarded as an unclean animal.

The money earned by prostitution was under no circumstances allowed to be brought *into the house of the Lord your God* and used *for any votive offering*, including any offerings made as payment of a vow. There was to be no excuse of “it is ok because we are giving the proceeds to charity.” Because the wages were earned by impure means, the money itself was impure, and so the Suzerain (Ruler) God would not accept any promised gifts that do not meet His standard of holiness (Num. 30:3, 4; Deuteronomy 12:11).

To sum up, to practice pagan cultic prostitution or to bring wages of secular prostitution as offerings to the Suzerain (Ruler) God would be to commit a detestable act in God’s eyes, *for both of these activities were an abomination to the Lord God*. Once again, this law prohibited any aspect of paganism in the worship of the holy LORD of Israel

**Biblical Text:**

**<sup>17</sup> None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute. <sup>18</sup> You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.**