

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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A Study for Judaism • Christianity • Islam

DOCUMENT 243

THE HIRE OF THE HARLOT

A Covenant Deep Dive into Prostitution *zenut* (harlotry / unfaithfulness) and What the Tanakh Reveals

What Does the Written Tanakh Say About Prostitution — the Practice, the Buyer, the One Who Profits, and the Woman Herself? — A Three-Religion Covenant Response

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The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
The Torah forbids a father to make his daughter a zonah (prostitute / harlot) (Leviticus 19:29) and bars the etnan (hire / a harlot's wage) from the house of Yahweh (Deuteronomy 23:18). Rabbinic tradition debated whether Rachav was a harlot or an innkeeper, and taught that she became the ancestress of prophets and priests (Talmud Megillah 14b). The door is teshuvah (repentance / return).	The New Testament names Tamar and Rachav in the genealogy of Yeshua (Matthew 1:3, 5), commends Rachav's faith (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25), and says harlots who believed would enter the kingdom ahead of the religious leaders (Matthew 21:31). Church history also tolerated the trade as a "necessary evil." The Tanakh speaks first.	Q. 24:33 forbids forcing slave women into bigha' (prostitution) for worldly gain, and hadith forbid mahr al-baghiy (the earnings of a prostitute) alongside the price of a dog (Sahih al-Bukhari 2237) — the same pairing as Deuteronomy 23:18 . Q. 17:32 commands: do not approach zina (unlawful intercourse). The Tanakh's structure — the trade forbidden, the woman called — is the common ground.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh**'s own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh**'s covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh* to a single question: what the Tanakh reveals about prostitution — the practice, the buyer, the one who profits from it, and the woman herself. **Yahweh** (יהוה) and **Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים) appear in bold throughout. Tanakh book names are given in English. Hebrew transliterations appear in ***bold italic*** with English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. Verse numbers follow the English version; where the Hebrew numbering differs, it is given in brackets on first citation. Scripture is rendered in a literal working translation from the Hebrew. Because this subject touches real suffering, the study distinguishes throughout between the trade the covenant forbids and the person the covenant still calls. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, New Testament texts, and the Qur'an are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	The statutes on prostitution, the Temple, the priesthood, and the trafficker; the narratives of Dinah and Tamar
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Malachi	Rachav, Yiftach, Shimshon, the two women before Shelomoh; the qedeshim; the prophetic indictment of buyers, traders, and nations
Ketuvim (Writings)	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth	Wisdom's warning to the buyer; the line of David through Tamar

COMPARATIVE TEXTS CITED — HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE REFERENCE ONLY

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Rabbinic literature	Mishnah Yevamot 6:5; Mishnah Temurah 6:3; Talmud Megillah 14b; Targum Jonathan and Rashi on Joshua 2:1	How the tradition defined <i>zonah</i> (prostitute / harlot), read <i>mechir kelev</i> (price of a dog), and received Rachav
New Testament	Matthew 1:3–5; 21:31–32; Luke 15:30; 1 Corinthians 6:15–16; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25	Tamar and Rachav in the genealogy; the harlot who believes; the one-flesh argument
Qur'an and Hadith	Q. 17:32; 24:2; 24:33; Sahih al-Bukhari 2237	Unlawful intercourse, forced prostitution, and the forbidden earnings
Historical and scientific record	Herodotus, <i>Histories</i> 1.199; Gruber (1986); Westenholz (1989); Budin (2008); DeGrado (2018); ILO/Walk Free/IOM (2022); Potterat et al. (2004)	The “sacred prostitution” debate; the modern trade and its toll

I. FRAMING THE QUESTION — WHAT IS PROSTITUTION, AND WHOM DOES THE TANAKH ADDRESS?

I-A. Why This Study, and What It Does Not Repeat

Miqdash Bethel has already published on the neighboring ground. An earlier study, “**Why Yahweh Calls Yisra’el a Whore: Pure Text, Original Context,**” traced the prophets’ use of *zanab* (*to prostitute / be unfaithful*) as the charge of covenant unfaithfulness against the nation. Doc 69 and its companion Doc 69A addressed sexual intimacy and the difficult narratives of the Tanakh for young people. Doc 194 and the slave-trade series (Docs 222–226) established the Torah’s man-stealing and fugitive-slave law as the covenant’s standard against the trade in human beings. Doc 235 examined the two inclinations in man and woman, including Tamar judged more righteous than Yehudah (Judah).

This study does not repeat those findings. It asks a narrower and harder question that none of them answered directly: **what does the written Tanakh say about literal prostitution** — the exchange of the body for payment — and **toward whom does it direct its law, its warnings, and its mercy?** The metaphor of Israel as harlot is treated in Section VIII only as far as it depends on the literal practice.

I-B. The Question in the Tanakh’s Own Terms

Modern discussion usually asks one question: is prostitution sin or is it work? The Tanakh does not frame the matter that way. It speaks to at least five parties, and it speaks differently to each:

First, to the father or owner who would make a woman a *zonah* (prostitute / harlot) for gain (**Leviticus 19:29; Joel 3:3 [Hebrew 4:3]**).

Second, to the buyer who goes in to her (**Proverbs 5–7; Hosea 4:14**).

Third, to the house of Yahweh, which may not be funded by the trade (**Deuteronomy 23:17–18 [Hebrew 23:18–19]**).

Fourth, to the priesthood, which may not marry into it (**Leviticus 21:7, 14**).

Fifth, to the woman herself — and here the Tanakh speaks mostly through narrative: Tamar, Rachab, the mother of Yiftach, the two women before Shelomoh, and Gomer.

The method is the standing method of this Institution. **Deuteronomy 19:15** requires two or three witnesses before a matter is established. Every finding below is graded on that standard, and where the Tanakh is silent, this study says so rather than filling the silence.

II. THE VOCABULARY OF THE TRADE — A WORD STUDY

II-A. The Hebrew Terms

The Tanakh has no single technical term for “prostitution” in the modern legal sense. It has a family of words built chiefly on one root, together with a small cluster of cultic and commercial terms. The table sets them side by side.

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>zanab</i> (זָנָה, to prostitute / be unfaithful)	H2181	The root verb: to have sexual relations outside a covenant bond; by extension, to be unfaithful to Yahweh	Leviticus 19:29; Numbers 25:1
<i>zonab</i> (זֹנֶה, prostitute / harlot)	H2181	The feminine participle of the same root, used as a noun: the woman who sells, a harlot	Genesis 38:15; Joshua 2:1
<i>zenut</i> (זְנוּת, harlotry / unfaithfulness)	H2184	Abstract noun: the state or practice of harlotry	Numbers 14:33; Hosea 4:11
<i>zenunim</i> (זְנוּנִים, harlotries)	H2183	Plural of intensity: repeated or habitual harlotry	Genesis 38:24; Hosea 1:2
<i>taznut</i> (תְּזָנוּת, whoring)	H8457	Found only in Ezekiel 16 and 23 : the prophet's own intensive coinage	Ezekiel 16:15
<i>etnan</i> (אֶתְנָן, hire / a harlot's wage)	H868	The payment given to a harlot; related to the verb “to give”	Deuteronomy 23:18; Micah 1:7
<i>qedeshah</i> (קִדְשָׁה, consecrated woman)	H6948	Literally “set-apart woman”; a cultic functionary of foreign worship. Whether her role was sexual is disputed (Section VII)	Genesis 38:21; Deuteronomy 23:17; Hosea 4:14
<i>qadesh</i> (קִדְּשׁ, consecrated man)	H6945	The masculine counterpart; plural <i>qedeshim</i> (consecrated men)	1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 23:7
<i>kelev</i> (כֶּלֶב, dog)	H3611	Ordinarily “dog”; in Deuteronomy 23:18 paired with the harlot's hire. Two readings (Section III-B)	Deuteronomy 23:18

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>mechir</i> (מָכַר, price)	H4242	Price, sale-value: the “price of a dog”	Deuteronomy 23:18
<i>nokbriyah</i> (נֹכְרִיָּה, foreign woman) and <i>ishah zarah</i> (זָרָה, strange woman)	H5237; H2114	Proverbs’ names for the woman outside the covenant bond who lures the young man	Proverbs 2:16; 5:3, 20; 7:5
<i>chalal</i> (חָלַל, to profane)	H2490	To make common what was set apart; used of the father who prostitutes his daughter	Leviticus 19:29; 21:9
<i>zimmah</i> (זִמָּה, lewd wickedness)	H2154	Planned sexual wickedness; what fills the land when the trade is permitted	Leviticus 19:29

II-B. Three Observations From the Vocabulary

First, the Tanakh uses **one root** for both the literal trade and covenant unfaithfulness. The prophets could accuse the nation of *zenut* (harlotry / unfaithfulness) only because every hearer already knew what the literal act was: intimacy taken out of covenant and exchanged for gain. The metaphor rests on reality, not the other way around.

Second, the vocabulary is **economic** as much as sexual. The *etnan* (hire / a harlot’s wage) is a wage; the *mechir* (price) is a price; the *zonah* (prostitute / harlot) is the one paid. The Torah’s concern reaches beyond the act to the commerce around it — who sells, who pays, and where the money goes.

Third, the Tanakh keeps two words apart that later readers often collapse. The *zonah* (prostitute / harlot) is a woman who sells; the *qedeshah* (consecrated woman) is a woman “set apart” to a foreign cult. **Genesis 38** uses both words of the same woman in the mouths of different speakers (**38:15, 21**), and **Hosea 4:14** sets them in parallel. Whether the two roles overlapped is a question the text raises and scholarship still disputes. Section VII weighs it.

III. THE LAW — WHAT THE TORAH COMMANDS

III-A. Leviticus 19:29 — The Law Is Aimed at the One Who Profits

“Do not profane your daughter to make her a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry and the land be filled with lewd wickedness.” (Leviticus 19:29)

The first statute in the Torah on prostitution does not address the woman. It addresses **her father**. The verb is *chalal* (to profane), and the infinitive is *lehaznotah* (to make her a harlot). The man who hands his daughter over to the trade — for debt, for gain, for survival — is the one commanded. The reason given is not only personal but civic: the land itself will fall into *zenut* (harlotry / unfaithfulness) and fill with *zimmah* (lewd wickedness). The Torah treats the trade as a contagion of the land, and it lays the first responsibility on the one with power over the woman.

The verse stands in the Holiness Code between the command not to practice divination (**19:26**) and the command to keep the Sabbaths (**19:30**). It is not a stray moral maxim. It is a covenant law for a holy people living in a holy land.

III-B. Deuteronomy 23:17–18 — No Consecrated Ones, and No Tainted Money in the House

“There shall be no consecrated woman among the daughters of Israel, nor a consecrated man among the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the price of a dog into the house of Yahweh your Elohim for any vow, for both of them are an abomination to Yahweh your Elohim.” (Deuteronomy 23:17–18 [Hebrew 23:18–19])

The passage contains two commands. The first forbids the *qedeshah* (consecrated woman) and the *qadesh* (consecrated man) among Israel — whatever their precise role, it belonged to the worship of other gods. The second forbids the *etnan zonah* (hire of a harlot) and the *mechir kelev* (price of a dog) from being paid into the house of **Yahweh** to fulfill a *neder* (vow). Both are called *to'evah* (abomination).

The second command is striking. The Torah anticipates that money earned in the trade might be offered to **Yahweh** as a vow payment — a way of washing the gain through the sanctuary — and it refuses. **Yahweh's house is not to be financed by the sale of a human body**. The principle reaches beyond the Temple: covenant worship cannot sanctify covenant-breaking commerce.

The phrase *mechir kelev* (price of a dog) has two established readings, and this study presents both. **Reading one:** “dog” is a term of contempt for a male prostitute, parallel to the harlot in the same verse; many modern translations adopt it. **Reading two:** the phrase means the literal price of a dog. Josephus read it of a dog's hire, and the Mishnah (Temurah 6:3) explains it as an animal exchanged for a dog. The parallel with the harlot's hire and the preceding verse on the *qadesh* (consecrated man) favor the first reading; the plain lexical sense of *kelev* (dog) supports the second. **Graded: both readings have witnesses; the text does not settle it.** Either way, the verse forbids tainted gain in the sanctuary.

III-C. The Priesthood — Leviticus 21:7, 9, 14

“They shall not take a woman who is a harlot or profaned, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband, for he is holy to his Elohim.” (Leviticus 21:7)

The priest may not marry a *zonah* (prostitute / harlot) or a *chalalah* (profaned woman) (21:7); the high priest may marry only a virgin of his people (21:14). The priest’s daughter who “profanes herself by playing the harlot” profanes her father, and the Torah assigns the gravest penalty (21:9). The logic is the logic of the whole chapter: the priestly house stands for the holiness of the sanctuary, and its marriages are held to that standard.

Two cautions belong here.

First, these are priestly laws. They govern who a priest may marry; they are not a general statute for the whole people.

Second, any capital penalty in the Torah is bound to a court and to the witness standard of **Deuteronomy 17:6** and **19:15**. No Torah text authorizes private violence against a woman in the trade, and the narrative in **Genesis 38**, examined in Section V, shows exactly why the Torah insists on judgment rather than rage.

III-D. What the Torah Does Not Legislate

A careful reading must also notice what the Torah leaves unsaid. It prescribes no court penalty for an unmarried woman of Israel who is not a priest’s daughter and who sells herself; it forbids the trade (**Leviticus 19:29; Deuteronomy 23:17**) without assigning a punishment to her. For the unmarried man who lies with an unbetrothed woman, the Torah’s pattern is not a fine to the state but an obligation to her: he must pay the bride-price and marry her, unless her father refuses (**Exodus 22:16–17 [Hebrew 22:15–16]; Deuteronomy 22:28–29**). The covenant’s answer to sexual use outside marriage is **responsibility toward the woman**, not a transaction settled and forgotten.

Where the Torah does not legislate, the Wisdom literature and the prophets speak. Section IV hears them.

III-E. Finding on the Law

Three independent Torah texts — **Leviticus 19:29, Deuteronomy 23:17–18, and Leviticus 21:7–14** — establish that the covenant forbids the trade, forbids its profits in the sanctuary, and forbids the priesthood to marry into it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard is met. The same three texts also establish the **direction** of the law: its first command falls on the one with power who profits, and its second on the sanctuary that might launder the gain.

IV. THE BUYER — WISDOM’S WARNING AND THE PROPHETS’ CHARGE

If the Torah’s statutes address the father, the sanctuary, and the priest, the Wisdom literature addresses **the man who pays**. The book of Proverbs devotes more sustained attention to the buyer than any other part of the Tanakh, and it is not gentle.

IV-A. The Price Is Higher Than the Coin

“For on account of a harlot a man is brought down to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress hunts the precious life.” (Proverbs 6:26)

“For a harlot is a deep pit, and a foreign woman a narrow well. She also lies in wait as for prey, and increases the treacherous among men.” (Proverbs 23:27–28)

“He who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth.” (Proverbs 29:3)

The *kikkar lechem* (loaf of bread) of **Proverbs 6:26** is an image of reduction: the man who pays for the body is himself reduced to the price of a meal. **Proverbs 23:27–28** adds a social consequence — the trade “increases the treacherous among men.” The buyer is not a neutral customer. He is being made into a covenant-breaker, and he multiplies covenant-breakers around him. **Proverbs 29:3** names the economic cost: wealth that should have sustained a household is poured out.

IV-B. The Young Man Without Sense — Proverbs 7

Proverbs 7 narrates the buyer’s path in slow motion: a young man “lacking heart” passes near her corner at dusk (**7:7–9**); a woman meets him “in the attire of a harlot, guarded of heart” (**7:10**); he follows “as an ox goes to the slaughter” (**7:22**). The chapter closes with the verdict: “Many are the slain she has cast down... her house is the way to Sheol” (**7:26–27**). Wisdom’s remedy is not merely avoidance but a positive command: “Drink water from your own cistern... rejoice in the wife of your youth” (**Proverbs 5:15–18**). The answer to the market is the covenant of marriage (**Genesis 2:24**).

Two cautions keep this reading honest. **First**, the woman of **Proverbs 7** is described as married (**7:19–20**); she is an adulteress dressed as a harlot, and Proverbs treats the *nokbriyah* (foreign woman) and the *ishah zarah* (strange woman) as a figure of every relationship outside the covenant bond. **Second**, Proverbs is addressed “to my son” (**7:1**). Its warnings fall on the man’s choice, not on a presumption that every woman in the trade is a predator. The narratives of Section V show the other side.

IV-C. The Prophets Turn the Charge on the Men

“I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with harlots, and sacrifice with the consecrated women. A people without understanding shall come to ruin.”
(Hosea 4:14)

This is the sharpest single verse on the subject in the Tanakh. **Hoshea** does not deny that the daughters sin. He declares that **Yahweh** will not single them out for punishment while the men who use them go free. The double standard of a society that condemns the woman and excuses the man is named and refused by **Yahweh** Himself.

Two prophets confirm the charge. **Yirmeyahu**: “When I had fed them to the full, they committed adultery and assembled in troops at the harlot’s house” (**Jeremiah 5:7**) — the *beit zonah* (house of a harlot) as a place men visit in crowds, in prosperity, not in desperation. **Amos**: “A man and his father go in to the same girl, to profane My holy name” (**Amos 2:7**) — the *na’arah* (young woman / girl), in the same breath as those who “sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals” (**2:6**). The prophet sets sexual use of the vulnerable girl inside the economy of oppression.

IV-D. The Narrative Witness — Shimshon at Gaza

The Tanakh also shows the buyer’s path in a life. **Shimshon (Samson)**, set apart from the womb, “went to Gaza, saw there a harlot, and went in to her” (**Judges 16:1**). The next verses place him in the snare of Delilah (**16:4–21**). The text does not moralize; it lets the sequence speak. The man whose strength was consecrated spent it where Proverbs said it would be spent: “lest you give your strength to others” (**Proverbs 5:9–10**).

IV-E. Finding on the Buyer

Five witnesses — **Proverbs 5–7**, **Proverbs 23:27–28**, **Hosea 4:14**, **Jeremiah 5:7**, and **Amos 2:6–7**, with **Judges 16** as narrative confirmation — establish that the Tanakh holds the buyer morally responsible, warns him of the cost to himself, his household, and his society, and refuses a double standard that punishes the woman while excusing the man. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard is exceeded.

V. THE WOMAN — FIVE WOMEN THE TANAKH REFUSES TO ERASE

The Tanakh could have mentioned women in the trade only as warnings. It does not. It names them, records their words, gives them hearings, and places some of them in the line of kings. Five accounts are

examined here. In each the question is the same: what does the text say of her, and what does **Yahweh** do with her?

Witness One — Tamar: “She Is More Righteous Than I” (Genesis 38)

Tamar was twice widowed by the sons of Yehudah, and Yehudah withheld his third son, Shelah, from her in breach of the duty owed to a widow of the house (**Genesis 38:11, 14**). Left without husband, child, or standing, she veiled herself and sat at *Petach Enayim* (the Opening of Eyes) on Yehudah’s road. “Yehudah saw her and thought her a harlot, for she had covered her face” (**38:15**). He bargained for a young goat and left his signet, cord, and staff as *eravon* (pledge) (**38:17–18**). When his friend returned with the goat, he asked the men of the place for “the *gedeshbah* (consecrated woman) who was at Enayim” (**38:21**).

Three months later Yehudah heard, “Tamar has played the harlot, and she is with child by *zenunim* (harlotries),” and he pronounced the sentence at once: “Bring her out, and let her be burned” (**38:24**). Tamar produced the pledge: “By the man to whom these belong I am with child” (**38:25**). And Yehudah answered with the words that turn the chapter:

**“She is more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son.”
(Genesis 38:26)**

The Hebrew is *tzadqah mimmeni* (she is more righteous than I) — **תְּצַדֵּק מִמֶּנִּי**. The man who bought and the man who condemned are the same man, and the text makes him judge himself. The injustice that drove Tamar to the roadside was his. Her son Peretz stands in the line of David (**Ruth 4:12, 18–22**). The account does not commend the act as a pattern; it exposes the hypocrisy of the one who would burn the woman for what he himself paid for.

Witness Two — Rachav: The Cord of Hope (Joshua 2; 6)

“They went and came into the house of a woman, a *zonah* (prostitute / harlot), whose name was Rachav” (**Joshua 2:1**). The same woman who is named by her trade makes one of the clearest confessions of **Yahweh** by any Gentile in the Tanakh:

“For Yahweh your Elohim, He is Elohim in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.” (Joshua 2:11)

She asks for *chesed* (covenant-love) toward her father’s house (**2:12**), and the spies swear *chesed* (covenant-love) and truth to her (**2:14**). The sign between them is a scarlet cord in her window — in Hebrew a *tikvah* (cord / hope) of scarlet thread (**2:18, 21**). The same word means **hope** everywhere else in the Tanakh (**Jeremiah 29:11; 31:17**). The harlot of Jericho hung her hope in the window, and

it held. “Rachav the harlot, her father’s household, and all she had, Yehoshua saved alive; and she has dwelt in the midst of Israel to this day” (**Joshua 6:25**).

Was she a prostitute or an innkeeper? The Hebrew text says *zonah* (prostitute / harlot) (**2:1; 6:17, 25**). The Aramaic Targum Jonathan renders the word *pundekita*, “innkeeper,” Rashi follows it, and Josephus describes her house as an inn (*Antiquities* 5.1.2). The Talmud, by contrast, reads her as a harlot who repented (Megillah 14b–15a). **Graded: the written text’s word is *zonah* (prostitute / harlot); the innkeeper reading is a later interpretive softening, and the two roles were not mutually exclusive in the ancient world.** The covenant point does not depend on the answer. Whatever her trade, the Tanakh calls her by it and then records her confession, her faith, and her rescue.

Witness Three — The Mother of Yiftach: The Child Is Not the Mother’s Trade (Judges 11)

“Now Yiftach the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, and he was the son of a harlot.” (Judges 11:1)

His half-brothers drove him out: “You shall not inherit in our father’s house, for you are the son of another woman” (**11:2**). Yet the elders of Gilead came to him in their distress, “the Spirit of **Yahweh** came upon Yiftach” (**11:29**), and **Shemuel** named him among the deliverers **Yahweh** sent (**1 Samuel 12:11**). The text calls him *chayil* (valor / strength) in the same sentence it names his mother’s trade. The stigma of the mother was not the verdict on the son. The rash vow that followed (**Judges 11:30–40**) is his own failure and is judged on its own terms; it is not charged to his birth.

Witness Four — The Two Women Before Shelomoh: Justice Is Not Withheld (1 Kings 3)

“Then two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him” (**1 Kings 3:16**). The first recorded case in Shelomoh’s (Solomon’s) court is theirs. The king does not dismiss them for their trade or refer them to a lesser official. He hears both, tests the claim, and finds the true mother by her *rachamim* (compassion): “her compassion yearned for her son” (**3:26**). “All Israel heard... and they saw that the wisdom of **Elohim** was in him to do *mishpat* (justice)” (**3:28**).

The proof of the king’s divine wisdom is displayed in a case brought by two prostitutes. The Tanakh presents their access to justice as the model of righteous government, not an embarrassment to it.

Witness Five — Gomer: Bought Back (Hosea 1–3)

Yahweh commanded **Hoshea**: “Go, take for yourself an *eshet zenunim* (wife of harlotries)” (**Hosea 1:2**). When she went after lovers, **Yahweh** commanded him again: “Go, love a woman... as **Yahweh** loves the children of Israel” (**3:1**). **Hoshea** bought her back for fifteen shekels of silver and a measure

and a half of barley (3:2), and said: “You shall remain with me many days; you shall not play the harlot” (3:3).

Gomer’s story is chiefly a sign of **Yahweh** and Israel (Section VIII). But the sign works only because the act is real: a man paid to bring a woman **out** of the trade, not to use her in it. It is the Tanakh’s picture of the *ga’al* (to redeem) — the purchase that restores rather than consumes.

Finding on the Five Women

Five witnesses from the Torah, the Former Prophets, and the Latter Prophets establish that the Tanakh names women in the trade honestly, exposes the men who condemned or used them (Tamar), receives the confession of the one who turns to **Yahweh** (Rachav), refuses to visit the mother’s trade on the child (Yiftach), grants full access to justice (the two women), and pictures redemption as a purchase out of the trade (Gomer). The **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard is exceeded. **The Tanakh forbids the trade; it does not write off the woman.**

A Counter-Witness Honestly Stated — Dinah (Genesis 34)

One further text shows the other edge of the word. After Dinah was taken and violated by Shekhem, her brothers answered their father: “Should he treat our sister as a harlot?” (**Genesis 34:31**). The line shows that in Israel’s own mouth, to be treated “as a *zonah* (prostitute / harlot)” was the name for being used and discarded. The brothers’ massacre is condemned by Ya’akov (**Genesis 49:5–7**), but their question stands: the covenant family did not accept that any daughter of theirs could be treated as merchandise.

VI. THE TRADE AND THE TRAFFICKER — WHEN NATIONS SELL THE GIRL

VI-A. Joel 3:3 — A Boy for a Harlot, a Girl for Wine

“They have cast lots for My people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink.” (Joel 3:3 [Hebrew 4:3])

Yoel names the nations’ crime in the language of the trade. Children taken as spoils are traded for sexual use and for drink. **Yahweh** does not treat this as a private vice; He brings the nations to judgment for it in the valley of Yehoshafat (3:2) and returns their deed on their heads (3:4–8). The text is Tanakh’s clearest description of what the modern world calls **sex trafficking**, and it places the guilt on the buyers and sellers of the child.

VI-B. The Man-Stealing Law and the Fugitive

The Torah's law against kidnapping — “He who steals a man and sells him... shall surely be put to death” (**Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7**) — and its law of the fugitive — “You shall not deliver to his master the servant who has escaped to you... you shall not oppress him” (**Deuteronomy 23:15–16 [Hebrew 23:16–17]**) — were established in Doc 194 and Docs 222–226 as the covenant's standard against the trade in persons. It is worth noticing where the fugitive law stands: **immediately before** the prohibition of the *qedeshah* (consecrated woman) and the harlot's hire (**Deuteronomy 23:17–18**). The same passage that forbids returning the escaped to their master forbids the trade that would consume them.

VI-C. The Economy of Harlotry — Micah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Nahum

The prophets extend the trade's vocabulary to whole economies. **Mikhah** says of Samaria's idols: “All her hires shall be burned with fire... for from the hire of a harlot she gathered them, and to the hire of a harlot they shall return” (**Micah 1:7**) — the *etnan* (hire / a harlot's wage) as the currency of an idolatrous economy. **Nahum** calls Nineveh “the well-favored harlot, mistress of sorceries, who sells nations through her harlotries” (**Nahum 3:4**). **Yechezkel** inverts the image: Jerusalem is worse than a harlot, because “men give gifts to all harlots, but you gave your gifts to all your lovers” (**Ezekiel 16:33–34**).

Yeshayahu records the most unexpected turn. Tyre, the merchant city, is pictured as a forgotten harlot who returns to her hire; but “her merchandise and her hire shall be holy to **Yahweh**; it shall not be stored or hoarded” (**Isaiah 23:15–18**). On its face this seems to contradict **Deuteronomy 23:18**. It does not: Tyre's gain is not offered as a vow payment by the trade; it is **seized** from it and redistributed “for those who dwell before **Yahweh**, to eat sufficiently” (**23:18**). The prophet pictures the profits of an exploitative economy taken away from it and turned to feed the poor.

VI-D. Finding on the Trade

Four prophetic witnesses — **Joel 3:3**, **Amos 2:6–7**, **Micah 1:7**, and **Nahum 3:4** — together with the Torah's man-stealing and fugitive laws, establish that the Tanakh treats the organized trade in human bodies as a crime of nations and economies, not merely a private sin, and that **Yahweh** brings the traffickers to judgment. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard is exceeded.

VII. THE “SACRED PROSTITUTION” QUESTION — THE EVIDENCE GRADED

VII-A. What the Tanakh Says About the Qedeshim

The *qedeshim* (consecrated men) and *qedeshot* (consecrated women) appear in a small, consistent set of texts. They were “in the land” under Rechav’am, doing “according to all the abominations of the nations” (1 Kings 14:24). Asa removed them (1 Kings 15:12), and Yehoshafat removed the remnant (1 Kings 22:46 [Hebrew 22:47]). Yoshiyahu (Josiah) “broke down the houses of the *qedeshim* (consecrated men) that were in the house of **Yahweh**, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah” (2 Kings 23:7). **Hoshea** sets the *qedeshot* (consecrated women) in parallel with the *zonot* (prostitutes), and says the men “sacrifice with” them (Hosea 4:14). **Iyov (Job)** speaks of the godless whose life ends “among the *qedeshim* (consecrated men)” (Job 36:14).

On one point these texts agree without dispute: the *qedeshim* (consecrated men) were functionaries of foreign worship, installed even in the house of **Yahweh** during Judah’s apostasy, and every reforming king removed them. That finding stands on five witnesses.

VII-B. The Scholarly Dispute

For most of the twentieth century, translators rendered *qedeshah* (consecrated woman) as “cult prostitute” or “temple prostitute,” on the theory that Canaanite fertility religion included paid ritual sex. The chief classical source for such a practice is Herodotus, who claimed that every Babylonian woman once in her life had to sit at the temple of Mylitta and lie with a stranger for a coin (*Histories* 1.199).

That theory has been heavily challenged. Mayer Gruber (1986) and Joan Goodnick Westenholz (1989, *Harvard Theological Review*) examined the Akkadian cognate *qadishtu* and found evidence of cultic duties — including roles connected with childbirth and wet-nursing — but not of a sexual function. Stephanie Budin’s *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008) argued that the whole category rests on misread sources and on Greek writers’ portrayal of foreign peoples; Herodotus in particular is widely treated as unreliable on this point. J. DeGrado (*Vetus Testamentum*, 2018) concluded that neither “priestess, not prostitute” nor “prostitute, not priestess” captures the full range of the Hebrew word. Budin’s method has in turn been criticized by other scholars. The question is not settled.

VII-C. The Evidence Graded

CLAIM	EVIDENCE	GRADE
The <i>qedeshim</i> (consecrated men) were cultic functionaries of foreign worship, forbidden in Israel	Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7	Corroborated — five Tanakh witnesses
The Tanakh associates the <i>qedeshah</i> (consecrated woman) with sexual conduct in at least some texts	Genesis 38:15, 21 (same woman called <i>zonah</i> (prostitute / harlot) and <i>qedeshah</i> (consecrated woman)); Hosea 4:14 (parallel with <i>zonot</i> (prostitutes)); Deuteronomy 23:17–18 (adjacent to the harlot’s hire)	Corroborated as an association — three texts; the nature of the link is not specified
An institutional system of paid ritual sex operated in Canaanite or Mesopotamian temples	Herodotus 1.199; later classical writers; no confirming cuneiform or Ugaritic evidence identified by Gruber, Westenholz, or Budin	Not corroborated — a single contested outside witness
The Akkadian <i>qadishtu</i> was a prostitute	Gruber 1986; Westenholz 1989 find cultic, not sexual, functions	Not corroborated

The covenant conclusion does not depend on the dispute. Whatever the *qedeshah* (consecrated woman) did, **Deuteronomy 23:17** forbids the role in Israel, and **Hosea 4:14** condemns the men who joined it. What the text does not permit is the confident modern claim that ancient Israel’s neighbors ran temple brothels as a matter of established fact. On the present evidence, that claim does not meet **Deuteronomy 19:15**, and Miqdash Bethel does not assert it (**Exodus 23:1**).

VIII. THE METAPHOR AND THE REALITY — WHY THE PROPHETS SPEAK THIS WAY

The earlier Miqdash Bethel study on why **Yahweh** calls Israel a harlot traced the metaphor in full: the Sinai covenant as marriage (**Exodus 24**), the charge of *zenut* (harlotry / unfaithfulness) after other gods (**Exodus 34:15–16; Numbers 15:39; 25:1; Deuteronomy 31:16**), and the great indictments of **Hosea 2, Jeremiah 3**, and **Ezekiel 16 and 23**. Three points connect that study to this one.

First, the metaphor depends on reality. The prophets could say “You had a harlot’s forehead; you refused to be ashamed” (**Jeremiah 3:3**) only because the hearers knew what the harlot’s trade was: intimacy detached from covenant and exchanged for provision. Israel’s sin, in **Hoshea’s** words, was saying “I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water” (**Hosea 2:5 [Hebrew 2:7]**).

Second, the prophets tie harlotry to injustice, not to sex alone: “How the faithful city has become a harlot! She was full of justice; righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers” (**Isaiah 1:21**). A city that sells its justice is described in the language of a woman sold. The trade and the corruption of justice belong to one family.

Third, **Yahweh**’s answer to the harlot-wife is not abandonment but pursuit. “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart” (**Hosea 2:14 [Hebrew 2:16]**). “You will call Me *Isbi* (my husband), and no longer call Me *Ba’ali* (my master / my lord)” (**2:16 [Hebrew 2:18]**). “I will betroth you to Me for ever” — the verb is *aras* (to betroth) (**2:19–20 [Hebrew 2:21–22]**). “Return, faithless Israel... for I am merciful” (**Jeremiah 3:12**). “I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant” (**Ezekiel 16:60**). What **Yahweh** does for the harlot-nation is the pattern for what His people owe the woman in the trade: call her out, not cast her off.

IX. THE MODERN RECORD — WHAT THE WORLD’S OWN DATA SHOWS

Tanakh’s claims about the trade can be set beside the modern record. The following findings are graded on the same **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard used for the text: a claim stands only where two or more independent sources support it, and contested evidence is reported as contested.

IX-A. The Scale of Forced Sexual Exploitation

The 2022 *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery*, produced jointly by the International Labour Organization, Walk Free, and the International Organization for Migration, estimated 27.6 million people in forced labour on any given day in 2021. Of these, **6.3 million** were in forced commercial sexual exploitation — about 23 percent of all forced labour. Almost four of every five people in forced commercial sexual exploitation were women or girls. Of the 3.3 million children in forced labour, more than half were in commercial sexual exploitation. The ILO estimates that forced labour generates about US\$236 billion in illegal profits each year. **Joel 3:3** — the boy traded and the girl sold — is not an ancient curiosity. It describes a present market.

IX-B. The Toll on the Woman

The longest-running mortality study of women in prostitution followed 1,969 women identified by police and health surveillance in Colorado Springs, Colorado, from 1967 to 1999 (Potterat et al., *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 2004). The authors calculated a crude mortality rate of 391 per 100,000. Homicide accounted for about 19 percent of deaths, and women active in prostitution faced a homicide rate of 229 per 100,000 person-years — far higher than the riskiest ordinary occupations of

the period. Excess deaths were driven chiefly by homicide, suicide, drug and alcohol toxicity, and AIDS. A British study (Ward, Day, and Weber, 1999) likewise found a general mortality rate about twelve times that of comparable women in London.

Limitations honestly stated: the Colorado Springs cohort was drawn mostly from street prostitution and from women known to police, so it may not represent every setting. But two independent studies on two continents point the same direction. **Proverbs 7:26–27** — “many are the slain” — is borne out, and the slain are overwhelmingly the women themselves.

IX-C. The Legal Debate — Reported, Not Adjudicated

Modern nations have adopted sharply different laws. Sweden in 1999 criminalized the **purchase** of sex while decriminalizing its sale and funding exit services (the “Nordic” or “equality” model), later followed by Norway and Iceland (2009), Canada (2014), Northern Ireland (2015), France (2016), Ireland (2017), and Israel (2018). The Netherlands legalized and regulated brothels in 2000 and Germany in 2002; New Zealand fully decriminalized the trade in 2003.

The evidence on outcomes is **contested**. Supporters of the Nordic model point to smaller trades and fewer prostitution-related killings in Sweden and Norway, and to a 2008 New Zealand government review in which about 90 percent of respondents cited money as the reason they remained. Cross-national research (Cho, Dreher, and Neumayer, *World Development*, 2013) associated legalized prostitution with larger reported human-trafficking inflows. Supporters of decriminalization cite research such as Cunningham and Shah (*Review of Economic Studies*, 2018), which found reported rape offenses and female gonorrhea incidence fell after Rhode Island inadvertently decriminalized indoor prostitution, and they argue that criminalizing buyers pushes the trade into more dangerous conditions. Each side disputes the other’s data.

Miqdash Bethel does not endorse a party or a bill. It records one structural observation from the text: the Torah’s own law is aimed at **the one who profits and the one with power (Leviticus 19:29)**, forbids the **laundering of the gain (Deuteronomy 23:18)**, holds **the buyer** responsible (**Hosea 4:14**), protects **the fugitive (Deuteronomy 23:15–16)**, and extends **justice and a door of return** to the woman (**1 Kings 3; Joshua 6:25**). Any civil approach may be tested by how closely it keeps those five lines.

IX-D. The Modern Record Graded

CLAIM	SOURCES	GRADE
Millions are held in forced commercial sexual exploitation, overwhelmingly women and girls, including children	ILO/Walk Free/IOM 2022 Global Estimates; ILO Forced Labour Observatory; UN reporting	Corroborated
Women in street prostitution face sharply elevated mortality, especially homicide	Potterat et al. 2004; Ward, Day, and Weber 1999; Brewer et al. 2006	Corroborated , with the sampling limits stated
Most who remain in the trade cite economic need	New Zealand review 2008; exit-service research	Corroborated in the settings studied
One legal model is proven to reduce harm better than all others	Competing studies (Cho et al. 2013; Cunningham and Shah 2018; national reviews)	Not established — evidence contested
Prostitution is a victimless private exchange	Contradicted by the mortality, trafficking, and exit data above	Not corroborated

X. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION HANDLES THE QUESTION

The table sets the three traditions against the Tanakh's witness. Comparative texts are cited as historical reference only, in keeping with the standing rule of this document.

ELEMENT	✧ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
Primary Question	Who counts as a <i>zonah</i> (prostitute / harlot) for the laws of priestly marriage, and how are Rachav and Tamar to be received?	Is the harlot beyond grace, and should the trade be tolerated as a lesser evil?	Is <i>zina</i> (unlawful intercourse) forbidden in every form, and what of the woman compelled into it?

ELEMENT	✧ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☉ ISLAM
Covenant Strength	Talmud Megillah 14b receives Rachav as a proselyte and ancestress of eight prophet-priests, including Yirmeyahu , and of the prophetess Huldah — teshuvah (repentance / return) for the one the text calls zonah (prostitute / harlot). Mishnah Temurah 6:3 applies Deuteronomy 23:18 strictly to the sanctuary.	Matthew 1:3, 5 places Tamar and Rachav in the genealogy of Yeshua; Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 commend Rachav's faith; Matthew 21:31–32 says harlots who believed would enter ahead of the religious leaders. 1 Corinthians 6:15–16 grounds the prohibition in Genesis 2:24 .	Q. 24:33 forbids forcing slave women into bigha' (prostitution) for gain; tafsir traditions connect it to 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy's slave women and record the Prophet removing a woman from his control. Sahih al-Bukhari 2237 forbids mahr al-baghiy (the earnings of a prostitute) with the price of a dog — the pairing of Deuteronomy 23:18 .
Covenant Departure	Mishnah Yevamot 6:5 records the view that for priestly marriage a zonah (prostitute / harlot) includes a female convert and a freed slave woman. The written Tanakh never calls the ger (resident stranger) a harlot; Rut the Moabite is the ancestress of David (Ruth 4:17). The Targum and Rashi soften Rachav into an innkeeper where the text says zonah (prostitute / harlot).	Augustine (<i>De Ordine</i> 2.4.12) argued that removing prostitutes would convulse society with lust, and later medieval cities licensed brothels — toleration the Tanakh refuses (Leviticus 19:29). Pope Gregory I (Homily 33, 591) merged Mary Magdalene with the “sinful woman,” a label the text never gives her. Ireland's Magdalene laundries confined women until 1996, punishing the woman while Hosea 4:14 turns the charge on the men.	Sunni schools hold mut'ah (temporary marriage) abrogated; Twelver Shi'a hold it lawful with contract, dower, and 'iddah (waiting period). Critics warn that misuse can make it a cover for paid sex; defenders distinguish it by paternity and legal obligation. Historical concubinage of captive women raised the same problem the man-stealing law addresses (Exodus 21:16).
Covenant Witness	The tradition's reception of Rachav matches Joshua 6:25 : the woman named by her trade dwells in Israel.	Read from the Tanakh outward, the New Testament's Tamar, Rachav, and believing harlots stand on Genesis 38:26 and Joshua 2:11 .	tawbah (repentance) and the release of the compelled woman mirror Deuteronomy 23:15–16 and Hosea 4:14 .

XI. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON PROSTITUTION

Per the **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard, no doctrine may stand on a single text. Each declaration below draws on more than one witness from the written Tanakh.

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	The covenant forbids the trade in the human body. Intimacy belongs within the covenant of marriage and may not be sold.	Leviticus 19:29; Deuteronomy 23:17; Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 5:15–18
II	The first responsibility falls on the one with power who profits — the father, the owner, the trafficker, the nation that sells the girl.	Leviticus 19:29; Exodus 21:16; Joel 3:3; Amos 2:6–7
III	The buyer is guilty, and Yahweh refuses the double standard that punishes the woman and excuses the man.	Hosea 4:14; Proverbs 6:26; 23:27–28; Jeremiah 5:7; Genesis 38:26
IV	The gain of the trade may not be laundered through worship. No vow, gift, or offering sanctifies it.	Deuteronomy 23:18; Micah 1:7; Isaiah 23:18
V	The woman in the trade is owed justice, a hearing, and protection from private violence; the child is not charged with the mother’s trade.	1 Kings 3:16–28; Judges 11:1, 29; Deuteronomy 17:6; Genesis 38:24–26
VI	The door of return stands open. The woman the text names by her trade may confess Yahweh and dwell among His people.	Joshua 2:11; 6:25; Hosea 3:1–3; Jeremiah 3:12; Ezekiel 33:11
VII	No claim about the practices of other nations may be asserted beyond its witnesses. The covenant condemns the <i>qedeshim</i> (consecrated men) on the text’s own evidence, without adding what the evidence does not show.	Deuteronomy 19:15; Exodus 23:1; 2 Kings 23:7

XII. THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THE TANAKH SAYS TO EACH ONE

Tanakh does not answer this subject with a single sentence. It speaks to each party by name.

To the woman in the trade: You are not your trade. The Tanakh names Rachab by hers and then records her confession, her hope in the window, and her life among **Yahweh**'s people (**Joshua 2:11, 18; 6:25**). It gave two women in the trade the first hearing in Shelomoh's court (**1 Kings 3:16**). It made the man who used Tamar confess, "She is more righteous than I" (**Genesis 38:26**). "Return... for I am merciful" (**Jeremiah 3:12**). If you are held against your will, the covenant is on the side of the one who escapes (**Deuteronomy 23:15–16**).

To the buyer: The price is not the coin. "A man is brought down to a loaf of bread" (**Proverbs 6:26**). **Yahweh** will not let you hide behind the woman: "the men themselves go aside with harlots" (**Hosea 4:14**). Turn, and give your strength to the covenant of your own house (**Proverbs 5:15–18**).

To the one who profits — the father, the owner, the trafficker, the platform: The first command was addressed to you (**Leviticus 19:29**). The one who steals a person and sells him stands under the Torah's gravest sentence (**Exodus 21:16**), and **Yahweh** brings to judgment the nations that sold the girl for wine (**Joel 3:3–8**).

To the congregation: Do not take the gain of the trade into the house of **Yahweh** (**Deuteronomy 23:18**), and do not shut the door that **Yahweh** opened. Receive the one who turns as Israel received Rachav, and judge the men as **Hoshea** judged them. A community that shames the woman and shelters the man has taken the side the prophet condemned.

To the nations: A land that permits the trade fills with *zimmah* (lewd wickedness) (**Leviticus 19:29**). A city that sells its justice becomes what it sells (**Isaiah 1:21**). The measure of a nation's law is whether it protects the girl the nations once sold for wine.

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“I will betroth you to Me for ever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in covenant-love and in compassion.

I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know Yahweh.”

Hosea 2:19–20 [Hebrew 2:21–22] — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

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