

CHAPTER 4

Prophets were sent to be reprovers, to tell people of their faults, and to warn them of the judgments of God, to which by sin they exposed themselves; so the prophet is employed in this and the following chapters. He is here, as counsel for the King of kings, opening an indictment against the people of Israel, and labouring to convince them of sin, and of their misery and danger because of sin, that he might prevail with them to repent and reform.

I. He shows them what were the grounds of God's controversy with them, a general prevalency of vice and profaneness (v. 1, 2), ignorance and forgetfulness of God (v. 6, 7), the worldly-mindedness of the priests (v. 8), drunkenness and uncleanness (v. 11), using divination and witchcraft (v. 12), offering sacrifice in the high places (v. 13), whoredoms (v. 14, 18), and bribery among magistrates (v. 18).

II. He shows them what would be the consequences of God's controversy. God would punish them for these things (v. 9). The whole land should be laid waste (v. 3), all sorts of people cut off (v. 5), their honour lost (v. 7), their creature-comforts unsatisfying (v. 10), and themselves made ashamed (v. 19). And, which is several times mentioned here as the sorest judgment of all, they should be let alone in their sins (v. 17), they shall not reprove one another (v. 4), God will not punish them (v. 14), nay, he will let them prosper (v. 16).

III. He gives warning to Judah not to tread in the steps of Israel, because they saw their steps went down to hell (v. 15).

HOSEA 4:1-5

THE SINFULNESS OF ISRAEL

Here is,

I. The court set, and both attendance and attention demanded: *“Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for to you is the word of this conviction sent, whether you will hear or whether you will forbear.”*

Whom may God expect to give him a fair hearing, and take from him a fair warning, but the children of Israel, his own professing people? Yea, they will be ready enough to hear when God speaks comfortably to them; but are they willing to hear when he has a controversy with them? Yes, they must hear him when he pleads against them, when he has something to lay to their charge: *The Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land*, of this land, of this holy land. Note, Sin is the great mischief-maker; it sows discord between God and Israel. God sees sin in his own people, and a good action he has against them for it. Some more particular actions lie against his own people, which do not lie against other sinners. He has a controversy with them for breaking covenant with him, for bringing a reproach upon him, and for an ungrateful return to him for his favours. God's controversy will be pleaded, pleaded by the judgments of his mouth before they are pleaded by the judgments of his hand, that he may be justified in all he does and may make it appear that he desires not the death of sinners; and God's pleadings ought to be attended to, for, sooner or later, they shall have a hearing.

II. The indictment read, by which the whole nation stands charged with crimes of a heinous nature, by which God is highly provoked.

1. They are charged with national omissions of the most important duties: *There is no truth nor mercy*, neither justice nor charity, these most *weighty matters of the law*, as our Saviour accounts them (⁴⁰²³Matthew 23:23), *judgment, mercy, and faith*. The generality of the people seemed to have no sense at all of the thing called honesty; they made no conscience of what they said and did, though ever so contrary to the truth and injurious to their neighbour. Much less had they any sense of mercy, or any obligation they were under to pity and help the poor. And it is not strange that there is no truth and mercy when there is *no knowledge of God in the land*. What good can be expected where there is no knowledge of God? It was the privilege of that land that *in Israel God was made known*, and his *name was great*, which was an aggravation of their sin, that they did not *know him*, ⁴⁰¹¹Psalms 76:1.

2. Hence follows national commissions of the most enormous sins against both the first and second table, for they had no regard at all to either. *Swearing*, and *lying*, and *killing*, and *stealing*, and *committing adultery*, against the third, ninth, sixth, eighth, and seventh commandments, were to be found in all corners of the land, and among all orders and degrees of

men among them, v. 2. The corruption was universal; what good people there were among them were either lost or hid, or they hid themselves. By these they *break out*, that is, they transgress all bounds of reason and conscience, and the divine law; *they have exceeded* (^{<389>}Job 36:9); they have been *overmuch wicked* (^{<217>}Ecclesiastes 7:17); they suffer their corruptions to break out; they themselves break over, and break through, all that stands in their way and would stop them in their sinful career, as water overflows the banks. Note, Sin is a violent thing and its power exorbitant; when men's hearts are *fully set in them to do evil* (^{<218>}Ecclesiastes 8:11) *what will be restrained from them?* ^{<1116>}Genesis 11:6. When they break out thus *blood touches blood*, that is, abundance of murders are committed in all parts of the country, and, as it were, in a constant series and succession. *Caedes aliae aliis sunt contiguae* — *Murders touch murders*; a stream of blood runs down among them, even royal blood. It was about this time that there was so much blood shed in grasping at the crown; Shallum slew Zechariah, and Menahem slew Shallum, Pekah slew Pekahiah, and Hoshea slew Pekah; and the like bloody work, it is likely, there was among other contenders, so that the land was *polluted with blood* (^{<1468>}Psalms 106:38); *it was filled with blood from one end to the other*, ^{<2216>}2 Kings 21:16.

III. Sentence passed upon this guilty and polluted land, v. 3. It shall be utterly destroyed and laid waste. The whole land is infected with sin, and therefore *the whole land shall mourn* under God's sore judgments, shall sit in mourning, being stripped of all its wealth and beauty. As the valleys are said to *shout for joy, and sing*, when there are plenty and peace, so here they are said to *mourn* when by war and famine they are made desolate. *The whole land shall be brimstone, and salt, and burning*, was as threatened in the law, ^{<1538>}Deuteronomy 29:33. They had broken all God's commandments, and now God threatens to take away all their comforts. *The land mourns* when there is neither *grass for the cattle nor herbs for the service of man*; and then *every one that dwells therein shall languish* for want of nice food to support a wasting life, and fret for want of the usual dainties for delight. *The beasts of the field will languish*, ^{<2445>}Jeremiah 14:5, 6. Nay, the destruction of the fruits of the earth shall be so great that there shall not be picking for the *fowls of the air*, to keep them alive; they shall suffer with man, and their dying, or growing lean, will be a punishment to those who used to have their tables replenished with wild-fowl. Nay, *the fishes of the sea shall be taken away, or gathered*

together, that they may go away in shoals to some other coast, and then the fishing trade will be worth nothing. This desolation shall be in that respect more general than that by Noah's flood, for that did not affect the fishes of the sea, but this shall. It was part of one of the plagues of Egypt that he *slew their fish* (^{<445>}Psalm 105:29); when the waters are dried the *fish die*, ^{<280>}Isaiah 50:2; ^{<300>}Zephaniah 1:2, 3. Note, When man becomes disobedient to God, it is just that the inferior creatures should be made unserviceable to man. Oh what reason have we to admire God's patience and mercy to our land, that though there is in it so much swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and adultery, yet there is plenty of flesh, and fish, and fowl, on our tables!

IV. An order of court that no pains should be taken with the condemned criminal to bring him to repentance, with the reason for that order.

Observe,

1. The order itself (v. 4): *Yet let no man strive nor reprove another*; let no means be used to reduce and reclaim them; let their physicians give them up as desperate and past cure. It intimates that as long as there is any hope we ought to reprove sinners for their sins; it is a duty we owe to one another to give and to take reproofs; it was one of the laws of Moses (^{<480>}Leviticus 19:17), *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour*; it is an instance of brotherly love. Sometimes there is need to rebuke sharply, not only to reprove, but to strive, so loth are men to part with their sins. But it is a sign that persons and people are abandoned to ruin when God says, *Let them not be reprov'd*. Yet this is to be understood as God's commands sometimes to the prophets not to *pray for them*, notwithstanding which they did pray for them; but the meaning is, They are so hardened in sin, and so ripened for ruin, that it will be to little purpose either to deal with them or to deal with God for them. Note, It bodes ill to a people when reprovers are silenced, and when those who should witness against the sins of the times, retire into a corner, and give up the cause. See ^{<426>}2 Chronicles 25:16.

2. The reasons of this order. Let them not reprove one another; for,

(1.) They are determined to *go on in sin*, and no reproofs will cure them of that: *Thy people are as those that strive with the priests*; they have grown so very impudent in sin, so very insolent, and impatient of reproof, that they will fly in the face even of a priest himself if he should but give them

the least check, without any regard to his character and office; and how then can it be thought that they should take a reproof from a private person? Note, Those sinners have their hearts wickedly hardened who quarrel with their ministers for dealing faithfully with them; and those who rebel against ministerial reproof, which is an ordinance of God for their reformation, have forfeited the benefit of brotherly reproof too. Perhaps this may refer to the late wickedness of Joash king of Judah, and his people, who stoned Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, for delivering them a message from God, ⁽⁴²²⁾2 Chronicles 24:21. He was a *priest*; with him they *strove* when he was officiating *between the temple and the altar*; and Dr. Lightfoot thinks the prophet had an eye to his case when he spoke (v. 2) of *blood touching blood*; the blood of the *sacrificer was mingled with the blood of the sacrifice*, That, says he, was the *apex of their wickedness* — thence their ruin was to be dated (⁽⁴²³⁾Matthew 23:35), as this is of *their incorrigibleness*, that they are as those who *strive with the priest*, therefore let no man reprove them; for,

(2.) God also is determined to *proceed in their ruin* (v. 5): “*Therefore, because thou wilt take no reproof, no advice, thou shalt fall, and it is in vain for any to think of preventing it, for the decree has gone forth. Thou shalt stumble and fall in the day, and the prophet, the false prophet that flattered and seduced thee, shall fall with thee in the night; both thou and thy prophet shall fall night and day, shall be continually falling into one calamity or other; the darkness of the night shall not help to cover thee from trouble nor the light of the day help thee to flee from it.*” The prophets are blind leaders and the people blind followers; and to the blind day and night are alike, so that whether it be day or night both shall *fall together into the ditch*. “*Thou shalt fall in the day, when thy fall is least feared by thyself and thou art very secure; and in the day, when it will be seen and observed by others, and turn most to thy shame; and the prophet shall fall in the night, when to himself it will be most terrible.*” Note, The ruin of those who have helped to ruin others will, in a special manner, be intolerable. And did the children think that when they were in danger of falling their mother would help them? It shall be in vain to expect it, for *I will destroy thy mother, Samaria, the mother-city, the whole state, or kingdom, which is as a mother to every part. It shall all be made silent.* Note, When all are involved in guilt nothing less can be expected than that all should be involved in ruin.

HOSEA 4:6-11

GROUNDS OF GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH ISRAEL

God is here proceeding in his controversy both with the priests and with the people. *The people* were as those *that strove with the priests* (v. 4) when they had priests that did their duty; but the generality of them lived in the neglect of their duty, and here is a word for those priests, and for the people that love to have it so, ⁽²¹⁵⁾Jeremiah 5:31. And it is observable here how the punishment answers to the sin, and how, for the justifying of his own proceedings, God sets the one over-against the other.

I. The people *strove with the priests* that should have taught them the knowledge of God; justly therefore were they *destroyed for lack of knowledge*, v. 6. Note, Those that rebel against the light can expect no other than to perish in the dark. Or it is a charge upon the priests, who should have been still *teaching the people knowledge* (⁽²¹⁶⁾Ecclesiastes 12:9), but they did not, or did it in such a manner that it was as if they had not done it at all, so there was *no knowledge of God in the land*; and because there was no vision, or none to any purpose, the people *perished*, ⁽²¹⁷⁾Proverbs 29:18. Note, Ignorance is so far from being the mother of devotion that it is the mother of destruction; lack of knowledge is ruining to any person or people. They are *my people* that are thus *destroyed*; their relation to God as his people aggravates both their sin in not taking pains to get the knowledge of that God whose command they were under and with whom they were taken into covenant, and likewise the sin of those who should have taught them; God set his children to school to them, and they never minded them nor took any pains with them.

II. Both priests and people rejected knowledge; and justly therefore will God *reject them*. The reason why the people did not learn, and the priests did not teach, was not because they had not the light, but because they hated it — not because they had not ways of coming to the knowledge of God and of communicating it, but because they had no heart to it; they *rejected* it. They *desired not the knowledge of God's ways*, but put it from them, and shut their eyes against the light; and therefore “*I will also reject thee; I will refuse to take cognizance of thee and to own thee; you will not know me, but bid me depart; I will therefore say, Depart from me, I know you not. Thou shalt be no priest to me.*”

1. The priests shall be no longer admitted to the privileges, or employed in the services, of the priesthood, nor shall they ever be received again, as we find, ^{<0443>}Ezekiel 44:13. Note, Ministers that reject knowledge, that are grossly ignorant and scandalous, ought not to be owned as ministers; but that which they *seem to have* should be *taken away*, ^{<0488>}Luke 8:18.

2. The people shall be no longer as they have been, a *kingdom of priests*, a royal priesthood, ^{<0496>}Exodus 19:6. God's people, by rejecting knowledge, forfeit their honour and profane their own crown.

III. They *forgot the law of God*, neither desired nor endeavoured to retain it in mind, nor to transmit the remembrance of it to their posterity, and therefore justly will God *forget* them and *their children*, the people's children; they did not educate them, as they ought to have done, in the knowledge of God and their duty to him, and therefore God will disown them, as not in covenant with him. Note, If parents do not teach their children, when they are young, to *remember their Creator*, they cannot expect that their Creator should remember them. Or it may be meant of the priests' children; they shall not succeed them in the priests' office, but shall be reduced to poverty, as is threatened against Eli's house, ^{<0521>}1 Samuel 2:20.

IV. They dishonoured God with that which was their honour, and justly therefore will God strip them of it, v. 7. It was their honour that they were increased in number, wealth, power, and dignity. The beginning of their nation was small, but in process of time it *greatly increased*, and grew very considerable; the family of the priests increased wonderfully. But, *as they were increased, so they sinned* against God. The more populous the nation grew, the more sin was committed and the more profane they were; their wealth, honour, and power, did but make them the more daring in sin. Therefore, says God, *will I change their glory into shame*. Are their numbers their glory? God will diminish them and make them few. Is their wealth their glory? God will impoverish them and bring them low; so that they shall themselves be ashamed of that which they gloried in. Their priests shall be made *contemptible and base*, ^{<0519>}Malachi 2:9. Note, That which is our honour, if we dishonour God with it, will sooner or later be turned into shame to us: for *those that despise God shall be lightly esteemed*, ^{<0523>}1 Samuel 2:30.

V. The priests ate up the sin of God's people, and therefore *they shall eat and not have enough*.

1. They abused the maintenance that was allowed to the priests, to the priests of the house of Aaron, by the law of God, and to the mock-priests of the calves by their constitution (v. 8): *They eat up the sin of my people*, that is, their sin-offerings. If it be meant of the priests of the calves, it intimates their seizing that which they had no right to; they usurped the revenues of the priests, though they were no priests. If it be meant of those who were legal priests, it intimates their greediness of the profits and perquisites of their office, when they took no care at all to do the duty of it. They feasted upon their part of the offerings of the Lord, but forgot the work for which they were so well paid. They *set their heart* upon the people's *iniquities*; they *lifted up their soul* to them, that is, they were glad then people did commit iniquity, that they might be obliged to bring an offering to make atonement for it, which they should have their share of; the more sins the more sacrifices, and therefore they cared not how much sin people were guilty of. Instead of warning the people against sin, from the consideration of the sacrifices, which showed them what an offence sin was to God, since it needed such an expiation, they emboldened and encouraged the people to sin, since an atonement might be made at so small an expense. Thus they glutted themselves upon the sins of the people, and helped to keep up that which they should have beaten down. Note, It is a very wicked thing to be well pleased with the sins of others because, in some way or other, they may turn to our advantage.

2. God will therefore deny them his blessing upon their maintenance (v. 10): *They shall eat and not have enough*. Though they have great plenty by the abundance of offerings that are brought in, yet they shall have no satisfaction in it. Either their food shall yield no good nourishment or their greedy appetites shall not be satisfied with it. Note, What is unlawfully gained cannot be comfortably used; no, nor that which is inordinately coveted; it is just that the desires which are insatiable should always be unsatisfied, and that those should never have enough who never know when they have enough. See ³¹⁶⁴Micah 6:14; ³¹⁰⁶Haggai 1:6.

VI. The more they increased the more they sinned (v. 7), and therefore though they *commit whoredom*, though they take the most wicked methods to multiply their people, yet *they shall not increase*. Though they have many wives and concubines, as Solomon had, yet they shall not have their

families built up thereby in a numerous progeny, any more than he had. Note, Those that hope any way to increase by unlawful means will be disappointed. And therefore God will thus blast all their projects *because they have left off to take heed to the Lord*; time was when they had some regard to God, and to his authority over them and interest in them, but they have *left it off*; they take no heed to his word nor to his providences; they do not eye him in either. They *forsake him, so as not to take heed to him*; they have apostatized to such a degree that they have no manner of regard to God, but are perfectly *without God in the world*. Note, Those that leave off to take heed to the Lord leave off all good, and can expect no other than that all good should leave them.

VII. The people and the priests did harden one another in sin; and therefore justly shall they be sharers in the punishment (v. 9): *There shall be, like people, like priest*. So they were in character; people and priest were both alike ignorant and profane, regardless of God and their duty, and addicted to idolatry: and so they shall be in condition; God will bring judgments upon them, that shall be the destruction both of priest and people; the famine that deprives the people of their meat shall deprive the priests of their *meat-offerings*, ²¹⁰ Joel 1:9. It is part of the description of a universal desolation that it shall be *as with the people, so with the priest*, ²³¹ Isaiah 24:2. God's judgments, when they come with commission, will make no difference. Note, Sharers in sin must expect to be sharers in ruin. Thus God will *punish them both for their ways, and reward them for their doings*. God will *cause their doings to return upon them* (so the word is); when a sin is committed the sinner thinks *it is gone* and he shall hear no more of it, but he shall find it *called over again*, and made to *return*, either to his humiliation or to his condemnation.

VIII. They indulged themselves in the delights of sense, to hold up their hearts; but they shall find that they *take away their hearts* (v. 11): *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine take away the heart*. Some join this with the foregoing words. *They have forsaken the Lord, to take heed to whoredom, and wine, and new wine*. Or, *Because these have taken away their heart*. Their sensual pleasures have taken them off from their devotions and drowned all that is good in them. Or we may take it as a distinct sentence, containing a great truth which we see confirmed by every day's experience, that drunkenness and uncleanness are sins which

besot and infatuate men, weaken and enfeeble them. They take away both the understanding and the courage.

~~HOSEA~~ HOSEA 4:12-19

THE SINS OF THE PRIESTS AND THE PEOPLE

In these verses we have, as before,

I. The sins charged upon the people of Israel, for which God had a controversy with them, and they are,

1. Spiritual whoredom, or idolatry. They have in them a *spirit of whoredoms*, a strong inclination to that sin; the bent and bias of their hearts are that way; it is *their own iniquity*; they are carried out towards it with an unaccountable violence, and this *causes them to err*. Note, The errors and mistakes of the judgment are commonly owing to the corrupt affections; men *therefore* have a good opinion of sin, because they have a disposition towards it. And having such erroneous notions of idols, and such passionate motions towards them, no marvel that with such a head and such a heart they have *gone a whoring from under their God*, v. 12. They ought to have been in subjection to him as their head and husband, to have been under his guidance and command, but they revolted from their allegiance, and put themselves under the guidance and protection of false gods. So (v. 15) Israel has *played the harlot*; their conduct in the worship of their idols was like that of a harlot, wanton and impudent. And (v. 16), *Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer*, as an *untamed* heifer (so some), or as a *perverse* or *refractory* one (so others), as a heifer that is turned loose runs madly about the pasture, or, if put under the yoke (which seems rather to be alluded to here), will draw back instead of going forward, will struggle to get her neck out of the yoke and her feet out of the furrow. Thus unruly, ungovernable, untractable, were the people of Israel. They had begun to draw in the yoke of God's ordinances, but they drew back, as *children of Belial*, that will not endure the yoke; and when the prophets were sent with the goads of reproof, to put them forward, they *kicked against the pricks*, and ran backwards. The sum of all is (v. 17), *Ephraim is joined to idols*, is perfectly wedded to them; his affections are glued to them, and his heart is upon them. There are two instances given of their

spiritual whoredom, in both which they gave that honour to their idols which is due to God only: —

(1.) They consulted them as oracles, and used those arts of divination which they had learned from their idolatrous priests (v. 12): *My people ask counsel at their stocks*, their wooden gods; they apply to them for advice and direction in what they should do and for information concerning the event. They *say to a stock, Thou art my father* (³⁴²⁷Jeremiah 2:27); and, if it were indeed a father, it were worthy of this honour; but it was a great affront to God, who was indeed their Father, and whose lively oracles they had among them, with which they had liberty to consult at any time, thus to *ask counsel at their stocks*. And they expect that their *staff* should *declare to them* what course they should take and what the event should be. It is probable that this refers to some wicked methods of divination used among the Gentiles, and which the Jews learned from them, by a *piece of wood*, or by a *staff*, like Nebuchadnezzar's divining by *his arrows*, ³⁵²¹Ezekiel 21:21. Note, Those who forsake the oracles of God, to take their measures from the world and the flesh, do in effect but consult with their stocks and their staves.

(2.) They offered sacrifice to them as gods, whose favour they wanted and whose wrath they dreaded and deprecated (v. 13): *They sacrifice to them*, to atone and pacify them, and *burn incense to them*, to please and gratify them, and hope by both to recommend themselves to them. God had pitched upon the place where he would record his name; but they, having forsaken that, chose places for their irreligious rites which pleased their own fancies; they chose,

[1.] High places, *upon the tops of the mountains and upon the hills*, foolishly imagining that the height of the ground gave them some advantage in their approaches towards heaven.

[2.] Shady places, *under oaks, and poplars, and elms, because the shadow thereof* is pleasant to them, especially in those hot countries, and therefore they thought it was pleasing to their gods; or they fancied that a thick shade befriends contemplation, possesses the mind with something of awe, and therefore is proper for devotion.

2. Corporal whoredom is another crime here charged upon them: *They have committed whoredom continually*, v. 18. They drove a trade of uncleanness; it was not a single act now and then, but their constant

practice, as it is of many that have *eyes full of adultery* and *which cannot cease from that sin*, ^{<024>}2 Peter 2:14. Now the abominable filthiness and lewdness that was found in Israel is here spoken of,

(1.) As a concomitant of their idolatry; their false gods drew them to it; for the devil whom they worshipped, though a spirit, is an unclean spirit. Those that worshipped idols were *separated with harlots*, and they *sacrificed with harlots*; for because they *liked not to retain God in their knowledge*, but dishonoured him, therefore God *gave them up to vile affections*, by the indulging of which they *dishonoured themselves*, ^{<025>}Romans 1:24, 28.

(2.) As a punishment of it. The *men* that worshipped idols were *separated with harlots* that attended the idolatrous rites, as in the worship of *Baal-peor*, ^{<026>}Numbers 25:1, 2. To punish them for that God gave up their wives and daughters to the like vile affections: They *committed whoredom and adultery* (v. 13), which could not but be a great grief and reproach to their husbands and parents; for those that are not chaste themselves desire to have their wives and daughters so. But thus they might read their sin in their punishment, as David's adultery was punished in the debauching of his concubines by his own son, ^{<027>}2 Samuel 12:11. Note, When the same sin in others is made men's grief and affliction which they have themselves been guilty of they must own that the Lord is righteous.

3. The perverting of justice, v. 18. *Their rulers* (be it spoken to their shame) *do love, Give ye*, that is, they love bribes, and have it continually in their mouths, *Give, give*. They are given to *filthy lucre*; every one that has any business with them must expect to be asked, *What will you give?* Though, as rulers, they are bound by office to do justice, yet none can have justice done them without a fee; and you may be sure that for a fee they will do injustice. Note, The love of money is the ruin of equity and the root of all iniquity. But of all men it is a shame for rulers (who should be men *fearing God* and *hating covetousness*) to love *Give ye*. Perhaps this is intended in that part of the charge here, *Their drink is sour; it is dead; it is gone*. Justice, duly administered, is refreshing, like drink to the thirsty, but when it is perverted, and rulers take rewards either to acquit the guilty or to condemn the innocent, the *drink is sour; they turn judgment into wormwood*, ^{<028>}Amos 5:7. Or it may refer in general to the depraved morals of the whole nation; they had lost all their life and spirit, and were

as offensive to God as dead and sour drink is to us. See ^{<630B>}Deuteronomy 31:32, 33.

II. The tokens of God's wrath against them for their sins.

1. Their wives and daughters should not be punished for the injury and disgrace they did to their families (v. 14): *I will not punish your daughters*; and, not being punished for their sin, they would go on in it. Note, The impunity of one sinner is sometimes made the punishment of another. Or, “*I will not punish them as I will punish you; for you must own, as Judah did concerning his daughter-in-law, that they are more righteous than you,*” ^{<6326>}Genesis 38:26.
2. They themselves should prosper for a while, but their prosperity should help to destroy them. It comes in as a token of God's wrath (v. 16): *The Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place*; they shall have a fat pasture, and a large one, in which they shall be fed to the full, and fed of the best, but it shall be only to prepare them for the slaughter, as a lamb is that is so fed. If they *wax fat and kick*, they do but wax fat for the butcher. But others make them feed as *a lamb on the common*, a large place indeed, but where it has short grass and lies exposed. The Shepherd of Israel will turn them both out of his pastures and out of his protection.
3. No means should be used to bring them to repentance (v. 17): “*Ephraim is joined to idols, is in love with them and addicted to them, and therefore let him alone*, as v. 4, *Let no man reprove him. Let him be given up to his own heart's lusts, and walk in his own counsel; we would have healed him, and he would not be healed, therefore forsake him,*” See *what their end will be*, ^{<6320>}Deuteronomy 32:20. Note, It is a sad and sore judgment for any man to be let alone in sin, for God to say concerning a sinner, “He is joined to his idols, the world and the flesh; he is incurably proud, covetous, or profane, an incurable drunkard or adulterer; *let him alone*; conscience, let him alone; minister, let him alone; providences, let him alone. Let nothing awaken him till the flames of hell do it.” The father corrects not the rebellious son any more when he determines to disinherit him. “Those that are not disturbed in their sin will be destroyed for their sin.”
4. They should be hurried away with a swift and shameful destruction (v. 19): *The wind has bound her up in her wings*, to carry her away into captivity, suddenly, violently, and irresistibly; he shall take *them away as*

with a whirlwind, ^{<180>}Psalm 58:9. And then *they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices*, ashamed of their sin in offering sacrifice to idols, ashamed of their folly in putting themselves to such an expense upon gods that have no power to help them, and thereby making that God their enemy who has almighty power to destroy them. Note, There are sacrifices that men will one day be ashamed of. Those that have sacrificed their time, strength, honour, and all their comforts, to the world and the flesh, will shortly be ashamed of it. Yea, and those that bring to God blind, and lame, and heartless sacrifices, will be ashamed of them too.

III. The warning given to Judah not to sin after the similitude of Israel's transgression. It is said in the close of v. 14, *Those that do not understand shall fall*; those must needs fall that do not understand how to avoid, or get over, the stumbling-blocks they meet with (and therefore *let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*), particularly the two tribes (v. 15): *Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend*. Though Israel be given to idolatry, yet let not Judah take the infection. Now,

1. This was a very needful caution. The men of Israel were brethren, and near neighbours, to the men of Judah; Israel was more numerous, and at this time in a prosperous condition, and therefore there was danger lest the men of Judah should learn their way and get a snare to their souls. Note, The nearer we are to the infection of sin the more need we have to stand upon our guard.

2. It was a very rational caution: "*Let Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah do so*; for Judah has greater means of knowledge than Israel, has the temple and priesthood, and a king of the house of David; from Judah Shiloh is to come; and for Judah God has reserved great blessings in store; therefore *let not Judah offend*, for more is expected from them than from Israel, they will have more to answer for if they do offend, and from them God will take it more unkindly. If *Israel play the harlot*, let not Judah do so too, for then God will have no professing people in the world." God bespeaks Judah here, as Christ does the twelve, when many turned their backs upon him, *Will you also go away?* ^{<162>}John 6:67. Note, Those that have hitherto kept their integrity should, for that reason, still hold it fast, even in times of general apostasy. Now, to preserve Judah from offending as Israel had done, two rules are here given: —

(1.) That they might not be guilty of idolatry they must keep at a distance from the places of idolatry: *Come not you unto Gilgal, where all their wickedness was* (^{<3095>}Hosea 9:15; 12:11); there they *multiplied transgression* (^{<3006>}Amos 4:4); and perhaps they contracted a veneration for that place because there it was said to Joshua, *The place where thou standest is holy ground* (^{<0055>}Joshua 5:15); therefore they are forbidden to *enter into Gilgal*, ^{<3085>}Amos 5:5. And for the same reason they must *not go up to Bethel*, here called the *house of vanity*, for so *Bethaven* signifies, not the *house of God*, as *Bethel* signifies. Note, Those that would be kept from sin, and not fall into the devil's hands, must studiously avoid the occasions of sin and not come upon the devil's ground.

(2.) That they might not be guilty of idolatry they must take heed of profaneness, and *not swear, The Lord liveth*. They are commanded to swear, *The Lord liveth in truth and righteousness* (^{<2002>}Jeremiah 4:2); and therefore that which is here forbidden is swearing so in untruth and unrighteousness, swearing rashly and lightly, or falsely and with deceit, or swearing by the Lord and the idol, ^{<3005>}Zephaniah 1:5. Note, Those that would be steady in their adherence to God must possess themselves with an awe and reverence of God, and always speak of him with solemnity and seriousness; for those that can make a jest of the true God will make a god of any thing.