

CHAPTER 23

This long chapter (as before Ezekiel 16 and 20) is a history of the apostasies of God's people from him and the aggravations of those apostasies under the similitude of corporal whoredom and adultery. Here the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the ten tribes and the two, with their capital cities, Samaria and Jerusalem, are considered distinctly. Here is,

I. The apostasy of Israel and Samaria from God (v. 1-8) and their ruin for it (v. 9, 10).

II. The apostasy of Judah and Jerusalem from God (v. 11-21) and sentence passed upon them, that they shall in like manner be destroyed for it (v. 22-35).

III. The joint wickedness of them both together (v. 36-44) and the joint ruin of them both (v. 45-49). And all that is written for warning against the sins of idolatry, and confidence in an arm of flesh, and sinful leagues and confederacies with wicked people (which are the sins here meant by committing whoredom), is that others may hear and fear, and not sin after the similitude of the transgressions of Israel and Judah.

~~231~~ EZEKIEL 23:1-10

THE SINS OF SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM

God had often spoken to Ezekiel, and by him to the people, to this effect, but now his word *comes again*; for *God speaks* the same thing *once, yea, twice, yea, many a time, and all little enough, and too little, for man perceives it not*. Note, To convince sinners of the evil of sin, and of their misery and danger by reason of it, there is need of *line upon line*, so loth we are to know the worst of ourselves. The sinners that are here to be exposed are *two women*, two kingdoms, sister-kingdoms, Israel and Judah, *daughters of one mother*, having been for a long time but *one people*. Solomon's kingdom was so large, so populous, that immediately after his death it divided into two. Observe,

1. Their character when they were one (v. 3): *They committed whoredoms in Egypt*, for there they were guilty of idolatry, as we read before, ²⁵⁰⁸Ezekiel 20:8. The representing of those sins which are most provoking to God and most ruining to a people by the sin of whoredom plainly intimates what an exceedingly sinful sin uncleanness is, how offensive, how destructive. Doubtless it is itself one of the worst of sins, for the worst of other sins are compared to it here and often elsewhere, which should increase our detestation and dread of all manner of *fleshly lusts*, all appearances of them and approaches to them, as *warring against the soul*, infatuating sinners, bewitching them, alienating their minds from God and all that is good, debauching conscience, rendering them odious in the eyes of the pure and holy God, and drowning them at last in destruction and perdition.

2. Their names when they became two, v. 4. The kingdom of Israel is called the *elder sister*, because that first made the breach, and separated from the family both of kings and priests that God had appointed — the *greater sister* (so the word is), for ten tribes belonged to that kingdom and only two to the other. God says of them both, *They were mine*, for they were the seed of Abraham *his friend* and of Jacob *his chosen*; they were in covenant with God, and carried about with them the sign of *their circumcision*, the seal of the covenant. *They were mine*; and therefore their apostasy was the highest injustice. It was alienating God's property, it was the basest ingratitude to the best of benefactors, and a perfidious treacherous violation of the most sacred engagements. Note, Those who have been in profession the people of God, but have revolted from him, have a great deal to answer for more than those who never made any such profession. "*They were mine*; they were espoused to me, and to me *they bore sons and daughters*;" there were many among them that were devoted to God's honour, and employed in his service, and were the strength and beauty of these kingdoms, as children are of the families they are born in. In this parable Samaria and the kingdom of Israel shall bear the name of *Aholah* — *her own tabernacle*, because the places of worship which that kingdom had were of their own devising, their own choosing, and the worship itself was their own invention; God never owned it. *Her tabernacle to herself* (so some render it); "let her take it to herself, and make her best of it." Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah bear the name of *Aholibah* — *my tabernacle is in her*, because *their* temple was the place which God himself had *chosen* to *put his name there*. He acknowledged it

to be his, and honoured them with the tokens of his presence in it. Note, Of those that stand in relation to God, and make profession of his name, some have greater privileges and advantages than others; and, as those who have greater are thereby rendered the more inexcusable if they revolt from God, so those who have less will not thereby be rendered inexcusable.

3. The treacherous departure of the kingdom of Israel from God (v. 5): *Aholah played the harlot when she was mine.* Though the ten tribes had deserted the house of David, yet God owned them for *his* still; though Jeroboam, in setting up the golden calves, *sinned, and made Israel to sin,* yet, as long as they worshipped the God of Israel only, though by images, he did not quite cast them off. But they way of sin is down-hill. Aholah played the harlot, brought in the worship of Baal (^{<116>}1 Kings 16:31), set up that other god, that dunghill-god, in competition with Jehovah (^{<118>}1 Kings 18:21), as a vile adulteress *dotes on her lovers,* because they are well dressed and make a figure, because they are young and handsome (v. 6), *clothed with blue, captains and rulers, desirable young men, genteel,* and that pass for men of honour, so she doted upon her neighbours, particularly the Assyrians, who had extended their conquests near them; she admired their idols and worshipped them, admired the pomp of their courts and their military strength and courted alliances with them upon any terms, as if her own God were not sufficient to be depended upon. We find one of the kings of Israel giving a *thousand talents* to the *king of Assyria,* to engage him in his interests, (^{<119>}2 Kings 15:19). She doted on the *chosen men of Assyria,* as worthy to be trusted and employed in the service of the state (v. 7), and *on all their idols with which she defiled herself.* Note, Whatever creature we dote upon, pay homage to, and put a confidence in, we make an idol of that creature; and whatever we make an idol of we defile ourselves with. And now again the conviction looks back as far as the original of their nation: *Neither left she her whoredoms which she brought from Egypt,* v. 8. Their being idolaters in Egypt was a thing never to be forgotten — that they should be in love with Egypt's idols even when they were continually in fear of Egypt's tyrants and task-masters! But (as some have observed) therefore, at that time, when Satan boasted of his having *walked through the earth* as all his own, to disprove his pretensions God did not say, *Hast thou considered my people Israel in Egypt?* (for they had become idolaters, and were not to be boasted of), but, *Hast thou considered my servant Job in the land of Uz?* And this corrupt

disposition in them, when they were first formed into a people, is an emblem of that original corruption which is born with us and is woven into our constitution, a strong bias towards the world and the flesh, like that in the Israelites towards idolatry; it was *bred in the bone* with them, and was charged upon them long after, that they *left not their whoredoms brought from Egypt*. It would never *out of the flesh*, though Egypt had been a house of bondage to them. Thus the corrupt affections and inclinations which we brought into the world with us we have not lost, nor got clear of, but still retain them, though the iniquity we were born in was the source of all the calamities which human life is liable to.

4. The destruction of the kingdom of Israel for their apostasy from God (v. 9, 10): *I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers*. God first justly gave her up to her lust (*Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone*), and then gave her up *to her lovers*. The neighbouring nations, whose idolatries she had conformed to and whose friendship she had confided in, and in both had affronted God, are now made use of as the instruments of her destruction. The *Assyrians, on whom she doted*, soon spied out the *nakedness of the land*, discovered her blind side, on which to attack her, stripped her of all her ornaments and all her defences, and so *uncovered* her, and *made her naked and bare*, carried her *sons and daughters* into captivity, *slew her with the sword*, and quite destroyed that kingdom and put an end to it. We have the story at large ²⁷⁶2 Kings 17:6, etc., where the cause of the ruin of that once flourishing kingdom by the Assyrians is shown to be their forsaking the God of Israel, *fearing other gods*, and *walking in the statutes of the heathen*; it was for this that God was very *angry with them and removed them out of his sight*, v. 18. And that the Assyrians, whom they had been so fond of, should be employed in *executing judgments* upon them was very remarkable, and shows how God, in a way of righteous judgment, often makes that a scourge to sinners which they have inordinately set their hearts upon. The devil will for ever be a tormentor to those impenitent sinners who now hearken to him and comply with him as a tempter. Thus Samaria became *famous among women*, or *infamous* rather; she *became a name* (so the word is); not only she came to be the subject of discourse, and much talked of, as the desolations of cities and kingdoms fill the newspapers, but she was thus ruined for her idolatries *in terrorem* — *for warning* to all people to take heed of doing likewise; as the public execution of notorious malefactors makes them such *a name*, such an ill name, as may serve to frighten others

from those wicked courses which have brought them to a miserable and shameful end. ^{<4521>}Deuteronomy 21:21, *All Israel shall hear and fear.*

^{<4521>}EZEKIEL 23:11-21

THE SINS OF SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM

The prophet Hosea, in his time, observed that the two tribes retained their integrity, in a great measure, when the ten tribes had apostatized (^{<2812>}Hosea 11:12, *Ephraim indeed compasses me about with lies, but Judah yet rules with God and is faithful with the saints*; and this was justly expected from them: ^{<2815>}Hosea 4:15, *Though thou Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend*); but this lasted not long. By some unhappy matches made between the house of David and the house of Ahab the worship of Baal had been brought into the kingdom of Judah, but had been by the reforming kings worked out again; and at the time of the captivity of the ten tribes, which was in the reign of Hezekiah, things were in a good posture: but it lasted not long. In the reign of Manasseh, soon after the kingdom of Judah had seen the destruction of the kingdom of Israel, they became more corrupt than Israel had been in their inordinate love of idols, v. 11. Instead of being made better by the warning which that destruction gave them, they were made worse by it, as if they were *displeased because the Lord had made that breach upon Israel*, and for that reason became disaffected to him and to his service. Instead of being made to stand in awe of him as a *jealous God*, they therefore grew strange to him, and liked those gods better that would admit of partners with them. Note, Those may justly expect God's judgments upon themselves who do not take warning by his judgments upon others, who see in others what is the end of sin and yet continue to make a light matter of it. But it is bad indeed with those who are made worse by that which should make them better, and have their lusts irritated and exasperated by that which was designed to suppress and subdue them. Jerusalem grew worse *in her whoredoms* than her sister Samaria had been *in her whoredoms*. This was observed before (^{<2361>}Ezekiel 16:51), *Neither has Samaria committed half of thy sins.*

I. Jerusalem, that had been a *faithful city*, became a *harlot*, ^{<2812>}Isaiah 1:21. She also *doted upon the Assyrians* (v. 12), joined in league with them, joined in worship with them, grew to be in love with their *captains and*

rulers, and cried them up as finer and more accomplished gentlemen than any that ever the land of Israel produced. “See how richly, how neatly, they are dressed, *clothed most gorgeously*; how well they sit a horse; they are *horsemen riding on horses*; how charmingly they look, *all of them desirable young men*.” And thus they grew to affect every thing that was foreign and to despise their own nation; and even the religion of it was mean and homely, and not to be compared with the curiosity and gaiety of the heathen temples. Thus she *increased her whoredoms*; she fell in love, fell in league, with the Chaldeans. Hezekiah himself was faulty this way when he was proud of the court which the king of Babylon made to him and complimented his ambassadors with the sight of all his treasures, ^{230D}Isaiah 39:2. And the humour increased (v. 14); she doted upon the pictures of the Babylonian captains (v. 15, 16), joined in alliance with that kingdom, invited them to come and settle in Jerusalem, that they might refine the genius of the Jewish nation and make it more polite; nay, they sent for patterns of their images, altars, and temples, and made use of them in their worship. Thus was she *polluted with her whoredoms* (v. 17), and thereby she *discovered her own whoredom* (v. 18), her own strong inclination to idolatry. And when she had had enough of the Chaldeans, and grew tired of them and disposed to break her league with them, as Jehoiakim and Zedekiah did, *her mind being alienated from them*, she courted the *Egyptians, doted upon their paramours* (v. 20), would come into an alliance with them, and, to strengthen the alliance, would join with them in their idolatries and then depend upon them to be their protectors from all other nations; for so wise, so rich, so strong, was the Egyptian nation, and came to such perfection in idolatry, that there was no nation now which they could take such satisfaction in as in Egypt. Thus they *called to remembrance the days of their youth* (v. 19), the *lewdness of their youth*, v. 21.

1. They pleased themselves with the remembrance of it. When they began to set their affections upon Egypt, they encouraged themselves to put a confidence in that kingdom, because of the old acquaintance they had with it, as if they still retained the gust and relish of the *leeks and onions* they ate there, or rather of the idolatrous worship they learned there, and brought up with them thence. When they began an acquaintance with Egypt they remembered how merrily their fathers worshipped the golden calf, what music and dancing they had at that sport, which they learned in Egypt; and they hoped they should now have a fair pretence to come to

that again. Thus *she multiplied her whoredoms*, repeated her former whoredoms, and encouraged herself to close with present temptations, by calling *to remembrance the days of her youth*. Note, Those who, instead of reflecting upon their former sins with sorrow and shame, reflect upon them with pleasure and pride, contract new guilt thereby, strengthen their own corruptions, and in effect bid defiance to repentance. This is returning *with the dog to his vomit*.

2. They called it *God's remembrance*, and provoked him to remember it against them. God had said indeed that he would reckon with them for *the golden calf*, that *idol of Egypt* (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 32:34); but such was his patience that he seemed to have forgotten it till they, by their league now with the Egyptians against the Chaldeans, did, as it were, put him in mind of it; and in the day *when he visits he will now*, as he has said, *visit for that*. It is very observable how this adulteress changes her lovers: she dotes first on the Assyrians; then she thought the Chaldeans finer and courted them; after a while her mind was alienated from them, and she thought the Egyptians more powerful (v. 20) and she must contract an intimacy with them. This shows the folly,

(1.) Of fleshly lusts; when they are indulged they grow humoursome and fickle, are soon surfeited but never satisfied; they must have variety, and what is loved one day is loathed the next. *Unius adulterium matrimonium vocant* — *One adultery is called marriage*, as Seneca observes.

(2.) Of idolatry. Those who think one God too little will not think a hundred sufficient, but will still be for trying more, as finding all insufficient.

(3.) Of seeking to creatures for help; we go from one to another, but are disappointed in them all, and can never rest till we have made the God of Israel our help.

II. The faithful God justly gives a bill of divorce to this now faithless city, that has *become a harlot*. His jealousy soon discovered her lewdness (v. 13): *I saw that she was defiled*, that she was debauched, and saw which way her inclination was, that the *two sisters both took one way*, and that Jerusalem grew worse than Samaria. For, *if we stretch out our hand to a strange god, will not God search this out?* No doubt he will; and when he has found it can he be pleased with it? No (v. 18): *Then my mind was alienated from her, as it was from her sister*. How could the pure and holy

God any longer take delight in such a lewd generation? Note, Sin alienates God's mind from the sinner, and justly, for it is the alienation of the sinner's mind from God; but woe, and a thousand woes, to those from whom God's mind is alienated; for whom he turns from he will turn against.

~~23~~ EZEKIEL 23:22-35

THE PUNISHMENT OF JERUSALEM

Jerusalem stands indicted by the name of *Aholibah*, for that she, as a false traitor to her sovereign Lord the God of heaven, not having his fear before her eyes, but moved by the instigation of the devil, had revolted from her allegiance to him, had compassed and imagined to shake off his government, had kept up a correspondence had joined in confederacy with his enemies, and the pretenders to a deity, in contempt of his crown and dignity. To this indictment she has pleaded, Not guilty: *I am not polluted; I have not gone after Baalim*. But it is found against her by the notorious evidence of the fact, and she stands convicted of it, nor has any thing material to offer why judgment should not be given and execution awarded according to law. In these verses, therefore, we have the sentence.

I. Her old confederates must be her executioners; and those whom she had courted to be her leaders in sin are now to be employed as instruments of her punishment (v. 22): *“I will raise up thy lovers against thee, the Chaldeans, whom formerly thou didst so much admire and covet an acquaintance with, but from whom thy mind is since alienated and with whom thou hast perfidiously broken covenant.”* They are called *thy lovers* (v. 22) and yet (v. 28) *those whom thou hatest*. Note, It is common for sinful love soon to turn into hatred; as Amnon's to Tamar. Those of headstrong and unreasonable passions are often very hot against those persons and things that a little before they were as hot for. Fools run into extremes; nay, and wise men may see cause to change their sentiments. And therefore, as we should rejoice and weep as if we rejoiced not and wept not, so we should love and hate as if we loved not and hated not. *Ita ama tanquam osurus* — *Love as one who may have cause to feel aversion.*

II. The execution to be done upon her is very terrible.

1. Her enemies shall come against her *on every side* (v. 22), those of the several nations that constituted the Chaldean army (v. 23), all of them *great lords and renowned*, whose pomp, and grandeur, and splendid appearance made them look the more amiable when they came as friends to protect and patronise Jerusalem, but the more formidable when they came to chastise its treachery and aimed at no less than its ruin.

(1.) They shall come with a great deal of military force (v. 24), with *chariots and wagons* furnished with all necessary provisions for a camp, with arms and ammunition, bag and baggage, with a vast army, and well armed.

(2.) They shall have justice on their side: “*I will set judgment before them*” (they shall have right with them as well as might; for the king of Babylon had just cause to make war upon the king of Judah, because he had broken his league with him), “and therefore they *shall judge thee*, not only according to God's judgments, as the instruments of his justice, to punish thee for the indignities done to him, but *according to their judgments*, according to the law of nations, to punish thee for thy perfidious dealings with them.”

(3.) They shall prosecute the war with a great deal of fury and resentment. It being a war of revenge, *they shall deal with thee hatefully*, v. 29. This will make the execution the more severe that their swords will be dipped in poison. Thou hatest them, and they shall deal hatefully with thee; those that hate will be hated and will be hatefully dealt with.

(4.) God himself will lead them on, and his anger shall be mingled with theirs (v. 25): *I will set my jealousy against thee*; that shall kindle this fire, and then *they shall deal furiously with thee*. If men deal ever so hatefully, ever so furiously, with us, yet, if we have God on our side, we need not fear them; they can do us no real hurt. But if men deal furiously with us, and God set his jealousy against us too, what will become of us?

2. The particulars of the sentence here passed upon this notorious adulteress are,

(1.) That all she has shall be seized on. The *clothes* and the *fair jewels*, with which she had endeavoured to recommend herself to her lovers, these she shall be stripped of, v. 26. All those things that were the ornaments of their state shall be taken away: “*They shall take away all thy labour*, all

that thou hast gotten by thy labour, and shall *leave thee naked and bare,*” v. 29. Both city and country shall be impoverished and all the wealth of both swept away.

(2.) That her children shall go into captivity. “They shall *take thy sons and thy daughters,* and make slaves of them (v. 25); for they are *children of whoredoms,* unworthy the dignities and privileges of Israelites,” ^{<XIII>}Hosea 2:4.

(3.) That she shall be stigmatized and deformed: “They shall *take away thy nose and thy ears,* shall mark thee for a harlot, and render thee for ever odious,” v. 25. This intimates the many cruelties of the Chaldean soldiers towards the Jews that fell into their hands, whom, it is probable, they used barbarously. Some will have this to be understood figuratively; and by the nose they think is meant the kingly dignity, and by the ears that of the priesthood.

(4.) That she shall be exposed to shame: *Thy lewdness and thy whoredoms shall be discovered* (v. 29), as, when a malefactor is punished, all his crimes are ripped up, and repeated to his disgrace; what was secret then comes to light, and what was done long since is then called to mind.

(5.) That she shall be quite cut off and ruined: “The *remnant* of thy people that have escaped the famine and pestilence shall *fall by the sword;* and the residue of thy houses that have not been battered down about thy ears shall be *devoured by the fire,*” v. 25. And this shall be the end of Jerusalem.

III. Because she has trod in the steps of Samaria's sins, she must expect no other than Samaria's fate. It is common, in giving judgment, to have an eye to precedents; so has God in passing this sentence on Jerusalem (v. 31, etc.): “*Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister,* notwithstanding the warning thou hast had given thee, by the fatal consequences of her wickedness; and therefore I *will give her cup,* her portion of miseries, *into thy hand,* the cup of the Lord's fury, which will be to thee a *cup of trembling.*” Now,

1. This cup is said to be *deep and large,* and to *contain much* (v. 32), abundance of God's wrath and abundance of miseries, the fruits of that wrath. It is such a cup as that which we read of, ^{<XIV>}Jeremiah 25:15, 16.

The cup of divine vengeance holds a great deal, and so those will find into whose hand it shall be put.

2. They shall be made to drink the very dregs of this cup, as the *wicked* are said to do (^{<57B>}Psalm 75:8): “*Thou shalt drink it and suck it out*, not because it is pleasant, but because it is forced upon thee (v. 34); *thou shalt break the shreds thereof, and pluck off thy own breasts*, for indignation at the extreme bitterness of this cup, being *full of the fury of the Lord* (^{<25D>}Isaiah 51:20), as men in great anguish tear their hair, and throw every thing from them. Finding there is no remedy, but it must be drank (for *I have spoken it, saith the Lord God*), thou shalt have no manner of patience in the drinking of it.” **3.** They shall be intoxicated by it, made sick, and be at their wits' end, as men in drink are, staggering, and stumbling, and ready to fall (v. 33): *Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow*. Note, Drunkenness has sorrow attending it, to such a degree that the utmost confusion and astonishment are here represented by it. Who would think that that which is such a force upon nature, such a scandal to it, which deprives men of their reason, disorders them to the last degree, and is therefore expressive of the greatest misery, should yet be with many a beloved sin, that they should damn their own souls to distemper their own bodies? *Who has woe and sorrow like them?* ^{<1P>}Proverbs 23:29.

4. Being so intoxicated, they shall become, as drunkards deserve to be, a laughing-stock to all about them (v. 32): *Thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision*, as acting ridiculously in every thing thou goest about. When God is about to ruin a people he *makes their judges fools and pours contempt on their princes*, ^{<27>}Job 12:17, 21.

IV. In all this God will be justified, and by all this they will be reformed; and so the issue even of this will be God's glory and their good.

1. They have been bad, very bad, and that justifies God in all that is brought upon them (v. 30): *I will do these things unto thee because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen*, and (v. 35) *because thou hast forgotten me and cast me behind thy back*. Note, Forgetfulness of God, and a contempt of him, of his eye upon us and authority over us, are at the bottom of all our treacherous adulterous departures from him. *Therefore* men wander after idols, because they forget *God*, and their obligations to him; nor could they look with so much desire and delight upon the baits of sin if they did not first cast God *behind their back*, as not worthy to be

regarded. And those who put such an affront upon God, how can they think but that it should turn upon themselves at last? *Therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms*; that is, thou shalt *suffer the punishment* of them, and thou alone must *bear the blame*. Men need no more to sink them than the weight of their own sins; and those who will not part with their lewdness and their whoredoms must bear them.

2. They shall be better, much better, and this fire, though consuming to many, shall be refining to a remnant (v. 27): *Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee*. The judgments which were brought upon them by their sins parted between them and their sins, and taught them at length to say, *What have we to do any more with idols?* Observe,

(1.) How inveterate the disease was: *Thy whoredoms were brought from the land of Egypt*. Their disposition to idolatry was early and innate, their practice of it was ancient, and had gained a sort of prescription by long usage.

(2.) How complete the cure was notwithstanding: “Though it has taken root, yet it shall be made to cease, so that thou shalt not so much as *lift up thy eyes* to the idols again, nor *remember Egypt* with pleasure *any more*.” They shall avoid the occasions of this sin, for they shall not so much as look upon an idol, lest their hearts should unawares *walk after their eyes*. And they shall abandon all inclinations to it: “They shall *not remember Egypt*; they shall not retain any of that affection for idols which they had from the very infancy of their nation.” They got it, through the corruption of nature, in their bondage in Egypt, and lost it, through the grace of God, in their captivity in Babylon, which this was the blessed fruit of, even *the taking away of sin*, of *that sin*; so that whereas, before the captivity, no nation (all things considered) was more impetuously bent upon idols and idolatry than they were, after that captivity no nation was more vehemently set against idols and idolatry than they were, insomuch that at this day the image-worship which is practised in the church of Rome confirms the Jews as much as any thing in their prejudices against the Christian religion.

~~326~~ EZEKIEL 23:36-49

ISRAEL AND JUDAH ACCUSED

After the ten tribes were carried into captivity, and that kingdom was made quite desolate, the remains of it by degrees incorporated with the kingdom of Judah, and gained a settlement (many of them) in Jerusalem; so that the *two sisters* had in effect become *one* again; and therefore, in these verses, the prophet takes those to task jointly who were thus conjoined: “*Wilt thou judge Aholah and Aholibah together?* v. 36. *Wilt thou go about to frame an excuse for them? Thou seest the matter is so bad as not to bear an excuse.*” Or, rather, “*Thou shalt now be employed, in God’s name, to judge them,* ~~326~~ Ezekiel 20:4. The matter is rather worse than better since the union.”

I. Let them be made to see the sins they are guilty of: *Declare unto them openly and boldly their abominations.*

1. They have been guilty of gross idolatry, here called *adultery*. *With their idols they have committed adultery* (v. 37), have broken their marriage-covenant with God, have lusted after the gratifications of a carnal sensual mind in the worship of God. This is the first and worst of the abominations he is to charge them with.

2. They have committed the most barbarous murders, in sacrificing their children to Moloch, a sin so unnatural that they deserve to hear of it upon all occasions: *Blood is in their hands*, innocent blood, the blood of their own children, which they have *caused to pass through the fire* (v. 37), not that they might be dedicated to the idols, but that they might be devoured, a sign that they loved their idols better than that which was dearest to them in the world.

3. They have profaned the sacred things with which God had dignified and distinguished them: This *they have done unto me*, this indignity, this injury, v. 38. Every contempt put upon that which is holy reflects upon him who is the fountain of holiness, and from a relation to whom whatever is called holy has its denomination. God had set up his sanctuary among them, but they defiled it, by making it a house of merchandise, a den of thieves; nay, and much worse; there they set up their idols and worshipped them, and there they shed the blood of God’s prophets. God had revealed

to them his holy sabbaths, but they profaned them, by doing all manner of servile work therein, or perhaps by sports and recreations on that day, not only practised, but allowed and encouraged by authority. They *defiled the sanctuary on the same day* that they *profaned the sabbath*. To defile the sanctuary was bad enough on any day, but to do it on the sabbath day was an aggravation. We commonly say, *The better day the better deed*; but here, the better day the worse deed. God takes notice of the circumstances of sin which add to the guilt. He shows (v. 39) what was their profanation both of the sanctuary and of the sabbath. *They slew their children*, and sacrificed them *to their idols*, to the great dishonour both of God and of human nature; and then came, on *the same day*, their hands imbrued with the blood of their children and their clothes stained with it, to attend in *God's sanctuary*, not to ask pardon for what they had done, but to present themselves before him, as other Israelites did, expecting acceptance with him, notwithstanding these villanies which they were guilty of; as if God either did not know their wickedness or did not hate it. Thus they *profaned the sanctuary*, as if that were a protection to the worst of malefactors; for thus they did *in the midst of his house*. Note, It is a profanation of God's solemn ordinances when those that are grossly and openly profane and vicious impudently and impenitently so intrude upon the services and privileges of them. *Give not that which is holy unto dogs. Friend, how camest thou in hither?* 4. They have courted foreign alliances, been proud of them, and reposed a confidence in them. This also is represented by the sin of adultery, for it was a departure from God, not only *to whom* alone they ought to pay their homage and not to idols, but *in whom* alone they ought to put their trust, and not in creatures. Israel was a peculiar people, must *dwell alone* and not be *reckoned among the nations*; and they profane their crown, and lay their honour in the dust, when they covet to be like them or in *league* with them. But this they have now done; they have entered into strict alliances with the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, the most renowned and potent kingdoms at that time; but they scorned alliances with the petty kingdoms and states that lay near them, which yet might have been of more real service to them. Note, Affecting an acquaintance and correspondence with great people has often been a snare to good people. Let us see how Jerusalem courts her high allies, thinking thereby to make herself considerable.

(1.) She privately requested that a public embassy might be sent to her (v. 40): *You sent a messenger for men to come from far*. It seems, then, that

the neighbours had no desire to come into a confederacy with Jerusalem, but she thrust herself upon them, and sent under-hand to desire them to court her: and, *lo, they came*. The wisest and best may be drawn unavoidably into company and conversation with profane and wicked people: but it is no sign either of wisdom or goodness to covet an intimacy with such and to court it.

(2.) Great preparation was made for the reception of these foreign ministers, for their public entry and public audience, which is compared to the pains that an adulteress takes to make herself look handsome. Jezebel-like, thou *paintedst thy face* and *deckedst thyself with ornaments*, v. 40. The king and princes made themselves new clothes, fitted up the rooms of state, beautified the furniture, and made it look fresh. Thou *sattest upon a stately bed* (v. 41), a stately throne; *a table was prepared, whereon thou has set my oil and my incense*. This was either,

[1.] A feast for the ambassadors, a noble treat, agreeable to the other preparations. There was incense to perfume the room and oil to anoint their heads. Or,

[2.] An altar already furnished for the ambassadors' use in the worship of their idols, to let them know that the Israelites were not so strait-laced but that they could allow foreigners the free exercise of their religion among them, and furnish them with chapels, yea, and complimented them so far as to join with them in their devotions; though the law of their God was against it, yet they could easily dispense with themselves to oblige a friend. The oil and incense God calls *his*, not only because they were the gift of his providence, but because they should have been offered at his altar, which was an aggravation of their sin in serving idols and idolaters with them. See ~~xxxv~~ Hosea 2:8.

(3.) There was great joy at their coming, as if it were such a blessing as never happened to Jerusalem before (v. 42): *A voice of a multitude being at east was with her*. The people were very easy, for they thought themselves very safe and happy now that they had such powerful allies; and therefore attended the ambassadors with loud huzzas and acclamations of joy. A great confluence of people there was to the court upon this occasion. The *men of the common sort* were there to grace the solemnity, and to increase the crowd; and *with them were brought Sabeans from the wilderness*. The margin reads it *drunkards from the wilderness*, that would drink healths to the prosperity of this grand alliance, and force them upon

others, and be most noisy in shouting upon this occasion. Whoever they were, in honour of the ambassadors they put *bracelets upon their hands and beautiful crowns upon their heads*, which made the cavalcade appear very splendid.

(4.) God by his prophets warned them against making these dangerous leagues with foreigners (v. 43): “*Then said I unto her that was old in adulteries*, that from the first was fond of leagues with the heathen, of matching with their families (¹⁰⁰⁸Judges 3:6), and afterwards of making alliances with their kingdoms, and, though often disappointed therein, would never be dissuaded from it (this was the adultery she was old in), I said, *Will they now commit whoredoms with her and she with them?* Surely experience and observation will by this time have convinced both them and her that an alliance between the nation of the Jews and a heathen nation can never be for the advantage of either.” They are *iron and clay*, that will not mix, nor will God bless such an alliance, or smile upon it. But, it seems, her being old in these adulteries, instead of weaning her from them, as one would expect, does but make her the more impudent and insatiable in them; for, though she was thus admonished of the folly of it, *yet they went in unto her*, v. 44. A bargain was soon clapped up, and a league made, first with this, and then with the other, foreign state. Samaria did so, Jerusalem did so, like lewd women. They could not rest satisfied in the embraces of God’s laws and care, and the assurances of protection he gave them; they could not think his covenant with them security enough. But they must by treaties and leagues, politic ones (they thought) and well-concerted, throw themselves into the arms of foreign princes, and put their interests under their protection. Note, Those hearts go a whoring from God that take a complacency in the pomp of the world and put a confidence in its wealth, and in an *arm of flesh*, ²¹⁷⁵Jeremiah 17:5.

II. Let them be made to foresee the judgments that are coming upon them for these sins (v. 45): *The righteous men, they shall judge them*. Some make the instruments of their destruction to be the righteous men that shall judge them. The Assyrians that destroyed Samaria, the Chaldeans that destroyed Jerusalem, those were comparatively righteous, had a sense of justice between man and man and justly resented the treachery of the Jewish nation; however, they executed God’s judgments, which, we are sure, are all righteous. Others understand it of the prophets, whose office it was, in God’s name, to judge them and pass sentence upon them. Or we may take it as an appeal to all righteous men, to all that have a sense of

equity; they shall all judge concerning these cities, and agree in their verdict, that forasmuch as they have been notoriously guilty of adultery and murder, and the guilt is national, therefore they ought to suffer the pains and penalties which by law are inflicted upon women in their personal capacity that shed blood and are adulteresses. Righteous men will say, “Why should bloody filthy cities escape any better than bloody filthy persons? *Judge, I pray thee,*” ~~208~~ Isaiah 5:3. This judgment being given by the righteous men, the righteous God will award execution. See here,

1. What the execution will be. be, v. 46, 47. The same as before, v. 23, etc. God will *bring a company of enemies upon them*, who shall be made to serve his holy purposes even when they are serving their own sinful appetites and passions. These enemies shall easily prevail, for God will *give them into their hands to be removed and spoiled*; this company shall *stone them with stones* as malefactors, shall *single them out and dispatch them with their swords*; and, as was sometimes done in severe executions (witness that of Achan), they shall *slay their children and burn their houses*.

2. What will be the effects of it.

(1.) Thus they shall suffer for their sins: Their *lewdness shall be recompensed upon them* (v. 49); and they shall *bear the sins of their idols*, v. 35, 49. Thus God will assert the honour of his broken law and injured government, and let the world know what a just and jealous God he is.

(2.) Thus they shall be broken off from their sins: *I will cause lewdness to cease out of the land*, v. 27, 48. The destruction of God's city, like the death of God's saints, shall do that for them which ordinances and providences before could not do; it shall quite take away their sin, so that Jerusalem shall rise out of its ashes a new lump, as gold comes out of the furnace purified from its dross.

(3.) Thus other cities and nations will have fair warning given them to keep themselves from idols. That *all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness*. This is the end of the punishment of malefactors, that they may be made examples to others, who will *see and fear*. *Smite the scorner and the simple will beware*. The judgments of God upon some are designed to teach others, and happy are those who receive instruction from them not to tread in the steps of sinners, lest they be taken in their snares; those who would be taught this must *know God is the Lord* (v. 49), that he

is the governor of the world, a God that judges in the earth, and with whom there is *no respect of persons*.