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Introduction

Thus chapter begins with observing that the fear of God leads to prosperity, but sin to ruin; a truth most visibly exemplified in the sin and punishment of Ephraim, Hosea 13:1-3. As an aggravation of their guilt, God reminds them of his former favors, Hosea 13:4, Hosea 13:5; which they had shamefully abused, Hosea 13:6; and which now expose them to dreadful punishments, Hosea 13:7, Hosea 13:8. He, however, tempers these awful threatenings with gracious promises; and, on their repentance, engages to save them, when no other could protect them, Hosea 13:9-11. But, alas! instead of repenting, Ephraim is filling up the measure of his iniquity, Hosea 13:12, Hosea 13:13. Notwithstanding this, God promises to put forth his almighty power in behalf of his people, and, as it were, raise them from the dead, Hosea 13:14; although, in the meantime, they must be visited with great national calamities, compared first to the noxious and parching east wind, Hosea 13:15, and described immediately after in the plainest terms, Hosea 13:16.

Verse 1

When Ephraim spake trembling - When he was meek and humble, of a broken heart and contrite spirit.

He exalted himself in Israel - He became great in God's sight; he rose in the Divine esteem in proportion as he sank in his own. But this did not continue.

He offended in Baal - He became an idolater.

He died - The sentence of death from the Divine justice went out against him.

This has been differently understood: "As soon as Ephraim spake (To your tents, O Israel!) There was a trembling or commotion: then the kingdom was exalted in Israel." Thus taken, it refers to the division of the ten tribes from Rehoboam, son of Solomon, 1 Kings 12:16, etc., and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam in opposition to that of Judah; which breach was never healed.

Verse 2

And now they sin more and more - They increase in every kind of vice, having abandoned the great Inspirer of virtue.

Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves - This was the test. If there be a Jew that pretends to sacrifice, and whose conversion is dubious, let him come openly and kiss the calves. This will show what he is; no real Jew will do this. If he be an idolater, he will not scruple. This was the ancient method of adoration.

1.They kissed the idol.

2.When the statue was too high or too far off, they presented the hand, in token of alliance.

3.They brought that hand respectfully to their mouths, and kissed it.

This was the genuine act of adoration; from ad, to, and os, oris, the mouth. So Pliny, Hist. Nat., lib. xxviii., c. 1. Adorando, dexteram ad oscula referimus.

And Apuleius, Asin., lib. iv:

Admoventes oribus suis dexteram, ut ipsam prorsus deam religiosis adorationibus venerabantur.

See Calmet, and see the note on Job 31:17.

Verse 3

Therefore they shall be as the morning Cloud - as the early Dew - as the Chaff - as the Smoke - Four things, most easy to be driven about and dissipated, are employed here to show how they should be scattered among the nations, and dissipated by captivity.

Verse 4

I am the Lord thy God - This was the first discovery I made of myself to you, and the first commandment I gave; and I showed you that besides me there was no Savior. There is a remarkable addition in the Septuagint here: "But I am Jehovah thy God, who stretched out the heavens and created the earth. And I showed them not to thee, that thou shouldest walk after them. And I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," etc. This might

have been once in the Hebrew text.

Verse 5

I did know thee - I approved of thee; I loved thee; and by miraculously providing for thee in that land of drought, I demonstrated my love.

Verse 6

According to their pasture - They had a rich pasture, and were amply supplied with every good. They became exalted in their heart, forgot their God, and became a prey to their enemies. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased."

Verse 7

I will be unto them as a lion - שׂחל (shachal) is supposed to mean here the black lion, frequent in Ethiopia.

As a leopard - נמר (namar), so termed from its spotted skin, for to be spotted is the signification of the root.

Will I observe them - The leopard, tiger, and panther will hide themselves in thick bushwood, near where they expect any prey to pass; and as soon as it comes near, spring suddenly upon it. To this is the allusion in the text: "By the way will I observe them; watch for them as the leopard does. They shall be greatly harassed even on their way to Assyria, when going into captivity."

Verse 8

As a bear - bereaved - This is a figure to denote excessive ferocity. See the note on 2 Samuel 17:8 (note), where a remarkable instance is given.

And will rend the caul of their heart - Every savage beast goes first to the seat of the blood when it has seized its prey; as in this fluid they delight more than in the most delicate parts of the flesh.

There will I devour them like a lion - לבי (labi), the old strong lion; drinking the blood, tearing the flesh, and breaking the bones to extract the marrow.

The wild beast shall tear them - Probably this refers to the chakal or jackal, who frequently hunts down the prey, which the lion takes the liberty to devour, while the jackal stands by, and afterwards picks the bones. Hence he has been called the lion's Provider, and the lion's waiting-man.

Verse 9

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself - These evils come not by my immediate infliction; they are the consequences of thy own crimes. In the above terrifying figures of the ferocious beasts, the prophet only shows what they would meet with from the hand of the Assyrians in the war, the famine, and the captivity; God being represented as doing what he only permits to be done.

But in me is thine help - "Though thou hast destroyed thyself, yet in me alone can thy help be found" - Newcome. And others read, And who will help thee? reading מי (mi), who, for בי (bi), in me. Though this is countenanced by the Syriac, yet there is no evidence of it in any of the MSS. yet collated, nor do I think it to be the true reading.

Verse 10

Give me a king and princes? - Referring to the time in which they cast off the Divine theocracy and chose Saul in the place of Jehovah.

Verse 11

I gave thee a king in mine anger - Such was Saul; for they highly offended God when they clamoured to have a king like the heathen nations that were around them.

Took him away in my wrath - Permitted him and the Israelites to fall before the Philistines. Others think that Shalmaneser was the king thus given, and Hoshea the king thus taken away.

Verse 12

The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up - It is registered in my court of justice; the death warrant is in store, and will be produced in due time. Though there be not at present the judgment inflicted which such glaring transgressions demand, yet it will surely come. Such crimes cannot go unpunished.

Verse 13

The sorrows of a travailing woman - These judgments shall come suddenly and unavoidably.

The place of the breaking forth of children - As there is a critical time in parturition in which the mother in hard labor may by skillful assistants be eased of her burden, which, if neglected, may endanger the life both of parent and child, so there was a time in which Ephraim might have returned to God, but they would not; therefore they are now in danger of being finally destroyed. And, speaking after the manner of men, he must be deemed an unwise son, who if he had power and consideration, would prolong his stay in the porch of life, where he must necessarily be suffocated; so is Ephraim, who, though warned of his danger, having yet power to escape, continued in his sin, and is now come to destruction. I could illustrate the allusion in the text farther, and show the accurate propriety of the original; but the subject forbids it.

Verse 14

I will ransom them from the power of the grave - In their captivity they are represented as dead and buried, which is a similar view to that taken of the Jews in the Babylonish captivity by Ezekiel in his vision of the valley of dry bones. They are now lost as to the purpose for which they were made, for which God had wrought so many miracles for them and for their ancestors; but the gracious purpose of God shall not be utterly defeated. He will bring them out of that grave, and ransom them from that death; for as they have deserved that death and disgraceful burial, they must be redeemed and ransomed from it, or still lie under it. And who can do this but God himself? And he will do it. In the prospect of this the prophet exclaims, in the person of the universal Redeemer, "O death, I will be thy plagues;" I will bring into thy reign the principle of its destruction. The Prince of life shall lie for a time under thy power, that he may destroy that power.

O grave, I will be thy destruction - I will put an end to thy dreary domination by rising from the dead, and bringing life and immortality to life by my Gospel, and by finally raising from the death the whole human race in the day of the general resurrection.

שְׁאוֹל (sheol), which we translate grave, is the state of the dead. מָוֶת (maveth), which we translate death, is the principle of corruption that renders the body unfit to be longer the tenement of the soul, and finally decomposes it. Sheol shall be destroyed, for it must deliver up all its dead. (Maveth) shall be annihilated, for the body shall be raised incorruptible. See the use which the apostle makes of this passage, 1 Corinthians 15:54, 1 Corinthians 15:55; but he does not quote from the Hebrew, nor from any of the ancient versions. He had to apply the subject anew; and the Spirit, which had originally given the words, chose to adapt them to the subject then in hand, which was the resurrection of the dead in the last day. Instead of דְּבָרֵי מָוֶת (debareycha), thy plagues, one of my oldest MSS., ninety-six of Kennicott's and thirty-two of De Rossi's, have דְּבָרֵי מָוֶת (debarcha), thy plague, that which shall carry thee off, as the plague does them who are affected by it. To carry off, carry away, is one of the regular meanings of the verb דָּבַר (dabar).

Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes - On these points I will not change my purpose; this is the signification of repentance when attributed to God.

Verse 15

Though he be fruitful - יָפְרִי (yaphri); a paronomasia on the word עֲפְרַיִם (ephrayim), which comes from the same root פָּרָה (parah), to be fruitful, to sprout, to bud.

An east wind shall come - As the east wind parches and blasts all vegetation, so shall Shalmaneser blast and destroy the Israelitish state.

Verse 16

Samaria shall become desolate - This was the capital of the Israelitish kingdom. What follows is a simple prophetic declaration of the cruelties which should be exercised upon this hapless people by the Assyrians in the sackage of the city.