

## Israel Played at Religion with Toy Gods

**11** <sup>1-9</sup>“When Israel was only a child, I loved him.

I called out, ‘My son!’—called him out of Egypt.

But when others called him,

he ran off and left me.

He worshiped the popular sex gods,

he played at religion with toy gods.

Still, I stuck with him. I led Ephraim.

I rescued him from human bondage,

But he never acknowledged my help,

never admitted that I was the one pulling his wagon,

That I lifted him, like a baby, to my cheek,

that I bent down to feed him.

Now he wants to go *back* to Egypt or go over to Assyria—

anything but return to me!

That’s why his cities are unsafe—the murder rate skyrockets

and every plan to improve things falls to pieces.

My people are hell-bent on leaving me.

They pray to god Baal for help.

He doesn’t lift a finger to help them.

But how can I give up on you, Ephraim?

How can I turn you loose, Israel?

How can I leave you to be ruined like Admah,

devastated like luckless Zeboim?

I can’t bear to even think such thoughts.

My insides churn in protest.

And so I’m not going to act on my anger.

I’m not going to destroy Ephraim.

And why? Because I am God and not a human.

I’m The Holy One and I’m here—in your very midst.

<sup>10-12</sup>“The people will end up following God.

I will roar like a lion—

Oh, how I’ll roar!

My frightened children will come running from the west.

Like frightened birds they'll come from Egypt,  
from Assyria like scared doves.  
I'll move them back into their homes."  
GOD'S Word!

## Soul-Destroying Lies

Ephraim tells lies right and left.  
Not a word of Israel can be trusted.  
Judah, meanwhile, is no better,  
addicted to cheap gods.