

Theme: Return: Realigning w/God

Title: Return to God or Egypt – Hosea 8:1-14

Aim: Point to choices we have, to return to God or go back to slavery.

Intro: We make choices everyday – some good, some not so. And, every choice has a consequence, again, some good, some not so, & some insignificant. The color of my socks is not going to adversely affect my life today, except that you may question my style. That's insignificant to me – if I have dressed myself, you can readily tell that I'm not a slave to style. That's why Andi lays out my clothes on Sunday. But other choices bring about heavier consequences. Drive drunk, may hurt, even kill yourself or others. Fail to study or do the work, may fail the test or class. Fail to pay bills, may lose home or car, etc. We often excuse the choices we make & bemoan the consequences. Israel, both the northern kingdom & the southern kingdom (Judah), had turned away from God, the northern kingdom Israel more quickly than the southern Judah. They committed spiritual adultery, going after other, false gods & forsaking the one true God, Jehovah. God, thru the prophet Hosea, illustrated the problem by having Hosea marry an adulteress & guiding Hosea to graciously deal w/her in spite of her sin. He would also graciously deal w/Israel (& Judah) restoring them to Himself, but 1st they would suffer the consequences of their choices, captivity & exile – the northern kingdom Israel at the hands of the Assyrians. Hosea 8 outlines the choices Israel made & the consequences they would incur. As we walk thru the passage, it would be good for us to consider the choices we make daily in our relationship w/God & the consequences that may await us. READ 1) Israel said they knew God but really didn't. God was sounding the trumpet of impending judgment thru Hosea. Judgment was looming over them like a vulture, in the form of Assyria. Why? Because Israel had "transgressed God's covenant &

rebelled against His law.” “Transgress” = “pass over” – in other words, they completely ignored the covenant God had made w/them. If they truly knew God, they would know & keep His covenant & obey His law. But they “spurned” – rejected the good. God developed His covenant w/Israel for His glory & their good. He gave them His law to reveal Himself to them & protect & guide them, but time & time again they broke covenant & disobeyed law. The consequence they would bear: “the enemy shall pursue him.” They thought that because they were God’s people, He would protect them from enemies, & He would, if they had not turned from Him & not heeded His warnings. Beware & be sure of your relationship w/God thru Jesus Christ. Heed the warning of Jesus in Matt.7:21-23 – ***“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father. On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, & cast out demons in Your name, & do mighty works in Your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*** II) They did not seek God’s direction. They “made” or chose kings/princes w/out God’s guidance. Jeroboam had rebelled against Solomon & because of Solomon’s threat to kill him he & those following fled to Egypt. After Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam became king & foolishly refused to hear Jeroboam’s plea for fairness. So, the kingdom became divided w/Jeroboam king over the northern 10 tribes of Israel & Rehoboam kingdom over 2 southern tribes, Judah & Benjamin. While Jeroboam was God’s choice, in judgment over Solomon & Rehoboam, from the time of his reign to the time of the Assyrian defeat & captivity, the northern kingdom chose kings that were evil & led the people astray. This was one of their most important choices as a kingdom – who would rule over them. James Boice: “To choose leaders w/out the direction of God is not only sinful, it is foolish. Those who follow their

own wisdom in the choice of leaders inevitably get what they deserve,” as Israel certainly did. They were led astray to the worship of idols, forsaking the God of their fathers. Note vs4b-6. The calf referred to here is the golden calf, actually 2, fashioned under Jeroboam’s reign. He didn’t want the people being drawn back to Jerusalem to worship God, so he set up 2 altars, one in Dan & one in Bethel, encouraging the people to go to those places to worship (I Kings 12). When I was in Israel, we were able to go to this site in Tel Dan, where one of those altars was set up (the Bethel site has not been discovered yet). (See picture). When it says, “I have spurned your calf, O Samaria,” that literally means, “Your calf stinks!” Note that God said to them “You have made these idols to your own destruction.” And, “the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces.” III) **They sowed the wind but would reap the whirlwind.** It’s a miracle of life that we can sow a seed & reap a crop. What is sown produces great results – bountiful crop of grain, produce, etc. But when it comes to the consequences of our choices, it often seems to us more than we expected or deserve – not true but seems like it. God’s judgment was coming hard against Israel, but He had warned them. It would seem to them to be unfair, out of balance. But it was a long time coming & God’s wrath had built up as He called upon them to return to Him. He would shut off the bounty of their crops. What was produced would be devoured by those coming to conquer them. Israel would be swallowed up – essentially there would be no kingdom of Israel anymore. The ironic thing is that they went to Assyria for help. Actually, it was King Ahaz of Judah who called upon Assyria to come & protect them even against the northern kingdom of Israel in alliance w/Syria (II Kings 16). That’s when the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, but then Assyria went after Judah, the southern kingdom. God protected Jerusalem but much of the country was devastated. God kept Judah from captivity for about 140 years before He gave them over to

Babylon in 586 BC. God's promise was that He would "soon gather them up." This wasn't a positive gathering but a gathering of judgment. The kings & princes of both Israel & Judah would "writhe because of the tribute" – they would be on display as captives to those to whom God gave them over. But neither Israel nor Judah paid heed to the warnings.

IV) **They multiplied altars for sinning**, which indeed became altars for sinning. Besides Bethel & Dan, all over Israel there were altars to false gods – Baal & Asherah & others. 100's of them. And people took advantage of them, led by their leaders. If you build it, they will come, & they did. How have you built altars for sinning? What are your idols? What do you go after instead of God? Israel rejected God's word. God said, "It wouldn't matter if I gave them 10,000's of laws, they would just think them strange & ignore them." We ignore God's word at our peril. God said, "I won't accept their offerings. They're just going thru the motions, making mockery of their meaning. What I will do is 'remember their iniquity & punish their sins.'" Read II Kings 17 – the fall of Israel into exile because of their idolatry. Then note what God said: "They shall return to Egypt." Now, Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, didn't take the captives of Israel to Egypt but to Assyria, so what did God mean by that? Simply this: God had years before brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt, now He was sending them back into slavery, because "Israel had forgotten his Maker" – gone their own way, insisting on being under their own rule, forsaking God. "Judah had multiplied fortified cities" – depending on their own might. "But I will burn those cities & devour their strongholds" – which He did thru the Babylonians. That's where the sermon title comes in, in case you wonder. God had graciously called Israel & Judah to return to Him, worship only Him, follow His law, keep His covenant, but they would not. He was saying, "Either return to Me or you'll return to Egypt" – to captivity, to slavery. There's an application for us here for sure. God calls us who don't yet know Him to

come to Him by faith in Christ; turn to Him, yield to Him in repentance for going our own ways, ruling our own lives & embrace His Christ, His salvation, forgiveness. Come to life. If you don't, then slavery to sin & punishment for sin is all that awaits you. It may seem harsh & unfair, but it will be eternally just. You've been warned. Come to Jesus. For those of us in Christ, we need to make sure we truly are in Christ. Don't just go thru the motions. Don't just pay lip service to God. By the Holy Spirit's help, tear down the altars/idols of your life & follow Jesus. Heed His word, follow His leading. Obey His commands. Your life is not your own. If you've strayed from God, hear His urging to return; realign w/God. This can be a daily thing but don't hesitate. Pray for your wayward children, that they may return to Jesus. God may discipline you/them, by His love & grace. Let the discipline have its intended result. If not you will continually be entangled again in a yoke of slavery. Hosea 6:1 – ***“Come, let us return to the LORD; for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, & He will bind us up,”***