

How Can You Go Forward Looking Backward?

Isaiah 30:1-11

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I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND BIBLICAL CONTEXT

General Observation: people who ignore, deny or despise their past neither know how to preserve and build on their heritages nor avoid past mistakes made by their ancestors. *It is also morally corrupt not to acknowledge the sacrifices and victories of our ancestors who sweat and bled to pave the way for our Present in which we reap the benefits.* The saying “**history repeats itself**” comes from scholars who studied the experiences of national leaders and nations who failed to learn about what their history could teach them. The History of Christianity is filled with grave errors, abusive treatment of congregants, Excommunication of great believers such as Martin Luther, bloody conflicts between the Catholics and Protestants, just to mention few. Christians who read and pay attention to history as well as the Bible will do well.

A. Historical Background

One *unbroken prominent characteristic thread* that can be traced in the fabric of the History of the Israelites can be described as an “**Ungrateful, Unrepentant, Backward Looking, Grumbling and Complaining Streak.**” This *characteristic* not only shaped the national profile of the Israelites but also *severely undermined* the spiritual, moral and ethical aspirations and progressive strides of those who were completely faithful and totally dedicated leaders who trusted God such as Moses, Joshua, Joseph, King David and King Hezekiah. This *character trait* of the Israelites *revealed itself multiple times* during the time God was leading them to Canaan, the Promised Land, as described in Exodus. *During their journey to Canaan, the Israelites repeatedly expressed their longing for Egypt while God was leading them, protecting them and caring for them!* The following words of the Israelites as recorded in Exodus and Numbers capture **the full extent of their ungratefulness as well as their contempt and disregard for God’s Love, Grace, Mercy and Plan for them.**

- a) **Exodus 16:1-4:** “... In the desert the whole community **grumbled** against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, **‘If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt!** There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.’”

- b) **Numbers 14:1-4**: “That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites **grumbled** against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, ‘If only we had died in Egypt! Or in the desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. **Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?**’ And they said to each other, ‘**we should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.**”

B. Biblical Context

- a) **Egypt/Pharaoh**: References to Egypt/Pharaoh in the Bible indicate a nation ruled by *absolute dictatorship*/Pharaoh and a culture completely dedicated to *idol worship of various kinds* which *promotes* sinfulness. For the Israelites, **Egypt** was supposed to *remind* them:

- **Of 400 years of Slavery**; a place where they were mistreated and subjected to all kinds of injustices, etc.
- **Of The God who delivered them out of bondage** with the full and glorious display of His Awesome Power and Amazing Miracles;
- **Of how God parted the Red Sea** so that they could cross to the other side on dry ground and completely destroyed the Egyptians who pursued them by letting the water to come crashing down and drowning them;
- **Of how God led them to Canaan, the land “flowing with milk and honey,”** where they possessed farms and vineyards they didn’t cultivate, homes and properties they didn’t build, cattle they didn’t raise, etc.

All of the above and more were fulfilled during the Time of **Moses** and **Joshua** according to God’s Promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, the Bible says in the **Book of Judges**, *it didn’t take long before the Israelites went back to their old habits of turning their backs on God and being ungrateful to Him*. So, the generations after Joshua lost territories and became slaves again due to being unfaithful and disobedient to God. **The Israelites had a recurring habit of sliding back and getting stuck in misery instead of pressing forward!**

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- b) **King David Recovered Lost Territories and Established a Nation**. God has shown the Israelites *how prosperous, secure and free nation* they can be under a God fearing, loving and trusting King David. However, the generations after King David kept on going backward instead of forward! **They kept looking to Egypt instead of looking toward the future God promised them!** How can the Israelites whose King was David who wrote

Psalms that *glorify* God in the highest, *declare* God's Love, Grace and Mercy, *speak* of who God is in **Psalm 23, Psalm 27, for example?**

II. THE LESSON: How Can You Go Forward Looking Backward?

1. **vv. 1-2: Woe to the Obstinate Children who Look to Egypt for Help.**

When the Bible uses the word "**Woe**," it means "great sorrow, grief, distress and heavy calamity" is on its way. In Isaiah chapter 30, it is the LORD that declared **Woe** upon "the obstinate children," the Israelites. God declares that He will bring "great sorrow, grief, distress and heavy calamity" upon His "obstinate children" for "heaping sin upon sin" **completely disregarding** the Messages of Warning and the Call to Repentance proclaimed by His Prophets. To *distinguish* "the obstinate children" from the faithful Remnants, God spells out the particular sins for which He declares the "Woe." Let us examine the "Woe" that came upon those:

- a) "who **carry out plans** *that are not mine*, **forming an alliance**, but **not by My Spirit**, heaping sin upon sin."

God's Plan for the Israelites was *clearly articulated* in **the Law** and His **Promises** under the **Covenant** were known by them. God was personally involved for 40 years during the leadership of Moses to explain, demonstrate and implement His Plan for them. God also continued to *manifest* His Promises *in real time and in tangible ways* during the lifetime of Joshua. However, the Israelites had their own plans which were contrary to God's Plan for them involving "**forming alliance**" with idol worshipping nations led by **evil spirits** instead of **the Spirit of God** (which were habitually recurring sins by this time).

- b) "who **go down to Egypt** *without consulting Me*; who look for help from Pharaoh's Protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge."

Another habitual sin the Israelites were known for was to "go down to Egypt" whenever they needed help *completely disregarding* their history with them. *Worse, they preferred to seek help from those who enslaved them rather than from the God who set them free!* **This is an outrageous sin! An affront to God!** It is one thing if the Israelites didn't know God! They had a long history with God who chose them! They had experienced God's Protection from various nations who came to attack them countless times in their history.

2. **vv. 3-5. Instead of Protection, Only Shame and Disgrace Awaits Them.**

Here are a couple of questions to help us understand the kinds of "shame and disgrace" God says awaited those who seek help from their abusers.

- a) How can one expect to receive protection from someone who **physically and psychologically abused, defamed, exploited and rejected him/her in the past?**
- b) **How can someone who experienced God's Love, Grace, Mercy, Protection and Provision prefer those who are known to be cruel, merciless, abusive and exploitative?** What is it that drives them back to their abusers? God says "Woe" to those whom He has redeemed, shown His Love, Grace and Mercy when they didn't deserve them reject Him preferring to seek protection from their abusers! **Woe to those who think they can go forward looking backward!**

3. vv. 6-7. **The Envoy on a Mission of Shame and Disgrace**

This section is better understood when we recall that God chose the Israelites (later Christians) to be glorious examples of what it means to be the believers of the God who created the universe. All idol worshipping people are supposed to look up to us because of how God *transformed* us from being slaves to free, liars to Truth tellers, unjust to justice promoters, warmongers to peace makers, abusers to healers, haters to loving people, etc. Idol worshipping nations were supposed to send their envoys on a mission to find out the Glorious Manifestations of His Presence among His people. But in Isaiah 30, the Bible describes how the Israelites were sending their Envoy on a Mission of Shame and Disgrace! In this mission, they were willing to traverse the Negev to go to Egypt, an arid "land of hardship and distress" populated by "lions and lionesses, venomous adders/vipers and darting snakes." The Envoy on a Mission of Shame and Disgrace were carrying "their riches on donkeys, their treasures on the humps of camels to that unprofitable nation, Egypt whose help is utterly useless."

4. vv. 8-9. **God Instructs Isaiah to Record their Obstinate Behavior.**

Let us begin with the definition of the word "obstinate." **Obstinate** means "stubbornly refusing to change one's chosen course of action, *despite having the knowledge of the negative consequences of such behavior.*" In the context of the Bible, it means having a willful, deliberate and intentional disregard for divine guidance/instructions being aware of the negative consequences of doing so! In a sentence, God describes His "obstinate children" as "rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD's instruction" (v.9). God instructs Isaiah "to write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness" against them. What a *tragic history* of **ill repute**; a terribly bad reputation; **notoriously ungrateful and unrepentant reputation to have!**

5. vv. 10-12. Stop Confronting Us with The Holy One of Israel (v.11)

For the Israelites, it came down to where they just couldn't bear to hear the Word of God! Wow! The Bible says, "They say to the seers, 'See no more visions!' and to the prophets, 'Give us no more visions of what is right!' Instead, they insisted upon hearing "prophecy of illusions." They *abhorred* the prophet's instructions about avoiding *the way* of destruction and *the path* that lead them to poverty, disasters and horrible deaths! They preferred "prophecy of illusions" which paint life filled with "pleasant things" which meant "wild, rebellious and sinful living!" So, they said to the prophets "stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel."

III. CONCLUSION

Let us make sure we read/study about our history and learn what it teaches us how to appreciate the Present and prepare well for the Future. Let us make every effort to read, study and understand God's Plan for Humanity and make sure we don't repeat the tragic, obstinate behaviors of the Israelites as Christians!

We cannot go forward looking backward?!

It is absurd to do so!