

Isaiah 30:1-26 • When It All Goes South

Introduction

The colloquial phrase denoting something failing or severely misbehaving is, “It’s going south”. Probably an expression that as one looks at a map, it’s dropping off the bottom edge from view. Ironically, this is the exact situation with Egypt. Located to the south of Israel, the repeated biblical warning is not to return to go south or return to Egypt, a symbol of the old life of slavery from which God redeemed us. But there are times that Christians **DO** “go south” in their returning to their old lifestyle. The Bible calls this “rebellion”. Because to have known God, embraced Him, and adhered for a time to His ways, and then in spite of that experience choose to return south to the old life, this is the very definition of rebellion. You can only “rebel” against something you’re intimately acquainted with. How does God deal with people that “go south”?

¹“Woe to the rebellious children,”
declares the LORD,
“Who execute a plan, but not Mine,
And make an alliance, but not of My
Spirit,
In order to add sin to sin;
²Who proceed down to Egypt
Without consulting Me,
To take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh
And to seek shelter in the shadow of
Egypt!
³Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be
your shame
And the shelter in the shadow of Egypt,
your humiliation.
⁴For their princes are at Zoan
And their ambassadors arrive at Hanes.
⁵Everyone will be ashamed because of a
people who cannot profit them,
Who are not for help or profit, but for
shame and also for reproach.”

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What are the characteristics that define someone as being “rebellious” against God?

A: They “execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit”. They exchange God’s ways for their own, and enter into a relationship with someone/something else.

Observation: The phrase “make an alliance” in v.1 in the Hebrew literally reads, “pours out a drink offering”. It’s the same wording found in Exodus 24:8 describing Moses’ sprinkling of blood to confirm God’s covenant with Israel.

Q: Why would an alliance with Egypt be particularly bad?

A: Old Testament Law specifically forbade Israel from making such alliances in general because God was to be their protection. But because God brought them out of Egypt so that they would be His people and He would be their God – the very act of salvation – “Egypt” became a biblical teaching representing the old life. This is a picture of coming into a relationship with God, then forsaking that relationship to return to the old life one had been originally saved from.

Q: So according to v. 2, what is the visible proof of spiritual rebellion?

A: To “take refuge” and “to seek shelter” in someone or something else other than God. You actually come to believe there is something of greater comfort and protection than God.

Q: According to v.3-4, how will God deal with rebellion?

A: He will destroy the very thing the rebellious have trusted in so that they will plainly see – to their shame – the futility of their trust in something other than the One True God.

Point: Placing a higher priority in something other than Christ always works until times of testing and trials, at which time the true strength/weakness of both our trust and the object of that trust is exposed.

⁶The oracle concerning the beasts of the Negev.

Through a land of distress and anguish,
From where come lioness and lion, viper
and flying serpent,

They carry their riches on the backs of
young donkeys

And their treasures on camels' humps,
To a people who cannot profit them;

⁷Even Egypt, whose help is vain and
empty.

Therefore, I have called her

"Rahab who has been exterminated."

[Read v.6-7]

Q: Is this prophetic judgment literally against animals in the desert region between Israel and Egypt? What is it actually describing as an extension of v.1-5?

A: This is describing the delegation sent by Israel to Egypt, a caravan of donkeys and camels carrying wealth and riches with which to secure the alliance with Egypt. This is how political alliances of the day were made.

Q: What can be considered ironic about the fact that they had to traverse such a harsh environment and overcome such dangerous obstacles in order to secure this alliance with Egypt?

A: It reflects both their present circumstances and their spiritual condition. These things can only be truly overcome through a right relationship with God, yet they risk the same dangers in a futile gesture away from Him.

Q: What is the meaning of God's calling Egypt by the name "Rahab"?

A: The word "Rahab" indicates ferocity, haughtiness, boasting, insolence – all qualities closely associated with strength derived from pride. In the original language this phrase most likely has the colloquial meaning, "courageous in talking, cowardly in acting" to describe how they **LOOK** like a source of strength, but are quite opposite in reality.

Point: *The unspoken truth of our seeking comfort and protection is that we ourselves cannot provide it and must seek something greater that can. Whether we seek it from God or another, it requires personal sacrifice and commitment on our part. Our deception is in believing that sacrifice to something other than God will provide that comfort and protection, when it's really just mis-directing our efforts.*

⁸Now go, write it on a tablet before them
And inscribe it on a scroll,

That it may serve in the time to come
As a witness forever.

⁹For this is a rebellious people, false sons,
Sons who refuse to listen

To the instruction of the LORD;

¹⁰Who say to the seers, "You must not see
visions";

And to the prophets, "You must not
prophesy to us what is right,

Speak to us pleasant words,
Prophesy illusions.

¹¹Get out of the way, turn aside from the
path,

Let us hear no more about the Holy One
of Israel."

[Read v.8-11]

Q: From these verses, what would you deduce to be the root cause that leads one into rebellion, to seek a replacement for God?

A: Complete and total rejection of God's Word in all forms. They don't want to see it, hear it, or be in the presence of anyone that speaks of it.

Q: What is it that they earnestly desire instead of God's Word?

A: "Speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions." They no longer have a desire for the truth.

Q: What is ironic about God's command in v.8 as it relates to this condition?

A: They have rejected God's Word, yet God commands that this very rejection be written down just the same as all of His Word. It will be a tool used on the other side of judgment for those that recover spiritually.

Point: *Rebellion is always accompanied and evidenced by a rejection of God's Word. This is why alternate alliances are attempted, because they say the things those that reject God's Word want to hear in its place.*

¹²Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel,
“Since you have rejected this word
And have put your trust in oppression and
guile, and have relied on them,
¹³Therefore this iniquity will be to you
Like a breach about to fall,
A bulge in a high wall,
Whose collapse comes suddenly in an
instant,
¹⁴Whose collapse is like the smashing of a
potter’s jar,
So ruthlessly shattered
That a sherd will not be found among its
pieces
To take fire from a hearth
Or to scoop water from a cistern.”

[Read v.12-14]

Q: In the context of the discussion of rebellion so far, how does God summarize it in v.12?

A: They have rejected His Word. This was the primary mechanism by which they were then able to transfer their reliance on God to a false substitute.

Point: *Have you noticed that although false believers, false teachers, false groups, or false spiritual movements go on for a time, that when their collapse occurs it seems sudden and irrecoverable? It’s exactly like v.13-14, slowly bulging outward until it results in total destruction.*

Q: What does the sherd represent?

A: It would be a surviving part of the pot that was big enough to still be usable to some degree, either to remove a coal from a fire or enough water to drink. It’s a commentary on how vain it is to trust in something other than God because there is not even a marginal value in it; it has absolutely no redeeming value whatsoever.

Point: *Rebellion is like all other addictive behaviors – it takes a traumatic, rock-bottom experience to get the person to realize the true nature of their misplaced confidence.*

¹⁵For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said,
“In repentance and rest you will be saved,
In quietness and trust is your strength.”
But you were not willing,
¹⁶And you said, “No, for we will flee on
horses,”
Therefore you shall flee!
“And we will ride on swift horses,”
Therefore those who pursue you shall be
swift.
¹⁷One thousand will flee at the threat of
one man;
You will flee at the threat of five,
Until you are left as a flag on a mountain
top
And as a signal on a hill.

[Read v.15-17]

Q: What is the HUGE contrast between what God states in v.15 as the right way to deal with their problems, versus their rebellious choice to pursue a futile alternative in v.6-7?

A: To seek an alternate alliance, they had to gather together riches, form a delegation, and make it overcome the tremendous challenges and dangers of the desert it had to cross. It was a far greater effort they had to expend in rebellion than if they’d put the same effort into reconciliation. Rebellions consumes, obedience produces.

Q: How might v.16 sound like a familiar, recurring biblical teaching in both Testaments?

A: It’s a variation of “you reap what you sow” or “by your measure of judgment so you will be judged”. The consequences of sin are inevitable.

Q: What is the meaning that in the end they will be like “a flag on a mountain top and as a signal on a hill”?

A: This is how “mass communication” worked in ancient times, signaling from one hill to the next by flags. It’s a way of stating that God will make an example of them as a very visible warning to everyone else.

Point: *It is sadly ironic that it takes more time and energy and resources to engage in rebellious behavior than to stay put and be spiritually reconciled. The resulting lesson learned at one’s personal expense will be a very public warning to everyone else about them.*

¹⁸Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you,
And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;
How blessed are all those who long for Him.

¹⁹O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. ²⁰Although the LORD has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, He, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. ²¹Your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left. ²²And you will defile your graven images overlaid with silver, and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them as an impure thing, and say to them, "Be gone!"

²³Then He will give you rain for the seed which you will sow in the ground, and bread from the yield of the ground, and it will be rich and plenteous; on that day your livestock will graze in a roomy pasture. ²⁴Also the oxen and the donkeys which work the ground will eat salted fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. ²⁵On every lofty mountain and on every high hill there will be streams running with water on the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. ²⁶The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days, on the day the Lord binds up the fracture of His people and heals the bruise He has inflicted.

[Read v.18-22]

Q: How does v.18 summarize God's point of view on the subject of rebellion?

A: He desires to show His grace and mercy; therefore this process of God's justice is necessary to shatter the rebellious to bring them back to Him. It is contrasted by those that never engage in rebellion, who experience the blessings of never longing for anyone else except Him alone and therefore don't have to undergo this experience.

Q: How do the remedies of v.19-22 speak to the original causes of rebellion?

A: The core problem that led to all subsequent problems was derived from rejecting God's Word, from wanting to only hear what was pleasing to their own ear. The initial steps of God's healing all involve coming back to His Word, of embracing it personally more than ever before. [Note: The cure for disobedience is **ALWAYS** obedience.]

Q: What is the visible proof of a restored relationship?

A: Destroying and removing everything that acted even in the slightest as a substitute for Him. You won't just put those things away in a closet lest you return to them some day, but will utterly destroy them so that they will never be used or returned to again.

Point: *Every true spiritual revival in the history of the church has been accompanied by a revival of commitment to His Word. True repentance must be accompanied by a true commitment to God's Word to change one's behavior permanently and irrevocably.*

[Read v.23-26]

Q: How are these verses a contrast to their original efforts described in v.6-7?

A: Whereas they were ready to give up their personal prosperity for the comfort and protection of another, their reconciliation of comfort and protection in God actually **MULTIPLIES** their prosperity.

Q: Is this effect of prosperity limited to physical comforts?

A: No. These are all parallel references to spiritual blessings as well in the biblical use of such things as seed, bread, pasture, winnowed grain, water, light, etc. The promise here is that there are far greater spiritual blessings to be enjoyed by a right relationship with God than even physical blessings can afford.

Point: *Even at their momentary best, a substitute for God could only provide a very temporary benefit and could never provide the spiritual assurance we need both for this life and the next.*