

Stubborn Like Hell

‘A devout cowboy lost his favorite Bible while he was mending fences out on the range. Three weeks later, a sheep walked up to him carrying the Bible in its mouth. The cowboy couldn’t believe his eyes. He took the precious book out of the sheep’s mouth, raised his eyes heavenward and exclaimed, “It’s a miracle!” “Not really”, said the sheep. “Your name is written inside the cover”.’ ¶ What miracles! Even from this ridiculous joke, we can see that God places the highest value on His Own word. This is the overarching point of the entire Holy Bible, of every book, chapter and verse within. God’s word is holy, true, perfect, pure, without error, and more valuable than life itself because God’s word as enlivened by Christ Jesus in His Holy Spirit is the very source of life itself. God’s word is the written down, engraved in granite, everlasting, never failing, explosive in power, never to be rescinded record of God’s acts, plans and purposes for earth and all mankind. It is the “last word” on every subject, issue and life on this earth and in all that exists. Matthew 24:35 records Lord Jesus saying, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away” (NIV). It is the standard by which all things, everything else, will be judged and measured. Men can not judge it. It can not be analyzed and picked apart as if it were

a laboratory specimen waiting to be dissected. It stands above us, demanding our allegiance, respect and obedience. It's the very word of God Almighty, and can not be mocked or ridiculed without consequence. Throughout history, all who've attempted to stand over it as if mankind's intellect was somehow superior will be called to account for their arrogance. For only those who humbly come under its shade and protection to read, meditate and study it, will be among those who come out with treasures, as one "who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old" (Matthew 13:52). For those who do this will be instructed by Holy Spirit Himself, the One Who gave these very words to the original men who wrote them down, becoming part of this holy and supernatural Book. Hebrews 4:12 states: "the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires".

Because the Holy Bible is a written document, sent to us on earth by God's very Own hand, testifying of His very Own Son the Lord Jesus Christ, sealed with His very Own Holy Spirit, this Holy Book represents the very presence, power, truth and authority of Almighty God Himself. And if we treat it with any less respect, reverence and honor than it deserves, we have in the same measure snubbed and given the brush off to God Himself. Though we are never to worship this Holy Bible, as if it was deity itself, yet we are to treat it and every copy of it with reverence and respect, as it

is no mere book. We must never sling it around like other books. In Japan, one of the most literate societies from ancient times, books have always been respected, and are thought of as if they themselves are teachers. And if a student would never dream of sitting on their teacher's head, thus one would likewise never sit on a book, or throw it around. Least of all the Holy Book of God.

We heard a reading today that's not included in the normal schedule of Bible readings that we and many churches follow. Those of you who've read through the entire Bible have read this thirteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings, but otherwise, it's never heard in many normal Sunday morning worship services. I Kings 13 is a somewhat perplexing chapter. But its point is not difficult to discern if we give it just a bit of focussed attention.

But first, we need to recall the historical context. The glory days of Kings David and Solomon have passed. The closing days of King Solomon were tragic in that he had fallen to the political correctness of the day and began sinning against God by not only worshipping pagan false gods, but by building shrines and temples, even two detestable ones on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, encouraging the people to also worship these horrendous idols because some of his thousand wives and concubines worshipped them. Thus having broken covenant with God, the Lord determined to take most of the kingdom of Israel away from Solomon's line, but only after he died. His heir, Rehoboam was given a choice, a chance, to retain the entire kingdom, but God

knew in advance that he wouldn't listen to good advice, instead following the stupidity of his rich young, pampered friends, like the elitist brats of our political class in Washington, D.C. and Tinseltown. As God had warned through the prophet Ahijah, upon hearing the brazen, heinous demands of the would-be king, Crown Prince Rehoboam, the northern ten tribes of Israel deserted him, declared their independence, making Jeroboam their king.

Who was Jeroboam? He was one of the most illustrious officials under King Solomon, put in charge of the kingdom's labor force. Today, we might call him the Secretary of Labor. He was well-known and well liked. It's no wonder that he enjoyed the favor of the northern tribes, as he took on the leadership of the northern tribes when they went to negotiate with Crown Prince Rehoboam after the death of King Solomon. Ahijah the prophet had already prophesied to Jeroboam that God would make him king over the northern ten tribes of Israel, and promised God's blessings on him in I Kings 11:37-38. God said, "I will place you on the throne of Israel, and you will rule over all that your heart desires. If you listen to what I tell you and follow My ways and do whatever I consider to be right, and if you obey My decrees and commands, as My servant David did, then I will always be with you. I will establish an enduring dynasty for you as I did for David, and I will give Israel to you". If wasn't long after that the aging Solomon heard of Jeroboam's shifting loyalties, and tried to have him killed, but Jeroboam fled across the border into Egypt

out of Solomon's reach and stayed there until Solomon died.

We see that God promised great blessings on Jeroboam, the first king of the ten northern tribes, if he would but obey God as David had. But no sooner had he become king that he forgot God's promises and worried that the people, because they were required to go to Jerusalem three times a year to worship God, would gradually turn away from him and look back to the king who reigned in Jerusalem, the southern kingdom, resulting in the kingdom being reunited again. And he'd lose his throne. Even though God had said otherwise. So King Jeroboam built two golden calves erected on substitute worship altars, Bethel in the south and one in the far north in the tribe of Dan's territory, and declared alternative holidays for the people to celebrate, thus turning the northern tribes away from devotion to God Who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt. Needless to say, God was not pleased.

Now in chapter 13, God presents King Jeroboam yet another chance to obey. He sends an unnamed prophet, a man of God, from Judah, to prophesy against this now desecrated altar that a future Judean king named Josiah would one day sacrifice the pagan priests upon it, destroying it. This happened 300 years later.

But to impress on Jeroboam the veracity and seriousness of this prophecy, God employed miraculous signs. Jeroboam, enraged at this prophecy, raised his hand and ordered the prophet slain. His hand became paralyzed in that position, and simultaneously the altar itself cracked and ashes poured out, as prophe-

sied. Frightened, he cried to the prophet to pray that his hand be restored, which he did, and it was. Though the prophet then refused the food and drink Jeroboam offered, he later disobeyed God and ate and drank with the local lying old prophet who had met him on his way back to Judah, because he believed the old man rather than God's explicit word. Then the lying old prophet spoke God's actual word regarding how the man from Judah would not die at home because of his disobedience. Well, a lion did kill him not far from the old prophet's house. Amazingly, the Judean prophet's body was not eaten, let alone even mangled by the lion. And the lion itself quietly stood on the road next to the body, waiting, nor did the donkey run away. Three miracles in succession! When the old prophet saw that everything had been fulfilled exactly as prophesied, he had the Judean prophet's body buried in his own grave, with orders that his own body be buried with the Judean after he himself died. Three hundred years later, when King Josiah destroyed this altar, only these two graves did he leave undisturbed. For even in their deaths, God honored these two, His prophets.

This succession of miracles and signs were designed to make it next to impossible for King Jeroboam to disbelieve that what was being proclaimed was the very word of God. Yet, he was stubborn as hell, refused to repent and turn back to God, thus guaranteeing his ultimate destination in hell. The moral of the story, this chapter? Don't ever be stubborn with God!

