



Shepherds need to know the Biblical meaning of "stubbornness"

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For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.
Samuel 15: 23

In context, this statement was made by Samuel directed toward King Saul who had failed again to be completely obedient to YHWH's directions. In this occurrence, he did not enforce YHWH's directive and restrain the people but allowed them to keep King Agag and the flocks alive. They were to have been completely destroyed as judgment was to be carried out against the Amalekites.

I have heard the first part of this verse many times, sometimes apparently used appropriately and sometimes inappropriately used as a form of spiritual abuse. I do not ever recall anyone speaking the second half of the phrase, let alone examining it for meaning. (This reminds me of the propensity to quote "Children, honor your father and your mother" but conveniently forget the second admonition to parents not to provoke their children.)

One may question whether Saul was lacking in responsiveness to YHWH or just to the counsel given to him by Samuel. My understanding is that Samuel was the acknowledged and confirmed prophet of YHWH and was given to Saul as his counselor. Operating in the wisdom of YHWH, he provided understanding and wise counsel. Therefore it would be difficult, if not impossible, to separate the two issues. Samuel spoke as YHWH directed. Failure to comply with Samuel's instructions is equal to failing to obey YHWH.

Obedience to YHWH in the use of one's authority is necessary for leaders though not always easily understood. Failure to exert one's authority seems to be a common failing of leaders. See Aaron and the golden calf incident, in which Moses was said to have seen that the people were unrestrained for Aaron had not restrained them to their shame among the nations (NKJV). KJV used "were naked" in place of "unrestrained," which refers to an absence of the exercise of appropriate authority or "covering."

There will be another article on this subject on our website soon. There is a related recurring theme in Judges as people quickly forgot the exhortations of YHWH-honoring leadership to their shame and destruction. Even in the account of Messiah's crucifixion we see that Pilate bowed to the will of the people despite knowing there was no guilt in the One being condemned. One could say these are "cycles of unrighteousness" as opposed to walking in the cycles of righteousness YHWH has provided.

However, as A.W. Tozer observed, the bird of truth has two wings. If failure to exert authority appropriately is one wing of this truth for shepherds then wielding that authority in an abusive manner is the other. The subject of abuse of authority is broad and, as it is all too common, a very important one to address. I have provided one article so far on that subject on our website entitled: "Spiritual Abuse: Leadership Authority and Accountability Patterns." The subject of conflict is also dealt with in our audio teaching entitled [Drama Triangle for Messianic Communities](#) which is also found on our website.

For the moment, I am most interested to delve into "stubbornness" with a few notes on iniquity and idolatry and its implications for shepherds. As we enter times of increasing darkness and hardness of hearts it seems especially important that we become well versed in the tasks of shepherding the "sheople," which includes correct understanding as to the heart motives for unpleasant or dangerous behavior. This has to do with being able to recognize the difference between genuine "wheat" and "tares;" and between "tares" and "wolves." This subject has been one of our discussions in our Leadership Teleconferences and has brought greater awareness of this need for discernment. Immaturity can at times look like viciousness and yet not really be intended as destructive though we believe destructive behavior needs to be addressed, the person held accountable and appropriate teaching/discipline provided. Some behaviors appear virtuous but are deadly from the heart. We call this duplicity and fully expect duplicitous behavior to increase in the months and years left to us before Messiah returns. When a situation arises that involves conflict, it is important for shepherds/leaders to cover the situation with prayer and then ask some very pointed questions of the individuals involved, rather than assume that they know the heart motives. This conversation should make matters somewhat more clear, giving some idea of what action to take, if any. Messianic communities have been decimated far too often when the correct understanding and action was not sought by their leaders.

Maturity or lack of it in leaders themselves is another important variable that we have dealt with elsewhere throughout our site and teachings. When we see how destructive conflict with immaturity among members of a community can be we also see how much greater that damage will be if the shepherd/leader is also immature.

What have we understood the word "stubborn" to mean in our culture today? Merriam-Webster Online dictionary defines it like this:

Function: *adjective*

Etymology: Middle English *stibourne*, *stuborn*

Date: 14th century

1 a (1): unreasonably or perversely unyielding : **MULISH** (2): justifiably unyielding : **RESOLUTE b**: suggestive or typical of a strong stubborn nature <a *stubborn* jaw>2: performed or carried on in an unyielding, obstinate, or persistent manner <*stubborn* effort>3: difficult to handle, manage, or treat <a *stubborn* cold>4: **LASTING** <*stubborn* facts>¹

I would agree that my understanding has also been that a stubborn person is one who is unyielding, digging their heels in, and refusing to receive any kind of exhortation or direction. It has appeared to me to be an individual matter, an issue of character perhaps, but its direct affects were thought to be pertaining only to that person. Perhaps we have all seen our share of stubborn people and are quick to sigh that this is just their personality or style; or maybe there is just a "personality conflict" between the person and the leader. It seems virtuous to many people that a leader might assume part of the "blame" for difficult people such as this, and less than virtuous if they dare to stand firm in the need for correction. Experience of abuse of authority has made many people skittish and suspicious of those who act in genuine YHWH honoring authority. It can all too easily set up conflict among groups, such as we have described in our CD on The Drama Triangle for Messianic Communities, as people find themselves drawn into an apparent battle for control. This is certainly difficult enough to deal with well yet there is much more under the surface.

The first step toward a Biblical understanding of this word "stubbornness" and the message we should be receiving through Samuel's words is to locate the Strong's number and definition. It is #6484, transliterated as "*patsar*", which is from a primitive root meaning "to peck at," or figuratively, "stun or dull—press, urge, stubbornness." My first surprise was that it seems to be describing the behavior of "stubbornness" in the context of what one person **does to** another, not just the internal experience described above.

I was unable to locate this specific word in Vine's Dictionary nor did I find it in the Etymological Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew by Clark. It was not listed in the dictionary compiled by Jeff A. Benner though I did find it in Benner's Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible.² This lexicon provides cross references from the Strongs number to the numbering system used in Benner's lexicon.

1200 words

¹ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stubborn>, May 13, 2009.

² Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible; Benner, Jeff A.;

As the word is taken back to its ancient meaning, exploration of the meaning of each of the consonants involved provides more light. This way of study goes back to the pictographic meaning and origin of each letter of the modern *Alefbet*, each of which tell a story in themselves. For "*patsar*", they are a *pey*, a *tsade* and a *resch* and a general understanding of their meaning as a root word is "sharpening of a metal tool by pressing or moving a file or stone over the point." As a verb, it is said "to push or urge another into action." Once again, the image is that of an ***action directed toward another***. I can well imagine the metal tool being acted upon and changed would call this action stubborn in this context. (There is a positive connotation for the image of sharpening metal in the well known Proverb 27: 17 "Iron sharpeneth iron as a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." KJV These are different root words and merit a companion study to hold in counterpoint with this study on "stubbornness," hopefully to be completed soon.)

Benner indicated two related words, numbered as 1342 B and 1435 A (f) These can be called "sister" words in Hebrew when they share consonants, and apparently, the *samech* and the *tsade* have a similar origin, thus making a connection with two of the three consonants of the basic root, transliterated as *patsar*. These sister words help develop the full meaning as we learn line upon line, precept upon precept.

1342 B sar, has a two letter root, a *samech* and *resch*, and this word would carry two connotations: 1) Rule: to make others turn in the direction of the ruler and 2) Turn: to turn away from the correct path toward another direction.

1435 A qsh meaning "stalk," has the pictographic meaning of the sun at the horizon and gathering of the light along with the idea of teeth and pressure. Summarized, "bring together and pressed," which is said to refer to the grain stalks being harvested and brought together and bundled or pressed together with a cord. It can also be connected with the idea of "stubble" which would refer to the "stiff part of the stalk that remains in the ground," or "the stiffness of a branch for making bows or arrows." Taken together it certainly does give a picture of what YHWH called a "stiff necked people" doesn't it? But now our understanding has broadened to comprehend that it is more than just personal behavior; it also represents the stubbornness as impacting others and the direction they take as well.

Brad Scott of www.wildbranch.org has described another way to develop the meaning of ancient Hebrew root words which incorporates all of the above meaning. He further

notes that the first and last consonants will pictographically indicate the outside appearance of the concept while the inside consonants will depict the heart or the hidden aspect of the word. In this method of understanding, the *pey* and the *resh* would indicate the outward appearance or behavior. The *pey* indicates several possible pictures, among them, "edges," "sharp," "blowing," "speaking" as the lips are the edges of the mouth. "*Resh*" refers to the head as in a ruler, or being raised up to see or speak. It can have a connotation of prideful "raising up." So taken together, the outside consonants of *patsar* /stubbornness could be said to indicate one that raises up his head to speak pride fully. This could be a positive for a ruler in the sense of having self-confidence/pride but there is also a hint of the destructiveness of self-sufficiency/pride.

Going to the inner consonant, *tsade*, will indicate the heart of the outward appearance. *Tsade* carries the connotation of the hunter, lying in wait alongside the path, stalking to catch his prey unawares. If there was any doubt as to the motivation for the raising of the head to speak being positive or negative, it would appear to me that this inner pictograph confirms the deceit and duplicity of one who speaks up to rule with the inner desire to redirect people away from the correct path.³

With this picture in mind, "stubbornness" doesn't sound like something to be tolerated with a sigh and a shrug of the shoulders. Shepherds, arise! Increase your discernment and vigilance to guard the sheep! Danger comes not only from outside but at times from those inside your group as well.

In this quote from Samuel, we find that he equated stubbornness with both "iniquity" and "idolatry." When we thought of stubbornness as a personal matter or characteristic, I don't think it was clear exactly how this could be so, though at the least, being stubborn and refusing to accept counsel could indeed be rebelliousness toward the one offering the counsel. Like Saul and Samuel, if that one is speaking as from YHWH, then the rejection is not likely to be only directed toward the counselor, but to the counselor's Counselor as well!

In this verse, "iniquity" has the Strong's #205, which is transliterated from the Hebrew as "*awen*" and according to the Lexical Aid provided in Zodhiates' The Word Study Bible, this word can also be #206 and translated as "idolatry," though in this verse "idolatry" is Strong's # 8655. The Lexical Aid has much to say on this word and its

³ Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible; Benner, Jeff A.

relatives. It is noted to be the major Hebrew word used for "sin" among the many listed. It says that the focus is "on planning and expression of deception;" and that there are two relevant descriptions: "1) trouble which moves onward to wickedness" and "2) emptiness which results in idolatry." ⁴

Vine's definition for sin, including "*awen*," is very lengthy as well. Descriptions that seemed prominent and relevant include "painful burden/difficulty that the offender caused for self or others" and "absence of all true worth." "Iniquity" is equated with lawlessness and a "perversion of life" and "twisted."⁵

"Idolatry" in this verse is listed as Strongs #8655, which can be transliterated as "*teraphim*". It is the plural form of #7495 which is "*rapha*" which is generally translated as "healer." In this case, "*teraphim*" is said to be "a healer, a family idol, images." The primitive root, "*rapha*" is "to mend by stitching, i.e. figuratively to cure, to cause to heal; physician, repair." There is no connotation of source, good or bad, of that healing in "*rapha*" but there is the indication of a source other than YHWH in "*teraphim*." (Remember that such "*teraphim*" are what Rachel hid from her father and in effect, died for doing so?) Interestingly, it is related to #7508 *Rephidim*, which is "a place in the desert" and the plural of the masculine form of "*rapha*." A connection is also noted to 7507, "*refedah*," which means a railing. (Well, a railing is a safety precaution that is prescribed by Torah so it could be a preventive source of healing.)

Adding to the picture of stubbornness being an action toward another person that has duplicity and deceit involved toward changing the other's direction we now add concepts of willful sin and defiance as in the planning and expression of deception. It seems to involve a desire for healing as Samuel paired these concepts though little concern as to the *source* of that healing. No wonder Saul had no problem contacting the medium at Endor! That discussion would include further exploration of the terms "witchcraft" and "rebellion," which is for another time.

If the *person/sheep* exhibiting such stubbornness is not held accountable we can see now how much harm can come forth. How much worse for Saul as a *leader/shepherd*, to demonstrate stubbornness as his example would be followed by many. That would still be true today! A leader/shepherd needs to speak into the lives of those they lead in order to lead well. It would be best if their attitude was a positive, YHWH-honoring one,

⁴ Zhodiatas The Word Study Bible

⁵ Vine's Bible Dictionary pages 230-231

rather than the "stubborn" bent that Saul had. Proverbs 17:15 and Exodus 23: 7 address the behavior of "justifying the wicked" as a "heinous crime," and Vine's conclusion bears note: "Sin is a path, a lifestyle or act deviating from that which God has marked out." ⁶

A stubborn person, in the Biblical sense, is one that raises up and speaks with deceitful motives to attempt to turn people to another direction, path. If leaders remain ignorant of this heart motive and complacent toward that stubbornness could they not also in a sense be justifying the wicked? Far be it from those who serve YHWH to want to fail in such a manner! The key question is that of discernment and the ability to rightly judge. Yet who can know the heart of another?

What then are shepherds/leaders to do as they walk out their responsibility for discernment and judgment for their people? Perhaps Solomon was paying attention to similar concerns in his father's life. (1 Kings 3: 4-15) When YHWH appeared to him in a dream after Solomon had become King, and gave Solomon permission to ask of Him whatever he wanted, Solomon's response included this request: " *Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?*" (Further exploration of the outcome of this prayer will be found in another article.) This understanding heart was given to him along with wisdom, great wealth and honor as YHWH was pleased with his request. May we follow his example!

As we stand in these last days coming nearer to the time of Messiah's return, I confirm once again that we will have to deal with many unpleasant and dangerous things: hostility, hard hearts, coldness, tares, wolves, wounded and immature people, false teachings and teachers; false shepherds. In all of the deception to come His true shepherds will need to stay close to Messiah in order to hear His voice, to not be enticed off the path and to be able to rightly discern and judge His people, however stubbornness appears. By the prophet Isaiah, He has spoken that He will raise up judges as at the first. (Isaiah 1: 26) I strongly suspect that shepherds and judges will need to have much in common in order to lead the sheople on the correct path. May we echo King Solomon's prayer as we will stand before Him for our teachings and actions.

⁶ Vines Bible Dictionary, page 232.

'Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?'

Abba, in Your mercy, please increase our knowledge of Your Word and Your Spirit within us that we will walk in all of Your wisdom and understanding to rightly judge Your people. May we not hesitate when we need to be bold nor rush in when we might cause further harm. Please show us the difference between immaturity or personal woundedness and the "stubbornness" Samuel spoke of as we need to see it today. Through your steadfast loving kindness and Messiah's work on our behalf, may we not walk a different path, tolerate stubbornness or fall into idolatry wherever it is found. We ask in the all powerful Name of our Messiah, Yeshua. May it be so.

Part 2: Shepherds Need to know the Biblical definition of an "understanding heart."

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Comments are always welcome at [info@set-apart-ministries.org](mailto:info@set-apart-ministries.org)  
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