

To Whom Should We Listen?

The story in I Kings 13 about the man of God who believed a lie and paid the ultimate price for his sin caused me more than a little concern. Every time I read this story I think if I had been in the man of God's position, I might have made the same decision. Most know the story.

The Lord sent the man of God from Judah at Bethel to speak against the priests who had burned incense on the altar of God. The man of God was instructed not to eat bread nor drink water with anyone and to return to Judah by a different route. An old prophet who lived in Bethel heard about the young prophet's preaching in Bethel and of the healing of the king's withered hand. The man of God is thought to be "younger," since the prophet living in Bethel was said to be "old." The old prophet sought out the young prophet's route back to Judah and caught up with him. The old prophet told the young prophet an angel of the Lord had told him to *bring him back with you to your house that he may eat bread and drink water*. The young prophet had earlier refused the king's offer to refresh himself and receive a reward, but he believed the lie told by the old prophet. The Lord told the young prophet, *Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord--your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers*.

The principle taught in this story is one of personal responsibility. Each of us is responsible for our decisions and choices. People generally understand this in everyday activities, but many rely on others to make their decisions regarding religion. How many times have you heard people say something like, "My preacher said _____" or "In our church they do _____." Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees because they did not know the Scriptures (Mark 12:24). Scripture clearly teaches that each of us will individually answer to God (Rom. 14:12; Matt. 7:22-23).

Another related principle taught by this story is there is a chain of command, so-to-speak, in Scripture. In the story in I Kings 13, the Lord gave the man of God instructions and those instructions could not be changed by anyone lower in the spiritual hierarchy. The apostles cannot change the teaching of Jesus and we must not change the teaching of the apostles. However, Jesus, the Son of God, reversed Moses' teaching on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in Matt. 19:1-9. We have the Bible, the message from God, and His apostles and prophets. There is not anyone alive today that can revise or supersede God's inspired word.

I am thankful for this story in I Kings 13. We all should be thankful for God's written word so we can know how we should conduct our lives. After all, we are responsible for our own souls.

-- For the elders (Don Denton)