

30 AMAZING BIBLE STORIES YOU MAY NOT KNOW #27 | A Bald Prophet and a Bear Attack | 2 Kings 2:23-24

THE SIMPLE STORY

- Elisha had just witnessed Elijah ride the chariot into heaven and had received the mantle of prophetic leadership.
- Almost immediately Elisha performed three of his sixteen total miracles.
 - He parted the Jordan river – 2 Kings 2:14
 - He healed the bitter waters of Jericho, using salt – 2 Kings 2:21-22.
 - He called out two bears to kill 42 children – 2 Kings 2:23-24.
- It is this third miracle which shall be our focus.
- The basics of the story:
 - He was on his way from Jericho to Bethel (about a 45-minute drive today).
 - On his way, he was mocked by children who said, **go up, thou bald head**.
 - Elisha cursed them, after which two bears came forth and **tare** 42 children.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

- The following comments come from the website “Dwindling in Unbelief,” an atheist website mocking the Bible. The blog article is about our passage.
(<https://dwindlinginunbelief.blogspot.com/2010/02/gods-88th-killing-god-sends-two-bears.html>)
- “someone [sic] please explain...to me this is evil...I personally would never wish ill will on anyone even if they made fun of me...this is just wrong...how can God do this? Just because you have the power doesn't mean you should use it. Also, there is a distinction between the developed mind of a child and an adult.”
- “So instead of making all the children's hair fall out for a month or so to teach them a lesson. He has the bear kill them and they learn nothing because they are DEAD. Your god fails again.”
- “This is absolutely insane and purely the work of MEN. Nothing worthy of a "god" would be so infantile. And it doesn't matter if these "children" were 2 or 29. Death just because you are mocked is thug behavior. Yahweh is a thug.”

- “We need these bears up in Congress right about now.”

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

- Bethel had long been a place that mocked God and His Word – see 2 Kings 12:26-30.
- The Hebrew word translated **children** is also used of Joseph in Genesis 41:12, where he is a **young man**. It is also used of David's army in 1 Samuel 21:4. It is used of Jeroboam 1 Kings 11:28, where he is also referred to as a **man of valor**. To understand this as a group of elementary boys is incorrect.
- The Hebrew word translated **little** is used in Genesis 1:17 to refer to the moon. It is used in comparison with **great** in Genesis 19:11.
- Together, the author takes the word to refer to young men who have no greatness to them.
- The insult **Go up, thou bald head** was doubtless making fun of Elisha's baldness, but the issue is likely more in the phrase **go up**.
 - Most say that it is a taunt to “get out of here like Elijah did.”
 - I suspect it is more of a reference to *go up to Jerusalem* and keep your “God stuff” there.
- Elisha was prematurely bald, for he was likely a man in his 20s at this point.
- The particular word translated **cursed** is “to make insignificant.” (See Strong's Hebrew #7043). This is likely a play on words with **little children**.
- The Hebrew word translated **tare** does not imply *killed*. It is first used in Genesis 7:11, translated **broken up**. The English word has a possible meaning of “to split into parties or factions” (OED, 3A). In Exodus 14:16 it is translated **divided**, referring to the Red Sea. See also 2 Kings 25:4, where a city was **broken up**, using this same Hebrew word. It is used of the Mount of Olives in Zechariah 14:4. Note that the NIV and NKJV says “mauled,” something which the Hebrew word *does not mean*.
- It is possible, even *likely*, that there was no bloodshed at all. Rather, that these *simpletons* who were the *useful idiots* of *pagan ideologs* were *scattered* by two momma bears.

A DISPENSATIONAL NOTE

- In dispensations past God often punished those who hindered His work.
- In our *dispensation of the grace of God* He is *patient* and uses only *natural punishments* for those who go against His work. The ultimate punishment awaits those who do not receive the gift of life.