

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
IRREVERENT CHILDREN CURSED
2 KINGS 2:23-25

Introduction

The Scripture before this evening is very early in the ministry of Elisha and here we find a controversy in Scripture that some folks have trouble dealing with.

Normally when folks have trouble dealing with something in Scripture, it comes from a lack of understanding of what is really happening. I think we find that to be the case of the Scripture we are dealing with tonight!

So far we have seen Elisha face different kinds of reactions from people:

1. **There were the DOUBTERS** (The sons of the prophets that wanted to go looking for Elijah's body after he was taken up in the whirlwind!)
2. **There were the DESPERATE** (The men of Jericho looking to Elisha to help them with their bad water!)

Tonight we see Elisha meeting **the DESPISERS**. (A group of what the Bible calls "*little children*" who came out of Beth-el and mocked the man of God.)

I. WE SEE THAT THIS INCIDENT HAPPENED ON ELISHA'S TRIP BACK TO BETH-EL.

(Vs. 23a "And he went up from thence unto Bethel...")

After his miracle that healed the waters of Jericho, Elisha headed back to Beth-el, the first place where he had traveled with Elijah as they began Elijah's last journey before his translation.

Remember how we saw that they were in Gilgal when they began. Then they first went to Beth-el, and then to Jericho, and then across the Jordan River where Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

We said that Gilgal, Beth-el, and Jericho all had schools (i.e. seminaries) where prophets were trained. Elijah took this "farewell trip" with Elisha before being taken up into heaven. In Beth-el and Jericho the sons of the prophets came out to Elisha with news that Elisha already knew—That the LORD was going to take Elijah away that day.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
IRREVERENT CHILDREN CURSED
2 KINGS 2:23-25

From there, Elisha had returned alone to Jericho to wait for the **DOUBTERS**, the 50 sons of the prophets that were out looking for Elijah. He was there 3 days while the young prophets searched in vain for Elijah. Then we saw last time how **the LORD used Elisha to heal the waters of Jericho for this city that was desperate for clean water!**

Now he is returning to *Beth-el* without Elijah. Remember *Beth-el* means "*House of God.*"

Understand also that *Beth-el* was the seat of the calf-idol worship which began at the time of Jeroboam, King of Israel. **It was also a place where a group of the sons of the prophets still resided, probably as a witness against the idolatry of Israel.**

(Vs 23– "...and as he was going up by the way...)

Understand that it is a steep ascent from the plains of Jericho to the city of Beth-el which is at an altitude of about 2800 feet.

His walk would have been along the main way that folks commonly traveled between these two cities. It was not specifically a road as we think of a road in the modern sense, but it would have been a well traveled way nonetheless.

II. WE SEE THE INCIDENT THAT SPARKED THE CURSE.

(Vs 23c "...there came forth some little children out of the city, and mocked him...")

The words "*little children*" to us might bring the idea of innocent little tykes who were just being silly and didn't know any better and were not deserving of the severity of what happens here.

However, Solomon uses the exact Hebrew term, *naar qatan*, about himself when he was crowned king of Israel in **1 Kings 3:7**.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
IRREVERENT CHILDREN CURSED
2 KINGS 2:23-25

*1 Kings 3:7–“And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a **little child**: I know not how to go out or come in.”*

Though Solomon’s age was unknown at the time, **he was old enough to know that he was young enough not to know enough of how to lead a nation**. Other people of adult age are described with this same term elsewhere in the Bible. (*e.g. Those who King Rehoboam took counsel from instead of the old men.*)

So, in this account then we have some young people (**more than 42 of them vs. 24**) of an indeterminate age, but who were old enough to know right from wrong. They are also old enough to be outside the city on their own away from their parents.

These youths came from the city of Beth-el and they mocked Elisha as he proceeded onward to the city. The sheer number of these youths might have been one thing that caused them to have such boldness against this man of God. Don’t you think?

The word for **“mock”** here is a rare one in the Bible. This is the first use of just four times that it is used. It comes from a primitive root meaning **“to disparage.”** So it means to **“mock, scoff, or scorn.”**

III. WE SEE THE NATURE OF THEIR MOCKING.

*(Vs 23c “...and mocked him, and said unto him, **Go up thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.**”)*

Now, understand that there is much to consider here.

First, was Elisha actually bald? What appears to be the case is that he was, in fact, bald. And as he would live for another 50 or so years, he was bald long before the normal time. **“Premature baldness”**

However, the term **“bald head” or “baldy”** was a term of contempt, sometimes even being applied to someone with a full head of hair. It would be the equivalent of calling someone an **“empty head”** today.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
IRREVERENT CHILDREN CURSED
2 KINGS 2:23-25

The term **“go up”** seems kind of strange. The insult is in the word translated **“bald head,”** but the word used for **“go up,”** is given for a purpose.

He is on his **way up** to Bethel, and so on the surface it may seem this is why they include **“go up.”** But it doesn’t explain anything about the derision. One would think they would just yell **“baldy, baldy”** at him and that would be sufficient.

However, it was already known in Bethel that Elijah was to be taken up to heaven. This was seen at the beginning of the chapter – *2 Kings 2:3–“And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.*

Because of this, these children seem to be mocking Elisha who was left behind while his master Elijah had been taken away. In fact their insults are directed toward Elisha as well as the LORD Whom he represents! After all, the LORD is the One Who had established Elisha in Elijah’s place.

Think of their chant, **“Go up thou bald head...”** as an organized attempt by children of idolaters in the city to discredit Elisha and wish that he was gone along with Elijah! No doubt they were glad to be rid of Elijah, the one who had destroyed the many prophets of Baal in times past.

IV. WE SEE ELISHA CURSE THESE CHILDREN IN THE NAME OF THE LORD. *(Vs 24a “And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD.”)*

The word for **“turned”** means that he **“faced”** them. **It was a turning of his face with purpose!**

These young people were behind him at this point, possibly even following him as they were deriding him as he walked toward Beth-el.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
IRREVERENT CHILDREN CURSED
2 KINGS 2:23-25

It is as if they were deriding him because Elijah was now gone and they were trying to intimidate him from his purpose ! Remember, Elijah was not popular with the idol worshipers!

Now Elisha could have just kept walking and muttered something under his breath at them. However, **he decisively turned and looked at them and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD!**

Understand that Elisha didn't curse at them, but rather **pronounced a curse on them!** There is a difference!

The word "**curse**" can have several meanings. One is **to inflict a curse**. This would be what the LORD did when He **curled the ground at the fall of man**. Another is **to wish for a curse upon another**. The third is **to pronounce a curse in this name of the LORD, which is what Elisha did!**

He was foretelling a punishment which the Lord had determined to inflict. This came from the LORD, not from Elisha. Elisha is just the messenger boy! Elijah foretold a specific curse from LORD which would be inflicted by the LORD. The curse made the catastrophe that came in the latter part of this verse certain!

V. WE SEE THE WORD OF THE LORD (THE CURSE) FULFILLED! (Vs 24b) "And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them."

The word translated "**children**" here is not the same as the previous word. The word here indicates something born, not specifically a certain age. Each of us are "**children**" in this same sense. In other words, this punishment was not merely inflicted upon the youths, but on the parents of these children as well.

BOOK OF 2 KINGS
IRREVERENT CHILDREN CURSED
2 KINGS 2:23-25

They had raised their children in a manner contrary to the way of the LORD and so the punishment came indirectly upon them for their irreverent attitude towards Him which was directly visited upon their children.

The curse of the LORD is the principle cause of the carnage here. The bears were just the instruments the LORD used.

VI. WE SEE ELISHA GO TO MOUNT CARMEL AND THEN TO SAMARIA. (Vs 25) "And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria."

Mount Carmel is the place where Elijah had defeated the 450 prophets of Baal. That is the only time that Carmel was ever mentioned in connection with Elijah's ministry. It is to the place of that high point in the prophet's career that Elisha next journeyed to. *Carmel* means "**Fruitful field.**"

It is with these seemingly anti-climatic words that both the passage and the chapter end. Elisha returned to Samaria where he would take up the duties of Israel's main prophet in place of Elijah.

There Elisha possessed his own home (*2 Kings 6:32*). The name *Samaria* means, "**Watch Mountain**" or "**Place of Watching.**"

Conclusion

So, what is the bottom line here?

God took seriously the mocking of His Prophet Elisha! Why? We are not told but it could have had something to do with the fact that it was an establishing of Elisha's authority early on in His ministry!

The LORD was with Elisha as well as He was with Elijah! The idolatrous people of Israel probably rejoiced at Elijah being gone! The LORD cut that rejoicing short!