

## The She Bears



During my speaking engagements, I am often asked about certain Bible passages which are difficult to understand. One of these is found in II Kings 2:23 and 24:

And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head: go up, thou bald head.

And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

I suppose Christians for centuries have shuddered at this apparent massacre, and wondered at Elisha cursing in the name of the Lord, and generally puzzled over these two difficult verses.

It seems to me these are two of the most mixed-up verses in the Bible, and I will try to tell now how I feel they should be understood.

First, the little children coming out of the city, should not be understood as literal children, but as natives of the area. Many places in the Bible, people are spoken of as children, such as the "children of Israel," "son of David," and so forth. Usually we get the meaning without any trouble that the word "descendent" is meant, but here we have forgotten that particular meaning for the word children, and thus we are confused.

Next we have the people mocking Elisha, and saying, "Go up, thou bald head:" They are saying "go up" because the men of God often went up into a mountain to pray, and these people are mocking Elisha for worshipping God. "Thou bald head" is an insult

comparable to our saying "empty-headed fool." In the East, it is a common saying, that if anyone is thought to have nothing in his head, he is called a bald head.

Now it says that Elisha cursed these people in the name of the Lord. I cannot believe that this is correct, for God's people are not to curse at all, nor even swear by heaven or earth, or any similar thing. It seems to me that Elisha must have rebuked them in the name of the Lord, which would be more becoming to a man of God, and is more in keeping with the rest of the passage.

" And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." This is an example of the Lord sending a sign to confirm the words of Elisha in rebuking the people. God's people have their words "confirmed with signs following" (Mark 16:20). However, these two she-bears did not kill forty-two people, because she-bears do not attack and eat people anyway. The word "tare" here is a hold-over from the old English, which would be expressed today, "tear after," or chase. In other words, God confirmed Elisha's rebuke of the people by sending these she-bears to chase the people away who had been mocking a prophet of God.

Thus we see that as Elisha came to Bethel he was mocked by natives of the city who said, "Go up to pray, you empty headed fool!" And Elisha rebuked them in the name of the Lord, and the Lord sent two she-bears out of the wood, to chase after the forty-two people.

The teaching of children today is the responsibility of adult teachers, whether they be the parents or other qualified instructors. Respect for a man of God is of prime importance in the teaching of little children. If they do not learn respect at a tender age, how can they have respect when they are older.

Have we as adults really learned and understood God's Word so that we can respect Him? Do we recognize and realize His love toward us that we are fully able to respect Him? We have heard many times that we can see the evidence of God in all creation, but do we recognize and respect the spirit of God in others?

Only as we learn to know these things for ourselves, are we able to teach others in this generation so that this Word of Life may become respected now and in generations to come.

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