

**"Keeping the Bears Away"**

**2 Kings 2:23-25**

**Introduction:** Tonight, in our study of Elisha we have come to another one of his miracles and this is a miracle that many have struggled with as they have read this text.

**The Miracle of Two Avenging Bears.**

**Notice 2 Kings 2:23-25**

There are many people who have problems when they read this text because of what happens within the text. Elisha curses the small children and then God brings 2 bears from the woods and those 2 bears will kill 42 children. Critics have attempted to use this to cast doubt upon God's love and His goodness. The questions by the critics have caused many Bible teachers to scramble in an attempt to come up with some sort of explanation. Some have taught that these were not little children but instead they were young men and so that seems to somehow have softened the severity of the account.

You may have a study Bible that even tells you they were young men and not children. Some people hold on to the meaning of the word "children" in 2:23 and they say it can be translated "young men" and that is true it can be, and it is translated that very way. But there is another word in the verse which I believe makes it very clear that these were not "young men" but they were small children.

**2 Kings 2:23**

<sup>23</sup> *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.*

The word "children" can be translated "young men" but the word "little" means just that, "little". These were a group of small children just as the Bible states.

Let me just say that we do not ever need to apologize for anything which is written in the Word of God. God has moved men to write all that is in this Bible for our learning.

Let us now take some time and look closely at the account recorded here and as we do we shall gather some really valuable lessons for our own personal lives.

I. **The Timing of the Miracle**

Now I want to start today by reading the account before because there is something here which we need to see.

**Notice 2 Kings 2:19-23a**

Elisha had healed the bitter waters of Jericho and then he set his eyes upon the city of Bethel. It would be on his journey to Bethel that the group of children would come out and verbally attack him. The first word in verse 23 is very important and we need to pay close attention to it. It is the word "and". This is a connective which tells us the events in :23-25 are connected to what happened at Jericho.

At Bethel Elisha will be verbally attack and that attack happens right after the healing of the waters in Jericho. The healing of the waters is a picture of salvation and Elisha was used by God to bring about that miracle.

**Application:**

Here is what I want you to get from this. When we place ourselves in the hand of God to be used by Him to reach other people with the Truth of the Gospel then you better believe that the attacks will come.

The attacks by the enemy are signs that we are a threat to him and we are being used to further the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The attacks that we face as we serve the Lord should not be a surprise to us. Let me show you what happened to our Lord.

**Matthew 3:16-4:1**

*<sup>16</sup> And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:*

*<sup>17</sup> And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

*<sup>1</sup> Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

Jesus was confronted by Satan after His baptism and God's announcement from heaven. We too can expect to be confronted by the enemy when we are walking in the will of God.

**1 Peter 4:12**

<sup>12</sup> *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:*

Keep in mind the attacks are attempts by Satan to discourage us and to get us to quit.

## II. **The Incident**

### **Notice 2 Kings 2:23-25**

As Elisha was leaving Jericho on his way to Bethel it was then that he was confronted by these children who mocked him. I need to explain what it was they meant when they told him to "go up".

### **Notice 2 Kings 2:1-11**

Here was the departure of Elijah as he was taken up in a whirlwind into heaven.

Now let us get back to our text. When these little children say, "Go up" they are encouraging Elisha to do the same as Elijah did.

But there is much more that we need to see.

### **Notice 2 Kings 2:23**

Elisha is going into Bethel when this happened, so we know that these children are from the city of Bethel.

Now the name "Bethel" means "house of God".

### **Genesis 28:16-19**

<sup>16</sup> *And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.*

<sup>17</sup> *And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*

<sup>18</sup> *And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.*

<sup>19</sup> *And he called the name of that place Bethel:*

So, Bethel came to be known as the "house of God". But in Elisha's day something had changed. Let me back you up to the time when King Jeroboam reigned in the northern kingdom.

The kingdom has just divided, and Jeroboam is the king of Israel and Rehoboam is the king of Judah. Jeroboam is afraid the people will leave his kingdom and go to the kingdom of Rehoboam to worship at Jerusalem. So, let us see what he does.

**Notice 1 Kings 12:25-30**

*<sup>25</sup> Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel.*

*<sup>26</sup> And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:*

*<sup>27</sup> If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.*

*<sup>28</sup> Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*

*<sup>29</sup> And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.*

*<sup>30</sup> And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.*

He sets up 2 golden calves and tells them these are the gods which brought them out of Egypt He placed in the position of the priest's office people who did not qualify to be priests. The bottom line was that he corrupted the entire worship system and the people accepted the corruption.

**Notice 1 Kings 13:33-34**

*<sup>33</sup> After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places.*

*<sup>34</sup> And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.*

The place which used to be known as the "house of God" has now turned into the habitation of devils. It became so wicked within the northern kingdom that the people did not want to hear the Word of God. You see God sent prophets to call them back to Him, but they

despised the prophets and so here was a kingdom of people who were suppressing the Truth of God and just wanted to live in their sin.

Now let us get back to 2 Kings again.

When these little children told Elisha to "go up" they were really saying, "We don't want you in our city. We don't want a prophet of God coming into our city and proclaiming the Truth. Get out and stay out!"

Now we must understand these are children, so they are repeating what they have heard from their parents. The children here are just manifesting the attitude of the entire city toward God. When they mock the man of God it is the same as mocking God.

### **Notice 2 Kings 2:24**

Elisha turned and looked on them. This curse he pronounced was not something which he did out of anger, but it was something which he thought through.

### **III. The Purpose of the Incident**

Why did God do this? What was the purpose of the loss of 42 children?

This was a judgment upon the parents not on the children. Notice the words of Thomas Scott;

*"They had heard that Elijah was "gone up to heaven" and they insultingly bade Elisha follow him, that they might be rid of him also, and they reviled him for the baldness of his head. Thus they united the crimes of abusing him for a supposed bodily infirmity, and enmity against him as the prophet of God. The sin therefore of these children was very heinous: yet the greater guilt was chargeable on their parents, and their fate was a severe rebuke and awful warning to them."*

The people of Bethel had continued to drift further and further from God and God sent prophets to call them back to Him. He even did great miracles before their eyes.

Remember Elijah on Mt. Carmel?

### **1 Kings 18:21**

*<sup>21</sup> And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.*

They desired to worship Baal and God.

**1 Kings 18:30-39**

*<sup>30</sup> And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down.*

*<sup>31</sup> And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name:*

*<sup>32</sup> And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed.*

*<sup>33</sup> And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood.*

*<sup>34</sup> And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time.*

*<sup>35</sup> And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.*

*<sup>36</sup> And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.*

*<sup>37</sup> Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.*

*<sup>38</sup> Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.*

*<sup>39</sup> And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.*

Eventually the people forgot about this and they went back to their false worship. The people at Bethel had many opportunities to turn back to God but they continued on the path which led them away from God. The situation with the little children was God's judgment upon the adults within the city of Bethel.

**Application:**

Where are you in your devotion to God?

Are you like the people at Bethel and you do not desire to hear from God?

Do you long to worship God or are there other things in your life which keep you from being faithful to Him?

Let me remind you that if you are saved God desires all of your devotion. If you have allowed something else to take His place in your life then you are walking on dangerous ground. He will patiently work with you to bring you back but if you ignore Him and suppress His Truth then He will go to the next step to get your attention.

Remember when David sinned with Bathsheba? Do you remember the cost of that sin? The child which was conceived through the affair was struck by the Lord and he died.

**Conclusion:**

When you turn from God it not only has an impact upon your life, but it can bring devastation upon people around you.