

PLAIN SPEECH

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“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12)

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FOUR LESSONS FROM ELISHA & TWO SHE BEARS

2 Kg. 2:23-24 reads as follows: “*And he [Elisha – vs. 19] went up from thence [Jericho – vs. 18] 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.*”

This interesting account, tucked away in the pages of the Old Testament, has several lessons within it that the student of God’s Word can glean. This article will underscore four of those lessons:

Lesson #1 – When somebody mistreats God’s people, he/she incurs the disfavor of God. Elisha was a prophet of God (**1 Kg. 19:16**). What was a prophet? Prophets were individuals whom God chose to use as mouthpieces so as to communicate His divine will to mankind (**Jdg. 6:7-10; Neh. 9:30; Jer. 25:1-7**). The little children in the account noted above (**2 Kg. 2:23-24**) mocked (chided; made fun of) God’s spokesman, Elisha. These mockers were not merely joking around with Elisha in a good-natured way. On the contrary, their words were meant to hurt (**Mt. 27:39-41**). If not, why were they punished?

What was it the mockers were getting at with their words? It seems they were saying Elisha was a fit subject for God’s wrath. During the Old Testament times, God sometimes used the imagery of baldness in connection with rebellious folks. Note: “*Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty. Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground*” (**Isa. 3:16-26; cf. Isa. 22:8-14; Eze. 7:1-18**).

Such behavior towards God’s men is common amongst the ungodly (**2 Ch. 36:11-17; Mt. 27:27-29; Heb. 11:36**). However, God does not approve – as forty-two people learned the hard way in Elisha’s day! To be disrespectful to God’s messengers is the equivalent of being disrespectful to God Himself (**Ax. 8:1-3; 9:4**). Those today who belittle faithful preachers – those who tell people what they need to hear rather than the smooth words they want to hear (**Isa. 30:9-10; 2 Tim. 4:1-5**) – ought to stop. All they are doing is hurting themselves (**Mt. 12:35-37; 23:37-38; Rom. 2:5**).

Lesson #2 – Those who prefer darkness to light would be happy if all of God’s men would just go away. The mockers said to Elisha, “*Go up... Go up.*” What did they mean? When one considers the extended context of the passage, the answer seems clear. The miscreants wanted Elisha to go away! Not long before this account, the prophet Elijah had been carried up and away from the earth (**2 Kg. 2:9-11**). Thus, when the young men exclaimed “*Go up...Go up,*” they were almost certainly expressing their wish that Elisha, too, would hit the road. What was true in Elisha’s day is still true today (**Jn. 3:19-20; Ax. 21:30-36**).

Lesson #3 – God has used animals to accomplish His will. Elisha placed a curse on the mockers in the name of the Lord and the next thing you know, two she bears emerge on the scene. Coincidence? I doubt it. It seems clear that the hand of God was in play. This is not the only time God used animals to teach lessons. God sent fiery serpents upon the Israelites (**Num. 21:6**), He used a lion to deal with a disobedient prophet (**1 Kg. 13:26**), and He prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah (**Jon. 1:17**).

Lesson #4 – The text does not show God slaying innocent kiddos as some claim. The word “little” in **2 Kg. 2:23** is the Hebrew word “**qatan**” (#6994). This word is used three ways in scripture: (1) to denote unworthiness (**Gen. 32:10**), (2) to denote something as less grand than something else (**2 Sam. 7:18-19**), and (3) to convey misrepresentation in business (**Am. 8:5**). Which idea best fits here? Unworthiness. The individuals who mocked Elisha were unworthy; i.e. they were “little” people. Next, the word translated as “children” in **2 Kg. 2:23** is the Hebrew word “**naar**” (#5286). This word clearly can mean a person who is not a little child as we think of such today. For instance, this word is used to describe Jacob’s son Joseph... when he was 30 years old (**Gen. 41:12, 46**)! The word is there translated as “*young man.*” Elisha was not met by innocent children.