

The deadly BEARS incident

in 2 Kings 2:23-24 **was** / is ...

“Then he [Elisha] went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, “**Go up** [like Elijah did], **you baldhead! Go up** [if YOU can], **you baldhead** [YOU weak old man]!” So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.” (2 Kings 2:23-24)

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a warning

to disbelievers (then & now)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

about the lack of

faith and godly fear

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

an avoidable

tragic loss of life

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

because of

mocking the Lord

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

both

miraculous & natural

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

difficult to reconcile

with Matthew 5:44

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

harsh but

just & thought-provoking

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Descriptive



Meditation

*more about disbelieving youths
than about angry mother bears*

* * *

like contemporary

mockery of the rapture

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

near the beginning

of Elisha's ministry

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

not about

young children

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

not nearly as

long as other Elisha stories

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

often wrongly

criticized by unbelievers

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

somewhat like the

deaths in Acts 5:1-11

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

similar to the

deadly incident in 2 Kgs. 7:17

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

the flip side of

healing the water in 2:19-22

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

to help show

that Elisha was God's prophet

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Directions: after reading through 2 Kings 2:19-25, consider and discuss the various ways the incident with the two female bears is described above. **Do you agree with the points made or would you change them in some ways? If so, how?** — **At the end of the study, focus on the most important descriptive phrases and make personal applications. Is it proper for believers today to curse those who oppose the gospel? If not, what should they do instead?** (See 2 Timothy 4:14-15 as well as Matthew 5:44.) — © 2022 by Jon F. Mahar, Hakusan City, Japan and Alexander, Maine, U.S.A.

What happened and why?

Two female bears severely injured and / or killed 42 youth because they mocked the Lord and his servant. This demonstrated that Elisha truly was Elijah's successor, and the incident was the negative flip side of the positive healing of the waters in the previous verses (2 Kings. 2:19-22). Yet, the shortness of this shocking passage probably indicates that it is NOT the primary way the Lord wants us to remember Elisha. The accounts of various positive miracles, such as the healing of Naaman, are longer.

What was this incident like?

Several worksheet phrases link the two bears incident with others that are somewhat similar, including the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. In both cases God was establishing his authority, first within Israel via Elisha and later within the early church via the apostles. So both shocking passages come early in their respective books.

How could two female bears have been in the same area since bears are solitary?

The loud shouting of the young men probably attracted the attention of two sows each of whom had cubs to protect. Though male bears tend to travel widely, females often have somewhat overlapping ranges in the same general area. Undoubtedly these two bears knew each other, and perhaps one of them was even the mother of the other. Undoubtedly, their protective instinct was involved in what happened, though their unusual attack upon many people at once while not harming Elisha must have been directed by the Lord in a special way.

What did the youths actually say?

They showed their disbelief by challenging Elisha to go up to heaven as Elijah had (2 Kings 1:11). Contrary to the impression given in some translations, they were not calling for Elisha to come up to them, and the irreverence in their words was not limited to the reference to Elisha's baldness. They were much like those today who scoff at biblical teaching about the rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-51). So this passage is a stern warning to disbelievers then and now. — Many of the studies on special animals in the Bible show that sin and unbelief must be taken seriously!

How old were the 42 youth?

Of course, it does not say, but they were all obviously old enough to: 1.) be active in a large, vocal, gang-like group outside of their homes and 2.) to have heard about and rejected Elijah's miraculous departure. Some would have been older than others, but they were not small children!

What are the applications for believers today?

Obviously, we should treat God's leaders and their teaching with respect. Moreover, in light of Matthew 5:44, we should not curse those who oppose us. However, the Lord's gracious teaching in the Sermon on the Mount does not show that those who oppose the gospel will be blessed by God (2 Timothy 4:14-15). Judgment will still come in God's time.