

Introduction

- Some children call Elisha bald, so he calls down bears to kill 42 of them.
- Even theologically conservative scholars are embarrassed by this story.
- Secular scholars point to it as an example of God's cruelty.
- Does God take respecting your elders or clergy this seriously?

Possible Explanations

- Some argue that "small boys" is a mistranslation and it should be young men.
- Some argue the boys are just severely injured, not killed.
- "Tore" can be translated as "split, breached, torn open, or broken."
- Some argue this is a mob that was going to kill Elisha.

Assumptions

- These are assumptions we should bring into every text, especially hard ones.
- This story is true and worthy of God.
- This story is placed in this particular place with these details for a specific reason.
- This story points to Christ.
- Studying this text is good for my sanctification.

2 Kings 1

- The bear portion of the story is 2 Kings 2:23-25.
- However, this story fits into a wider context of Elisha succeeding Elijah.
- In 1 Kings 1, Elijah is ignored and disrespected by King Ahaziah.
- Ahaziah asks other gods instead of YWH, then tries to arrest Elijah.
- His men are burned by fire until they finally respect Elijah.

2 Kings 2:1-14

- Elijah is taken up to heaven.
- Several sons of the prophets aren't sure if Elisha has heard what will happen.
- Elisha asks to be made a prophet like Elijah, but has to wait for it to be confirmed.
- Elisha is confirmed by seeing the chariots of fire.
- Elisha is confirmed by parting the water miraculously like Elijah.
- This section is focused on Elisha being recognized as the new Elijah.

2 Kings 2:15-18

- The sons of prophets say that Elisha has the spirit of Elijah.
- They want to look for Elijah, because they do not believe he is gone.
- They do not listen to Elisha and demand to search for him anyway.
- They come back after three days and have to admit Elisha was right.
- There are some who have not yet accepted Elisha's prophetic status.

2 Kings 2:19-22

- Men of the city ask Elisha for help because the water in the city is bad.
- Elisha miraculously heals the water and land with salt.
- The salt in the water makes it clear only God is doing this.
- He declares, "thus says the LORD."
- His miracle lasts far into the future after he is gone.
- This miracle is further evidence that he is the prophet sent to replace Elijah.

2 Kings 2:23-25

- Elisha leaves from performing these miracles and goes to Bethel.
- Bethel is near where these miracles have taken place and is a religious center.
- They should know that Elisha is a prophet.
- They are either mocking his physical baldness or the physical sign of his office.
- It is possible that prophets shaved part of their heads bald (think medieval monks).
- Priests were forbidden this practice, but prophets were not.
- They also could be mocking Elisha and telling him to "go up" like Elijah.
- Either way, they are clearly rejecting his authority and office as a prophet.
- Elisha pronounces a curse from God, which God fulfills by sending out bears.
- It is not Elisha who brings out the bears, but God.

Conclusion

- All of chapter 2 is focused on Elisha being recognized as the prophet.
- This is not a random insult of bald men nor an example of the Bible wanting us to respect our elders.
- The story is focused on Elisha getting the respect he deserves.
- Christ is similarly disrespected in his ministry and on the cross.
- Christ responds with forgiveness, but his judgment and curse is coming.