

Judgment on an insult: II Kings 2:23-25

“Was it overkill for simply calling someone bald?”

1. **We must never assume that God over reacts** to anything or that any of His judgments are not fair. His understanding of justice is always correct.
2. **We must never assume that we need to or can defend God.** God not only does not need defending, it would never fall to any of us to play that role anyway. God does not have to account for His action. As far as judging sin and sinners is concerned there is no greater defense for Him than what He displayed when He allowed His Son to die for our sins. God cannot be defended by us because He does not need it.

To fully understand what happened here we need a brief overview of what preceded this. Elijah had been the prophet in Israel for many years. Under the direction of God his replacement name Elisha was chosen. In II Kings 2 we read that the time had come for Elijah to go to heaven. Elisha and Elijah came to the Jordan River where Elijah used his cloak to part the river so he could cross over on dry ground. Elisha went with him. Elijah is taken to heaven in a whirlwind and Elisha returned across the Jordan, using the cloak as Elijah did to part the water. This was the first of 17 or 18 miracles attributed to Elisha. Shortly after that Elisha performed his second miracle when he cured the cursed water in Jericho, a curse that had probably been on the water for hundreds of years, dating back to the fall of that city to Joshua. (See Exodus 6) Apparently one of the things God put in place to prevent rebuilding the city was water that was ugly to drink and considered evil. Early Jewish commentaries said it caused animals to give still births to their young and plants to die. God now reverses that.

God has put together in His Word the account of the life of Elisha so that it clearly pictures all that God does for us, in us and to us when there is sin to be judged. This passage speaks of that judgment and while we would like to ignore it because we do not like to think about judgment, it is a passage that teaches about God and the seriousness of sin.

The story is very simple. Elisha was on his way to Bethel and as he was walking along a group of young people came out and made fun of him. Elisha called for a curse on those young people who were then mauled by two bears.

Note **when this happens**. It is immediately after two miracles, first the splitting of the Jordan and then the curing of the cursed spring. After God's servant had done a great miracle, the world laughed. In other words opposition came to him. By testimony of Jesus Himself, we understand that persecution is a part of following Him. Jesus said that as they persecuted Him, so they would persecute and laugh at us. The most common time of opposition from Satan is following a time of growth, blessing or commitment.

Note **where Elisha was heading**. He was going to Bethel. Bethel means “House of God” but that was not what it was at that time. When the nation divided in half following the reign of

Solomon, Jeroboam, who was king of the northern kingdom, was afraid that if the people went to Jerusalem to worship they would not return north so he set up his own sites of worship, one in Dan and one in Bethel. He then fashioned gods in the form of golden calves to be worshipped. It was an abomination to God. Bethel had become a place of evil brought on by the replacing of the true God with false gods, including Baal. (See Hosea 10:5, where “Bethel” meaning “House of God” is described as “Beth-aven” meaning “House of iniquity.”) There was no way Elisha could expect a hardy welcome from that city since he represented the covenant God who was rejected by many who lived there. This is important. If we view what took place here as merely a silly prank of a few boys, then the judgment does seem severe but if we see the actions of the boys as the outgrowth of a place gone evil and of parents who were in rebellion against God and God’s servant, then the picture begins to change.

Those boys were making fun of a servant of God. Psalm 105:15 says “touch not my anointed and do my prophets no harm.” A case can be made for not making fun of those whom God has chosen. (Deuteronomy 7:10 and 18:17-19 tell us that to mock a servant of God is to mock God.)

Note **the taunt** “Go on up, you baldhead.” We focus too easily on the boys calling him bald but the real issue here is the taunt to **“Go on UP.”** Undoubtedly word of the miraculous translation of Elijah had reached Bethel and now the boys, probably at the prompting of their parents, were telling Elisha not to come there but to go to heaven the same way Elijah had. They were saying “Elisha, imitate Elijah and take yourself to heaven and leave us alone.” Of course in telling God’s servant to go away they were also telling God to leave. It is never wise to tell God to leave.

There may also have been implications to calling him bald, although we cannot say that for certain. In ancient times baldness had a variety of meanings. It sometimes referred to one who was considered inferior. If that were the case it is possible that they were implying that God’s servant was less of a prophet than their false prophets. A common lie of Satan who wants the world to think that Christians are less educated, less realistic, less informed than those in the world.

In the end **the insult is against God** who had just taken His servant Elijah home. It is never a good thing to insult God. (We insult God when we call Him a liar and say He will not send someone to hell. We insult God when we reject His Son. We insult God when we fail to trust Him to do the things He has promised. We insult God when we take His name in vain.)

Note the **reaction of Elisha**. This was not a case of anger and vengeance on his part. In fact, the whole thing was a picture of calmness. Elisha simply turned back and looked on them and then he cursed then in the name of the Lord. Had Elisha just been upset himself there is no way God would have done that. Elisha saw this as an insult to God and God saw it the same way.

“Is this really a severe judgment?” It is severe and maybe that is exactly what God wants to show us. His judgment is always severe. Too many take sin too lightly. Too many want to deny

the effects of sin. Too often we ask if a loving God will really send people to hell forever. He will because that is the seriousness of sin but we must balance that severity with His loving provision for our sin at His own expense on the Cross. Never minimize the power of God's judgment on sin. No one can escape. There are 42 young people and only 2 bears but look who loses. Too often individuals think they can beat the odds on sin but they cannot. God is not mocked.

Note that Elisha then went to Carmel. Remember it was on Mt. Carmel not many years previously that God proved who was Lord and who was false, what was true and what was not. On Mt. Carmel sin was judged. That, however, was not the whole story. There the curse on the land was removed and the people were blessed as the rains began to fall. Elisha did not glory in the judgment but rather recognized the awesomeness of God and returned to the place where God had not only demonstrated His authority and power but where He had demonstrated His awesome love and grace. The judgments of God can be severe but the grace of God can be beautiful and it is His grace that Elisha wanted to remember.

This event is recorded to remind us of the seriousness of sin. Sin is not a trifle thing to be played with. It is not simply a poor choice, a part of growing up, or an indiscretion. It is rebellion against the Holy God of creation. But the action of Elisha following it reminds us that God is also a loving and gracious God. Sin is serious and not cared for leads to eternal death but God's love is greater for all who will receive it.