

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Forty-Seventh Week - Saturday

### THE MOCKERS

*"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, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!' So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of Yahweh. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths" (2 Kings 2:23,24).*

In Bethel was one of Jeroboam's golden calves, and so we cannot doubt but that the inhabitants were very corrupt in their religious ideas and services; and the reception Elisha received confirms the impression. He was assailed by a rabble of young blackguards with cries of "Go up, you bald-head! Go up, you bald-head!" And how did the prophet meet this rude assault from what the reader takes to have been a gang of unmannerly boys? He turns and *curses* them--nothing less--curses them in the Name of the LORD. And forthwith two female bears came out, perhaps robbed of their whelps, and killed forty-two of them.

We dare say there are many young readers, and indeed old ones too, who think the prophet was terribly severe, feeling that though the "children" (KJV) deserved a good whipping or something of that sort for their impudence, it was going rather too far to punish them with death. But, let us note, Elisha did no such thing. He "cursed them," and that not from personal resentment but under a divine impulse. He cursed, and that was all. He did not *punish*. He left that to the Lord to determine and inflict; and the Lord judged the crime worthy of death.

Now, in the first place, we are not to take these "children" as mere thoughtless boys, scarcely knowing what they were about. They were young men acting from a strong animus against the prophet for his works' sake, and with a full intention to insult and discourage him at the beginning of his career. The Hebrew word here employed to describe them (*naarim*, singular *naar*), no doubt does denote even an infant and a mere child. But it also frequently denotes grown-up lads, youths, and young men; it is often used irrespective of age in application to servants and soldiers. We need only point out several passages to show this.

The term is applied to Ishmael when he was about fourteen years old (Gen. 21:16); to Isaac when he was grown up to a young man (Gen. 22:12); to Hamor of Shechem when of marriageable age, probably not less than twenty (Gen. 34:20); to Joseph when he was

seventeen (Gen. 37:2); to Gideon's son Jether, when old enough to be ordered to slay two kings (Judg. 8:20); to Solomon after he had become king (1 Kings 3:7); to the four-hundred Amalekites who escaped on camels (1 Sam. 30:17); to Elisha's servant Gehazi (2 Kings 4:12); to the son of the prophets who anointed Jehu (2 Kings 9:4); to the 232 attendants of the princes of the provinces who went out against Benhadad (1 Kings 20:15); to the soldiers of the Assyrian king (2 Kings 19:6); and in other places too numerous to cite. In all these cases, though differently translated according to the apparent meaning of the sacred writer--by child, lad, young man, servant--the word is but one in the original, and is the same which is here employed to express "children."

But it will be said that those designated here are not only children but "little children." Even so, in one of the instances just cited, Solomon calls himself "a *little* child" when certainly a young man. And we wish to call attention to the fact that although those who came out against the prophet are called "little children," the "little" is dropped where the forty-two who are killed are mentioned. Even the word for "children" is then changed to another (*jeladim*, singular *jelad*); and although that word is of nearly synonymous use and application with the other, the change together with the dropping of the word "little" is probably intended to note a distinction--for wherever there is a mob of idle young men there is sure to be a number of mischievous urchins who shout and bawl without knowing much about the matter.

There were no doubt little children among this rabble of young Bethelites, and there is every reason to suppose that the forty-two *of them* who were destroyed were the oldest ones, the ringleaders of the group, the ones who very well knew what they were about. It is worthy to note that the Jews have long considered a father responsible for the sins of his sons while they are under thirteen years of age, after which they become accountable for themselves. There is a ceremony wherein the father publicly transfers to his son the responsibility he has hitherto borne for him once that son attains that age. We trace it in John 9:23, where the parents decline to answer for their son on the ground that he has reached the age of personal responsibility and can answer for himself.

Observe further that these youths were not accidentally encountered. They did not just happen to be at their sports outside the town when the prophet passed. They "came out" of *malice prepense* [malice aforethought] "to meet" and insult Elisha. Such a purpose against the prophet must have been the result of their ungodly training in that evil place, and must have had its root in the sneers and sarcasms which they had heard leveled at the name and acts of Elijah all their lives. Elijah, his name surrounded by terrors, they would not have dared thus to insult and abuse; but they feared nothing from his meek and gentle successor, whom they had probably never yet seen in any position of authority. Thus they could pour out the blackness of their hearts upon him with impunity.

They had heard that Elijah had been taken up to heaven, and they believed it. But instead of being suitably impressed by it, they regarded it as a new subject of derision, telling Elisha to "go up" after his master. Then they should well be rid of both. To this they added the

ignominious term of "bald-head," which was one of great indignity with the Israelites. It was a term of contempt, equivalent to calling him a low and unworthy fellow, a social outcast. It is used in this sense still in the farther East (India, etc.), and is often cast at men who have ample heads of hair. This offense involved a blasphemous insult upon one of the Lord's most signal acts, and made a near approach to what in the New Testament is called the sin against the Holy Ghost.

It was fitting for the Lord to vindicate the character and authority of his anointed prophet at the outset of his high career by such a signal judgment.