

Bearing Ridicule

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2 Kings 2:23 – 24

(BHS)

וַיַּעַל מִשָּׁם בֵּית־אֵל
וְהוּא עֹלָה בְּדֶרֶךְ
וַיִּנְעָרִים קְטַנִּים יָצְאוּ מִן־הָעִיר וַיִּתְקַלְסוּ־בּו
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ עֹלָה קָרַם עֹלָה קָרַם:
וַיִּפֹּן אַחֲרָיו וַיִּרְאֵם
וַיִּקְלֹם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה
וַתִּצְאָנָה שְׁתֵּים־עָבָר מִן־הַיַּעַר
וַתִּבְקַעְנָה מֵהֶם אַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁנַיִ יְלָדִים:

(RSV)

He **went up** from there to **Bethel**;
and while he was **going up** on the way,
some small boys **came out** of the city and jeered at him,
saying, “**Go up**, you baldhead! **Go up**, you baldhead!”
And he turned around, and when he saw them,
he cursed them in the name of the LORD.
And two she-**bears came out** of the woods
and tore forty-two of the boys.

Bethel is readily recognized; note that the “small boys” came from there. I have added some color to help you coordinate the vocabulary, such as brown *dubbîm*, “bears.” Note the verb “came out” is feminine in line 7 (as is “two”).

The critics hate this story. Jones (from near **Dublin**) said bears came out “by coincidence;” “This tradition, unworthy as it is, has found its way into the present version of the narrative” (1984, p. 390). “This is in every respect a puerile tale” (Gray, 1970, p. 479). These **dubious barraters** consider the story a tragedy and have no sympathy at all for the prophet or the community that preserved the story; they took their **doubloons** only to trash it. Those poor innocent little boys! O that nasty Elisha. How could he?

Long before, Joshua had put a curse on Jericho (Josh 6:26). The city was the first fruit of the Conquest, and as such belonged to the Lord. So whoever tried to reclaim it would **indubitably bear** the loss of their own firstborn, and other progeny (1 Kgs 16:34). Apparently, this curse was still potent in the time of Elisha, and still affected children (i.e., caused miscarriage, 2 Kgs 2:21). And the land was **barren**. But the people there had great respect for the Lord’s prophet.

The city of Bethel, to the contrary, was notorious as a center of false worship. The infamous golden calf (that they **dubbed** “Yahweh”) was housed there. And their attitude toward the prophet was seen in their youth’s **barefaced** jeers, **dubbing** him “baldhead.” **Bareheaded** Elisha ritually lifted the curse from Jericho’s children—and put it on Bethel’s cubs instead. Faithful Israel was healed; the **bar** came down on apostate Israel (Satterwaite, 1998).

Barring Christ, we are all under judgment. It is only by grace that we are not mauled by **bears**, or by something, all the time. Below is a selection from Johnathan Edwards’ famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, preached in 1741:

... the sun does not willingly shine upon you, to give you light to serve sin and Satan; the earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts, nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God’s enemies.

It is **barely** possible that you will be clawed by **bears**, but in the end you will certainly be savaged by something, like violence or cancer. Until you finally die and are consumed by worms (Acts 12:23 – 24). You may not be eaten by **bears**, but you *will* be eaten. This is the curse we are all born under, that Jesus alone can **bar** from us.

The curse had been lifted from faithful Jericho and put on apostate Bethel. But Christ died for the very people who **barraged** him with jeers, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” The curse has now been lifted from us and put on him. “Bethel” means “house of God”—and Jesus is the fullness of deity in bodily form. This is where our curse was relocated, so we sinners might have life, but the very House of God willingly suffered our curse.

So today we willingly **bear** ridicule for the sake of the gospel of Jesus. We endure this, waiting for our final vindication. Nature (including **bears**) does God's bidding, and when Jesus returns nature will serve him at his good pleasure—to the joy of the elect who at present suffer for his sake.

And to the lament of those who reject the one prophet the Father has sent to lift the curse. This includes Bible critics who have more sympathy for the mockers than for the prophet of the living God. By doing so, in my opinion, those critics identify themselves and show solidarity with the mockers of Jesus.

Something to think about.

P.S. You might find [this](#) to be fun.