

Bear facts: Bad news for baldies

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [September 7, 2004](#) issue

I have spent a lot of time searching through the Bible for loopholes,” said W. C. Fields, who was looking for moral wriggle room. While surfing the Web for a recent column on baldness I found many commentators citing 2 Kings 2:23: “As Elisha was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tore forty and two children of them.”

The commentators worked to find moral wriggle room for God and God’s prophet in this story which seems to show God’s dark side.

The writer for the *Christian Courier* (www.christiancourier.com) makes God and Elisha sound more moral by citing other translations that use the words “young lads” or “youths.” Perhaps, the writer suggests, the mockers were “teen-age ruffians”—further reason to side with the bears. They ought to have known that “cursing [God’s] servant was tantamount to cursing him and rightly punishable by death.”

The writer finds more loopholes: “The expression, ‘Go up . . . Go up,’ is held by many scholars to reflect the wish of these young men [note that they have grown even older] that the prophet . . . leave the earth, that they might be rid of him.” Furthermore, “the taunt, ‘thou bald head,’ was likely . . . an expression of extreme contempt. They were pronouncing a divine curse upon him, for which baldness was often the outward sign.” Bad news for us baldies! And, of course, Elisha was speaking “in the name of the Lord,” not cursing on his own. “It was not Elisha who slew those forty-two youths, but the Lord in His Providence.” Which must have made their pain and death minor.

Another Web site, www.ccel.org, tells us that mocking Elisha would have been very wrong even if he had not been a holy prophet, for God has said, “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man.” Our vice president had

better watch out. Should he mock any more elderly senators, we would be justified in calling out the bears. Jon Courson (www.joncourson.com) urges us to do just that when we are being mocked. We should say, “‘No way’—call for the bears!” and “Eat ‘em, bears.” But do this tearing and killing, he advises, “in the name of the Lord.”

The Adventist Sabbath School lesson at www.tagnet.org points to Elisha’s happy life after that attack by the gourmandizing bears. He “had no further trouble in his mission,” and “no one ever mocked him” again. “Does teasing deserve the death penalty?” asks www.studybibleforum.com. After all, people like Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia are pretty generous with capital punishment. “The young men mocked the features of Elisha, the man of God.” Remember, it’s a feature about which some of us in the nonprophet sector are also sensitive. “They were guilty of blaspheming the God he represented,” so the death penalty was right on.

Al Maxey at www.zianet.com justifies the tear-bears because those cowardly young people “chose to jeer and mock [Elisha] from behind.” Maxey regards “the animus in this ridicule to be that of an intolerant religion”—the Islamism of ages ago, perhaps? Sporting Mr. Maxey concludes, in bold print, with the score: Bears 42, Raiders 0.