

Elisha's Early Ministry and Judgment on Some Who Mocked Him

2 Kings 2:15-25

2 Kings 2:15-22 – *“Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. Then they said to him, “Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.” And he said, “You shall not send anyone.” But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, “Send them!” Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days but did not find him. And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, “Did I not say to you, ‘Do not go’?”*

Then the men of the city said to Elisha, “Please notice, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the ground barren.” And he said, “Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the source of the water, and cast in the salt there, and said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness.’” So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.”

Background Notes for 2 Kings 2:15-22

In verse 15, we read once again about the “sons of the prophets.” Remember, they were the seminary or Bible college students of the day. There were several of these schools scattered about the land, and Elijah had been involved in building up the schools.

The young prophets at Jericho acknowledged Elisha as the prophet who would replace Elijah. However, before Elisha could get on with his ministry, the sons of the prophets at Jericho wanted to make sure that Elijah had really been taken up to Heaven. They thought perhaps the Lord had transported Elijah to another location. Elisha reluctantly allowed 50 men to search for Elijah for three days, and of course they didn't find him.

Then the citizens of Jericho came to Elisha to report that their water was bad. Elisha performed a miracle, and the water was purified. Verse 22 says that those waters “remain healed to this day.” What does “to this day” mean? It means “to the day” when 2 Kings was written. However, a little-known but very interesting fact is that the modern city of Jericho currently receives part of its water supply from a spring known as “Elisha's Spring” – and it's pure water to this day! There's good evidence that this is the same spring that was purified by Elisha.

Doctrinal Point for 2 Kings 2:15-22

Salt is the solution to this world's problems.

In Matthew 5:13, the Lord Jesus said of believers, *"You are the salt of the earth."* In ancient times before modern refrigeration, salt was used as a preservative. It prevented the spread of decay in foods. In the same way, as salt, Christians are to prevent the spread of spiritual and moral decay in this world. Salt is a symbol of the preserving and purifying power of the truth that we Christians possess in Christ.

This miracle is a spiritual picture of the true solution to this world's problems. Often in the Bible, Jericho is a picture of the "world". Jericho was a pleasant place, but the water was bad. And without good water, people die. In the same way, this world is pleasant in many ways, but the water is bad. There is no spiritual life. Thus it is a barren and unfruitful place, and that results in many problems. The world tries all kinds of solutions to fix up its moral and spiritual problems - but without the salt of the truth from God's Word, all the world's methods fail.

The world refuses to try the salt of the Christian message. Take AIDS, for example. The world knows that this is a problem, and they've tried everything to come up with a solution, but they refuse the true solution - the salt of biblical truth. The Bible teaches that a sexual relation outside of monogamous heterosexual marriage is sin. Abstinence is biblical. But the world refuses the remedy in God's Word. It refuses the salt of biblical truth.

Just as salt was a common material and readily available to Jericho, as it was situated right there by the Dead Sea (the Salt Sea), so the salt of the Word of God is readily available today.

Notice that the **salt was applied to the source** of the bad water (v21). In the same way, the salt of the truth of God's Word is not a "bandaid." The salt of the Word goes right to the root of the problem, the sinful heart of man. *"The word of God is alive and active.... it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12). The salt of truth is the solution to this world's problems.

Practical Application for 2 Kings 2:15-22

Let's be saltshakers, not just salt containers.

The problem of Jericho's water was not solved until the salt was put in a new bowl and poured out into the spring. There's a spiritual picture here. God has already put the salt in the new bowl. We are like that new bowl containing the salt. Now let's shake it out. Let's be *saltshakers*, not just salt containers.

Colossians 4:6 tells us to *"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each one."* Let's speak out biblical truth against the moral and spiritual corruption in this world around us.

Let's speak the truth directly to the sinful heart of man. It's the only solution to this world's problems. Let's be saltshakers, not just salt containers!

2 Kings 2:23-25 - *"Then he 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 the Lord. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria."*

Background Notes for 2 Kings 2:23-25

The "youths" who mocked Elisha (v23) were not little children. They were most likely teenage hoodlums. The Hebrews word that's used here does not mean toddlers or little children. It's used for young people who are teens, or even young adults.

Notice that the youths came out of Bethel. Elisha was on his way to Bethel because a school of the prophets was located there. But Bethel was one of the cities in the northern kingdom where King Jeroboam I had set up an idolatrous golden calf shrine. This pagan atmosphere no doubt affected the peoples' attitudes towards God and His prophets. The youths who were mauled by the bears may even have been involved in some way with the pagan worship at Bethel.

Notice, too, that Elisha rebuked the youths in the name of the Lord - but Elisha didn't call for the bears to come out of the woods. **God sent the bears!** When these young hoodlums said, *"Go up, you baldhead!"* most likely they were sneering at Elisha's message: "You said Elijah went up to heaven? Yeah sure! Well then - let's see *you* go up! Go up, you baldhead!" They were mocking Elisha's message as well as his person.

A humorous side note here. This summer when we were teaching at a teen camp, the staff made up a poem about me. Included was the idea that I was getting old, losing my hair, and so on. At counselor devotions the next morning, guess what Scripture I picked? ☺

Doctrinal Point for 2 Kings 2:23-25

Blessing or cursing is determined by the response to God's Word.

Under the Law, God had promised that if His people would follow Him and obey His word, He would bless them and their land. But if they turned away from Him and disobeyed Him, then they would suffer the curses that God mentioned in the Law.

We see that truth displayed in the two events in verses 15-25. At Jericho, the people turned to Elisha, the man of God, for his help. They respected him as God's representative. They followed his orders, and their land was blessed. At Bethel, however, Elisha was mocked even though he was a servant of the living God. In doing so, these young people blasphemed God - and they suffered the consequences.

While the Mosaic Covenant and the Law are no longer in effect today, this biblical principle still holds. Blessing or cursing is determined by an individual's response to God's Word. If you respond to God's Word and obey it, you will be blessed. But if you reject God's Word and disobey it, you will not be blessed. And in the final analysis, if you reject the truth of God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ, you will suffer the curse of eternal hell – eternal separation from God. You can be sure of this: blessing or cursing is determined by response to God's Word.

Practical Application for 2 Kings 2:23-25

Teach your children to respect the Lord's servants!

God really comes down hard on disrespect - especially disrespect of His servants. How can we teach your children to respect the Lord's servants?

First and foremost, we can teach our children to respect spiritual leaders by not bad-mouthing them ourselves! Of course no servant of the Lord is perfect, and no servant of the Lord can please everyone. In our homes there may sometimes be discussion about the leaders or those in Christian service in our churches or fellowships, and sometimes the attitude in our homes is not respectful. Unfortunately, when our children hear disrespectful comments, they're bound to follow our example.

We need to be guarded in the way we talk about the Lord's servants. We're all servants, but some are spiritual leaders, and they carry more responsibilities than others. They are the ones we tend to talk about. We don't have to agree with everything they say or decide, but we should be *respectful* in our speech and actions, even when we disagree.

How is the discussion in your Christian home? Teach your children to respect the Lord's servants!