

## Animals of the Bible (4) The Bear



Not only did David have to contend with lions in his shepherding days, but bears were also a threat to his flock (1 Samuel chapter 17 verses 34 – 37). They were quite common in the Middle East in Old Testament times, when much more of the land was forested than in the present day.

A strange incident involving bears is recorded in 2 Kings, chapter 2, verses 23 and 24. The prophet Elisha cursed some boys who were mocking him and calling him “Baldy”. Two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys to pieces. Having little hair on top myself, I have a degree of sympathy with Elisha, but calling down a curse like this upon the boys seems an over-reaction, to say the least.

Seriously, it is hard to imagine a man of God acting in such a vindictive manner towards some cheeky youngsters. I suspect this story got into 2 Kings because it was told by parents to their children as a warning against making fun of their elders. In a similar way, many cultures around the world have legends about fearsome lake dwelling monsters, which were probably told at first to stop children playing too close to the water. The story also shows the awe and respect with which a prophet was regarded: this was a man you messed with at your peril!

We must remember, too, that the Old Testament gives us an account of a developing relationship between a people and their God. It contains some wonderful insights into His being and His nature, but at times its writers convey an understanding of God that appears to conflict with the full revelation given to us by Jesus Christ.

How different is the reaction attributed to Elisha in the 2 Kings story to that of Jesus recorded in the Gospel according to St Luke, chapter 9, verses 51 – 55. When the people of a Samaritan village refused to receive Him, he rebuked James and John for wanting to call down fire upon them. St Luke also records, in chapter 23, verse 34, that even as Jesus was being crucified, rather than cursing His tormentors, He prayed that they might be forgiven.

**A prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am a sinner. I confess my sins to you, especially those upon my conscience. I firmly believe that you died for me to take away my sins. And now, according to your promise, I open my heart to you. Come in, Lord Jesus, and be my Saviour and Friend for ever. AMEN

*(source unknown)*

**Image:** Syrian brown bear (pixabay.com)