

In a Cave

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[0 : 00] Now return to the passage that we read. First book of Kings, chapter 19. And we move it again at verse 9.

There he came to a cave, that is Elijah, and lodged in it. There he came to a cave and lodged in it. The last time I was with you, we reflected on this man being under a broom tree. We took note of who he was, a prophet, a man of God.

Took note of why he was under a broom tree. The Bible paints for us a picture of abject dejection. As if the prophet, the man of God, was sitting on the very edge of the deep pit of despair, without actually descending into that dark and dismal pit.

[1 : 05] I highlighted some reasons for his dejection and his discouragement. I noted the pastoral care that was exercised through the ministry of an angel.

Not just that he was fed, but how that he enjoyed the companionship of an angel, but also that he was given an opportunity for rest, an opportunity to recharge.

The writer tells us that he ran for his life, but under the broom tree he petitioned the Lord that he might die. Not only did the Lord reject his petition, but he is one of the few people who are mentioned in the Bible who did not die.

He is not only encouraged by the angel to arise and eat, but commanded to arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.

As if God is saying to Elijah through the angel, I have worked for you yet. This is not the end of the world for you in this life.

[2 : 22] Remember, Elijah himself thought that there was no further need of him in the service of the Lord. But God thought differently.

And you know, we can sometimes be so mistaken in these matters, and we can be so dogmatic even about these matters, when God is saying something very, very different to what we think.

Elijah was not fed and strengthened for no purpose.

He was fed and strengthened for further service. Perhaps I should have passed comment on the fact that we are told the angel touched him, says the writer.

And we ought to ask ourselves why this little detail is given to us. Well, one reason that I can think of is to assure the prophet that this was no dream but reality, and so therefore the angel touched him.

[3 : 45] He had to travel a lonely road. We are told he went in the strength of that food 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. No indication is given by the writer that he stopped off anywhere along the journey.

No impression is created that he was constantly on the mountain. And there is no mention made that he received any more food. No mention made of meeting any other person on this journey.

And what I read into that is this, that there may be occasions in our lives where we have had experience of the blessing of God, and that there may be a period of intense loneliness where no one else is able to be with you or where you have to go.

You are a solitary figure, alone with your thoughts, in the solitude of the wilderness, with whatever state of soul you may have then.

No, I don't mean by that, but you will not be surrounded by many people. But in what kind of situation where you have eaten, where you have enjoyed blessing from the Most High, there can be a period of loneliness and you cannot even disclose your circumstances to anyone but the Lord Himself.

[5 : 22] There is no mention either that Elijah complained of lack of food on this journey. The psalmist could speak of a time in his own life where you find him stating, my heart, he says, within

me smitten is, and it is withered like very grass, so that I do forget to eat my bread.

And then he goes on to paint a picture of the loneliness he himself experienced in the wilderness, like pelican in wilderness, forsaken I have been.

I like an owl in Desserdon, that nightly there doth moan. I watch, and like a sparrow, I am on the housetop alone. Well, we don't read that the prophet felt like the psalmist, that he was aware of acute solitude, because nothing has told us of his thought process during these 40 days and 40 nights.

Why, I wonder, are we told that it was a journey of 40 days and 40 nights? There must be surely some purpose in recording this information in the chapter.

Does it have anything to do with the fact that Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness? Did Elijah reflect on the steps they took during these 40 years in the wilderness?

[6 : 46] Did he remember the faithfulness of God throughout all these years? Did he reflect on the purpose for which they spent 40 years in the wilderness?

Because remember, the Bible tells us, that the Lord your God led you these 40 years in the wilderness, that he might humble you. That was the basic purpose of it.

Testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

And he humbled you, and let you hunger, and fed you with manna, which you did not know.

Nor did your fathers know that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Was that why we're told 40 days and 40 nights? Or did it have some connection with the career that was spent by Moses on the top of the mountain?

[7 : 47] We are told that he spent 40 days and 40 nights. Well, tonight then I'd like to set further thoughts before you of this man who was under the broom tree and now he is in a cave.

So, the title for tonight is In a Cave. And my first point is this, a specific location. Secondly, a searching question.

Thirdly, a startling revelation. And fourthly, sound advice. A specific location. We are told it was a cave at Horeb.

And of course, from your Bible reading, you will remember that Horeb is a place of great biblical significance. Horeb is clearly a Hebrew word, meaning dryness or desolation.

And it may be that it's very applicable to Elijah at this particular juncture in his life.

[9 : 00] A man who feels desolate in a place of desolation. Horeb and Sinai are both used in the Bible to describe a particular mountain peak.

Although Sinai is more often used for the mountain and Horeb for the area. It describes a mountain ridge.

And there are memorable incidents, they call it in the Bible, about Horeb. It is known as the mountain of the Lord. Not in itself, but surely a loaded statement.

Probably known in this way because of the way in which God revealed himself to Moses after a silence of approximately 400 years.

From the time that God spoke to the early fathers, then there was this period of silence until he revealed himself to Moses.

[10 : 10] Forty also comes into the equation. Moses was forty years and medium. Cut off from his own people, there weren't years of failure, but years of self-assessment and years of training for the work to which God had in mind.

And we are told that Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro the priest of Midian. He led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

It was at Horeb that God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Horeb is also the place where water flowed from a rock as a token that the Lord was indeed among the people of Israel.

And however you might understand this miracle of water flowing from a rock, you have to acknowledge that it was God's provision for the children of Israel.

provision that looked forward symbolically to the real provision of God, even Christ himself, as Paul demonstrates in writing to the Corinthians, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.

[11 : 39] Christ alone was ultimately able to satiate the thirsty soul. The psalmist speaks of it in this way, and deser of rocks he claimed, and drink is from great depths supplied.

He from the rock brought streams like floods made waters to run down. Drink is from great depths. Great depths indeed. How great are the depths that are to be found in Christ Jesus. Horeb is also the place where the children of Israel stripped off their ornaments in the spirit of penitence. They stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward. And as I have already stated, Mount Sinai is part of this ridge. What can we learn about Sinai? Was it not the place where God gave the law? Was it not also the place where Moses went seeking to see the glory of God?

[12:51] Please show me. Was the petition of Moses, please show me your glory. He wanted to see more of the radiance and the splendor of the Lord. You could say it was a personal desire on the part of Moses to know more about God.

He had already experienced revelation of God in the glory cloud, but he wanted the Lord to go further. Yet that was too much for human faculties to perceive God as he is in himself because of the very sinfulness of the nature of man.

He couldn't be exposed to the fullness of the radiance of the divine glory. Also God said, You cannot see my face, none shall not see me and live.

And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock. My glory passes. I will put you in a cleft of the rock. I will cover you with my hand with the life pass by. Then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen. I believe that there is a very real sense in which the desire to behold the face of God is awoken in the lives of those who are quickened to spirit your life.

[14:16] And although sinfulness is a barrier, the child of grace has a hope, a hope that is expressed by the psalmist.

As for me, says the psalmist, I shall behold your face in righteousness when I awake. I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

And you may be saying, Well, you've gone a long way from Elijah. I don't think so. For this very reason, what brought Elijah to Horeb?

Was Elijah seeking the face of God? Some would say yes. We are not told that he was commanded to come to Horeb.

Some would argue that because of the instruction of the angel, Arise and eat, and in light of the qualifying statement for the journey is too great for you, that there was divine sanction for the journey that was undertaken by Elijah for these 40 days and 40 nights.

[15:36] But all that we are told is this. He went to the strength of that food 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mount of God. And there, we are told, he came to a cave and lodged in it.

I don't know about you, but I tend to think of a cave as somewhere that would not be very comfortable, a cold, dank place.

A cave could be symbolic of darkness surrounding surrounding the mind of this man or the loneliness that he experienced. We have other mentions in scripture of others in caves, for example, David in the cave of Adana.

And the cave there is symbolic, I believe, of the refuge that David took in God. And we sang it in Psalm 57, and he, my soul, takes refuge in the shadow of your wings.

Now, I will take refuge till the storms of destruction pass by. And so, this man, Elijah, comes to this specific place a cave on the mountain of God.

[16:58] Some would argue, and argue strongly, that this is the same cleft of the rock where the Lord placed Moses.

Remembering, God is preparing this man for further service. So, I say again, was it a desire to behold the glory of God that lay behind, the journey of Elijah, the specific place, the place that is reminiscent of blessed and glorious revelations in the past.

Do you and I not seek such places? Do we not seek to meet the Lord where we have met Him in the past?

The Psalms could say that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face as I have seen thee beautiful within thy holy place. And he speaks in that, of course, as having seen God in the place of worship.

A specific place, a cave, might not think of it as anything strange, a place of great biblical significance because of all that is associated with the place horror.

[18:18] love. And that brings me secondly to the search in question. We read, there he came to a cave and lodged in it. The impression created, and more known rightly or wrongly, is that he didn't have much time for rest.

For we read, and behold, the word of the Lord came to him. The word behold in the Bible is frequently used to draw attention to something very important.

It's like the highlighter of the Bible. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him. Does that sentence or statement merely mean that God spoke to him?

Or does it mean something more? Could it be that this speaks of an appearance of the word? Remember, John speaks of the word.

In the beginning was the word. The word was with God, and the word was face to face with God, and the word was God. Could it mean that this speaks of an appearance of the word in human form long before the word took true human nature to himself?

[19:40] If my memory serves me white, I think pink took that view, although one would not always agree with the views expressed by pink.

But before now, if we look at the scriptures, we are told the word of the Lord came to him. Depart from here. Hide yourself by the book Kerith.

Again, the word of the Lord came to him, and the eyes go to Salafath. After many days, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, and the third year said, go show yourself to Ahab. But you notice in this particular context, and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, which would seem to suggest that it was more than just a message, that it was a messenger, not just a divine message, but a divine messenger speaking and addressing the prophet here.

And he said to him, and you could say that the messenger is calling Elijah back to God, calling him back to what God says, calling him back to the one from whom he received covenantal promises. That is what God brings us back. He brings us back to himself when we are in danger of straying, or being overwhelmed by feelings and thoughts that may lead us away from the Lord.

[21:26] Do you remember Pilgrim's Progress? And Benham had a special facility with words in that book. And in the book of Pilgrim's Progress he speaks of Christian and hopeful being imprisoned in Doubting Castle.

And all of the language that is used by Benham there has a meaning and a relevance. There are a Doubting Castle. The castle belonged to giant despair.

Yet a real fertile imagination did Benham. His wife was Mrs. Diffidance. And so we are told of these prisoners there, how they were tormented, how they were beaten, and by giant despair.

Until in abject misery and righteousness, Christian remembered that he had a key. A key that was able to unlock the doors of Doubting Castle.

And the key is called promise. In other words, the promises of God. Where was the key that unlocked the doors of Doubting Castle that enabled Christian and hopeful to escape from their imprisonment.

[22:46] And so when you and I are plagued by doubts, when we are imprisoned by giant despair, where do you go? Where do you turn?

Do you not go to the word of God, to the promises of God, in order that you might unlock these gates and doors that keep you imprisoned in the castle, Doubting Castle, of giant despair?

Well, Elijah is addressed by a such in question. what are you doing here, Elijah?

Many commentators see this searching question as a form of rebuke being addressed to Elijah. As in the replied in the question, Elijah, you should not be here.

Some see it just as a searching question, in other words, what leaves you here? personally, I am not altogether convinced by that line of approach.

[23:58] Why? Well, when the angel came to this man, in deep dejection, under the broom tree, I do not read that any rebuke was administered or implied.

But what I do see is the tender, loving care of God through the ministry of the angel, being applied to the life of a broken, sorrowful man of God.

And for that reason, I do not read into this question, into this searching question, that it is one of rebuke, but rather an invitation to Elijah to unfold his inner burdens, his inner cares, and circumstances to the Lord.

In other words, that the Lord is inviting him to cast his burden on the Lord. You might say to me, did God not already know what was causing the prophet such distress?

Of course he did. God is omniscient. That was a factor of encouragement rather than a factor of fear in the life of the psalmist. When I said to rise to you, it's known from my inner thoughts you ponder, both my goings out and lying down, all my ways you know.

[25 : 29] I speak no word, but you know it perfectly. And it seems to me that in this particular context, God is saying, tell me, Elijah, you don't know thoughts.

What is really troubling you? What is causing you this deep distress? And it seems to me, if I can use a little illustration, parents, perhaps mothers especially, will know this, when children are unwell, perhaps they've eaten something that leaves them unwell, and you know, often for a child to get rid of that, to vomit it up, is worse than death.

They hate putting up. But you know, the parent knows if they'll get it out, they will feel much better. Temperature will go down, and they will feel much better.

Child doesn't appreciate that. And it seems to me that the heavenly father is saying to his own charioteer, just spill up all that is going on in your life, just confide it in me.

And it seems to me that that is what lies behind this question. I know the question is used sometimes in an evangelical context, perhaps misapplied, but perhaps used very sectionally, what leaves you here, Elijah?

[27 : 04] But I get most satisfaction of looking at it in this light, that the Lord is asking him to confide in him, and to make known the things that are troubling him.

Because the Lord alone ultimately is able to minister to his needs, and to minister in such a way that ministry is effective, he is able to apply the healing balm that the prophet requires in this time of sorrow and darkness.

And so the prophet discloses what it is that is particularly troubling him. And at the heart of his complaint, this is what you find. The people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, killed your prophets with the sword.

In other words, what do you say here? He's not wallowing in a trough of self-pity. I see the prophet here as one who is truly concerned about the church of God in his own day.

And I see in sin. In the answer of the prophet, I rebuke to ourselves if we are complacent about the cause of Christ in your own day.

[28 : 37] Do we share the burden felt by the prophet? Are we concerned about the faithfulness of the church to the truths of scripture?

Here is a man with a zeal for the glory and the honor of God. And that is what I see right behind the question here. A searching question, a specific place, thirdly a startling revelation.

We are presented with a picture of awesome powers as God passes in majestic powers. Go out and stand on the mountains, the instruction to the prophet.

Behold the Lord passed by, a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broken pieces the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind a earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. Now, the writer doesn't seek to interpret for us these unusual events.

[29 : 41] He merely states that they took place. And whatever we might say about the strong wind, the earthquake, the fire, all three are forces that failed to show the weakness, the helplessness, and the omnipotence of man.

When we have to look in the media in past days or in the Bahamas, where they had that terrifying wind, and the destruction and havoc that it created, and how powerless man was in the face of the forces of the wind during that period.

In an earthquake, if you've been caught in an earthquake, you feel when the earth is moving around you, when you cannot do anything. And so, irrespective of the power that is out, that belongs to even the richest nations of the world, when these forces combine, even the richest and most powerful nations, are helpless in the face of these forces.

And so, here you have three things, wind, earthquake, and fire. Do all of these things remind us how man can be paralyzed by these forces when they combine or even on the road.

Forces that are even instrumental in removing from life. Yet all of these forces are under the authority and the jurisdiction of the one who is the great creator of God.

[31 : 28] There may be times when the spirit of God is in the wind or in the earthquake or in the fire. as is evidenced on Mount Carver.

But what the writer here says is three times the Lord was not in the wind and the earthquake got in the fire. And then we are told, after this display of majesty and power, the sound of our law whispered.

There's still, in the authorised verse, still, small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And again the same question is addressed to him and you find exactly the same response. Do you have an interpretation of this?

God, the sound of our law whispered. Now, if I didn't have my hearing aids, I wouldn't hear our law whispered.

[32 : 47] It would pass me by. But I would always love to hear the whispering of God. Because I think the whispering of God strikes a chord in the heart and the mind of a man or a woman.

And you see, it was the whispering that brought Elijah to the mouth of the cave. It wasn't the wind or the earthquake or the fire.

It was the whispering. Would you not like to know what was in the whisper? Eh? Because it was the whisper that took him out of the depths of the cave.

And you know there's something very intimate and very private about a whisper, is there not? It speaks of intimacy.

It speaks of special friendship. friendship. And the whisper brought Elijah to the place where he listened to the instruction of God.

[34 : 08] And so in this episode you see the weakness of power. It didn't bring Elijah out of the cave. But what you do see is the power of weakness because that's what brought Elijah to the mouth of the cave.

What we might tell is weakness. It's very instructive. That's what brought this man out of the cave and to the mouth of the cave.

And you see, you notice what the writer tells us. That Elijah understood that he was in the presence of the Lord. How do we know?

He wrapped his face in his cloak. In other words, he was aware that he was in the presence of the Most High. Does it not remind you of what the angelic beings do, what the sacrophants do?

They're wearing their faces before the majestic presence of the holiness of God. And here is this man, through the whispering of the Lord, he realizes that he is in the presence of the Most High.

[35 : 22] In other words, God didn't come as an enemy, but as a true friend. At a time when the prophet felt most alone.

God makes himself known. Makes himself known to the prophet. He is reminding the prophet, he is not forgotten, he is not alone.

The omnipotent God is his friend, and he has not forgotten him. And that message, whatever was contained in the chusper, entered into the very heart of the life of the man of God.

A merciful message coming from the Most High. And often that is how the Spirit of God works.

It's not often similar in shouting, or in demonstration of great power, but working silently, undefectively, in the hearts and lives of men and women.

[36 : 42] So, what's darkly revelation? A searching question, a specific place, finding the time has gone, sound advice. Go, says the Lord, returning the road to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you arrive, shall I know it Hazel, and Jehu, and Elisha.

And in that you can see how the sovereignty of God is at work. It's God who places people in positions of power and influence.

It doesn't occur under the sovereign jurisdiction of the Most High. He is working out his own purpose, and he is involving Elijah and matters that went far beyond Elijah's own time, particularly in the arighting of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, as his replacement.

You see, the work of God, on the purpose of God, progresses, perhaps at different levels.

Sometimes it appears to be outworked very slowly, other times it, as we look in it, other times it may happen very quickly.

But what the Lord says to us is this, trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. That's where we have to rest, just as the psalmist do, rest on the Lord, patiently word for him.

[38 : 14] Someone wrote like this, I'm going to conclude on this, Twixt glimms of joy, on clouds of doubt, our feelings come and go.

Our daily state is tossed about and ceaseless ebb and flow. Thy purpose of eternal good, let me but surely know, on this I lean, let changing mood and feeling come or go.

No mood of feeling, form or thought, is constant for a day, but thou Lord, thou changes not, the same thou art always.

Glad when thy sunshine fills my soul, nor sad when clouds overcast, since thou within thy sure control of love, dost hold me fast.

Elijah on the mount of the Lord, I'm sure Elijah didn't know then that he was going to stand on another mount, along with Moses, and that he was going to see the Lord Jesus Christ transfigured in glory, where they were discussing the exodus that was to be achieved by Christ as he went out from Jerusalem.

[39 : 47] Perhaps on that day on the mount he understood a little of the small place that he had in the sovereign purpose of Almighty God.

Perhaps on the day when he stood on the mount of transfiguration, he understood it better when he heard the voice that declared from heaven, this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

Hear ye him. That has not changed. We are still commanded to listen to the beloved son.

May we tonight hear the whispering of God and our hearts and our souls and may we be drawn towards him.

A specific place, a searching question, a darkly revelation, sound advice. Let us pray.