

# Lessons in the Cave

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[ 0 : 01 ] Let us now read from the Old Testament, from the first book of Kings, chapter 19, and at verse 8.

The first book of Kings, chapter 19, and from verse 8. And he arose, that is Elijah, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God.

And he came thither unto a cave and lodge there. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, slain thy prophets with a sword.

And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away. And he said, Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord.

[ 1 : 26 ] And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and break in pieces the rocks before the Lord.

But the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake.

And after the earthquake a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire a still small voice.

And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face on his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entry in of the cave.

And behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with a sword.

[ 2 : 41 ] And I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away. And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus.

And it says, Him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.

Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed them.

Amen. And may God bless to us, that reading from his truth. Let us again sing in the psalm in which we've been singing, Psalm 57, and at verse 4.

Psalm 57, and at verse 4. My soul among fierce lions is, I, fire bronze, live among men's sons, whose teeth are spears and darts, a sharp sword is their tongue.

[ 4 : 28 ] Be thou exalted, very high, above the heavens, O God, let thou thy glory be advanced O'er all the earth abroad.

My souls bow down, for they a net have laid my steps to snare. Into the pit which they have digged for me they've fallen out.

My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, O God, I'll sing and praise. My glory wake, wake, sultry harp, myself, I'll early raise.

Let us sing these verses, My soul among fierce lions is, I, fire bronze, live among. My soul among fierce lions is, I, fire bronze, live among, make sounds to see God's user worthyere gloom, which I, where the Bee fend, 'll be a real item of steals, and gene is sealed, in playable rattlesnake, and games ofnaire, mantener and canción is, and the mountain is shot at their Fotos customers, their business MARK andimmen Monsieur the scale of ■■■■, are she stayington and Maharaj Song for the great joy of angled■ andrire dead, as sons of a young man so they work and Wonder amongst ■

BeNews YOUR■ Such a glad country about the Heaven's ■ Ostrom Let Thine Holy Spirit pass on the holy earth at all.

[ 6 : 32 ] My source I've done for thee, O Lamb. I'll leave myself to sin, and through the will to true of doom.

On the evening calling I, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed.

For God I'll see you and is, my glory, liquid, salt, we have.

My soul, my heart is fixed. Let us now turn to the passage that we read.

The first book of Kings, chapter 19. And we may read again at verse 9. And he came thither, that is Elijah, unto a cave and lodged there.

[ 8 : 20 ] Or, as it might be translated, he went into a cave and spent the night in that place. This morning we spent some time reflecting on Elijah under a broom tree.

Under the broom tree he petitioned the Lord that he might die. And as I mentioned in the morning, not only did the Lord reject that petition, but Elijah is one of the few people mentioned in the Bible who did not die.

Under the broom tree he was, not only encouraged by the angel to arise and eat, but commanded by the angel of God.

As if God were saying to Elijah through the angel, I have work for you in this life. Remember, he himself had thought that there was no further need for him in the service of the Lord.

But God knew differently. You know, sometimes we can be very mistaken in these matters.

[ 9 : 51 ] And yet, when we're so mistaken, we can even be so dogmatic about it. Refusing to recognize that we are mistaken.

And God saying something that is very different. How obvious it is, what the Lord states through the prophet Isaiah. My thoughts are not your thoughts.

Neither are your ways my ways. Declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways. Higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Elijah wasn't fed and strengthened for no purpose. He was fed and strengthened in order to render further service.

And perhaps I should pass comment on the fact, I may not have done it in the morning, that we are told in the context that the angel touched him.

[ 10 : 59 ] That raises the question, why would the angel touch him? Well, one reason that I could suggest is to assure Elijah that this was no dream but reality.

The other reason I would suggest would be this. Could the touch not indicate a measure of sympathy with a discouraged, despondent prophet?

You know how we have an example of that in the New Testament. The leper who came to Jesus. A man who was shunned by the whole community.

And what did Jesus do? He reached out and touched him. How much that must have meant to that poor man, rejected by society at large, to find someone was prepared to offer care and sympathy in such a practical way.

And it may be that is why the angel touched Elijah here. Because Elijah had to travel a lonely road.

[ 12 : 30 ] We are told that he went in the strength of the food that was given to him, forty days and forty nights, until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

So, the food that he was given was obviously of a high energy level. Because there is no indication that he stopped off anywhere along the route to have any more food.

The impression that is created by the writer is that Elijah was constantly on the move. There is no mention either made of meeting any other people on the journey.

It's as if Elijah were travelling in a self-isolating bubble. And what I read into this is that there may be occasions in the lives of believers where they have had experience of the blessing of God, a time of uplift, perhaps even a time of preparation for further service or trial.

At any rate, that can be followed by a time of intense loneliness where no one else is able to be with you or where you have to go.

[ 14 : 02 ] You're a solitary figure, alone with your thoughts, in the solitude of the wilderness, with whatever state of soul you have.

Now, I don't mean by that that you may not be surrounded by people. But in that kind of situation where you have eaten, where you have enjoyed blessing, it can be followed by a period of loneliness.

And you cannot disclose your circumstances to anyone but to the Lord Himself. There is no mention either that Elijah complained of a lack of food on this journey.

Nothing is told us of his inner thoughts during these 40 days and 40 nights. It's as if a veil of silence is drawn over this period.

But there must be some purpose in recording the information 40 days and 40 nights. Does it have something to do with the fact that Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness?

[ 15 : 24 ] Did Elijah reflect on the steps that they took during these 40 years in the wilderness? Did he ponder on the faithfulness of God during these years?

Did he reflect on the purpose for which the people of Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness? Remember how the Bible tells us why they spent 40 years in the wilderness.

The Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness that He might humble you. That was one of the reasons that they might become humble. Testing you to know what was in your heart.

They were tested so that they would know their own inner lives. Whether you would keep His commandments or not and He humbled you and let you hunger 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.

Lord. So you see not only were they being taught humility not only were they being taught to recognize the kind of hearts they had but they were also being taught that they must live in dependence on the word of God.

[ 16 : 44 ] So did this period of 40 days and 40 nights have anything to do was the prophet drawing parallels with the people of Israel or did the 40 days have something to do with the time Moses spent on the mountaintop with God he was there you remember 40 days and 40 nights it's not clear well the same man whom the writer depicts for as an utter dejection under a broom tree is now in a cave you might say a place of self isolation and I'd like just to raise four thoughts first a specific location secondly a searching conversation thirdly a startling revelation and fourthly sound advice a specific location here is this man now you might say self-isolating in a specific location a cave at Horeb and the moment you read that you realize that

Horeb is a place of great historical significance in the Bible the actual word comes from the Hebrew word meaning dryness or desolation so here is you might say a desolate figure in a place of desolation Horeb and Sinai 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 you could say Horeb describes the mountain ridge and there are memorable incidents recorded in the Bible about Horeb it is known as the mountain of the Lord and that in itself is a loaded statement probably known by that name because of the way God revealed himself in this area on more than one occasion it was at

Horeb that God revealed himself to Moses after a silence of over 400 years 40 also comes into this equation Moses you remember was 40 years in Midian cut off from his own people now these were not years of failure but years of self assessment years of training for the work to which Moses was to be called he 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 interpret this miracle of water flowing from a rock you have to acknowledge that it was God's provision provision that look 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 the rock was Christ Christ alone is able to satiate the thirsty soul and the psalmist speaks of it in this way in desert rocks he clave and drink as from great depths supplied he from the rock brought streams like floods made waters to run down great depths indeed and how great are the depths in

Christ Horeb again is the place where the children of Israel where they stripped off their ornaments in the spirit of penitence people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onwards as already stated Mount Sinai is part of this reach what can we learn about Sinai was it not the place where the law was given was it not also the place where Moses went when he was deeply desirous of seeing the glory of God 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 the revelation of God in the glory cloud but he wanted the Lord to go further it was too much for human faculties to perceive

[ 22 : 35 ] God as he and himself because of the sinfulness of man he couldn't be exposed to the fullness of the radiance of the divine glory and so God said you remember you cannot see my face for man shall not see me and live and the Lord said behold there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock I will cover you with grace shall not be seen and there is a very real sense in which the desire to behold the face of God is awoken in the lives of every person who is quickened to spirit your life and although our sinfulness is a barrier the child of grace has a hope that is beautifully summarized by the psalmist when he writes as for me he states

I shall behold your face and righteousness when I awake so at the end of life's journey the Christian is looking forward to see the face of God in Christ I shall be satisfied with your likeness now you may be saying oh man you have gone a long way from Elijah well I don't think so for the very reason that this may be what brought Elijah to Horeb that he too was seeking to see the face of God we're not told that he was commanded to go to Horeb some some 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 of forty days and forty nights but we're only told that he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights and then we're told that he went into a cave and spent the night in that place now

I don't know about you but when I think of a cave I don't think of it as somewhere comfortable in my mind there is the picture of a cold dank place a cave could be symbolic of darkness or of loneliness a place symbolizing a withdrawal from society self isolation we know that for example that David also spent time in a cave the cave system at Adela and there I am of the view that the cave system in the life of David is symbolic of the fact that David found ultimate refuge in God in you my soul takes refuge in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge till the storms of destruction pass by this man then was in a cave on the mountain of the

Lord and some would say and argue strongly that this cave is the same cleft of the rock where the Lord placed Moses remember God is preparing this man for further service so I ask again was it a desire to behold the glory of the Lord that lay behind his journey this specific place the place that is reminiscent of blessed and glorious revelations in the past and if you are in Christ Jesus this evening do you and I not seek the same do we not seek to meet the Lord where he met with us in the past in the fellowship of his people at the throne of grace under the proclamation of the word and with the psalmist you express the same desire that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face so I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place a specific place a place of great biblical significance yes a place of self isolation but a place that may demonstrate that this man wanted to see the face of

God and that brings me to my second point a searching question he came thither to a cave and lodged there and the implication is he came to spend the night you also get the impression or at least I do that he didn't have much time to rest in this cave for we read and behold the word of the Lord came to him now the word behold in the Bible most times is used to bring our attention to focus on something of importance and here we are told behold the word of the Lord came to him what does that mean does that sentence 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 in human form long before the word took true human nature to himself if my memory serves me right

[ 28 : 48 ] I think that A.W. Pink held that view but let us just remember what we are told before now the word of the Lord came to him depart from here hide yourself by the brook Kareth again the word of the Lord came to him arise go to Saraphath after many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah and the third year saying go show yourself to Ahab but in all of these examples in his past experience can you see that there is a subtle difference here it is not expressed quite in the same way as in these previous verses I have quoted behold the word of the Lord came to him but then notice what the passage says and he said to him there is a difference it is not just a divine message but the implication seems to be a divine messenger and he said to him you could say that the word was calling him back to

God calling him back to what God says calling him back to the one from whom we receive covenantal promises that is what God calls his people and the pilgrims progress Christian and hopeful they found themselves prisoners you may remember in Doubt in Castle owned by one named Giant Despair whose wife was named Mrs Dividends I always am amazed at the way in which Banyan found such apt names for the characters that he raises in his pilgrim's progress and you remember how Christian and hopeful how they were mistreated in Doubting Castle they were wretched until Christian remembered that he had a key called promise and what was true of the key it opened the doors and the gate of the castle how we ought to value the promises of a covenant keeping

God always remembering that faithful is he that has promised you see the promises of God are used in the Bible to encourage you to uplift you to enable you to come out of these dark places where you sometimes enter in despondency and discouragement and in the cave the question is asked of Elijah what are you doing here Elijah now I know that many sermons have been preached with a very pronounced evangelical emphasis from these words many commentators see this searching question as a form of rebuke to Elijah as implied in the question you should not be here

Elijah others see it as just not a searching question what leaves you here personally I'm not altogether convinced by these applications why well when the angel came to this man in deep dejection when he was under the broom tree I don't read in the Bible that any rebuke was administered to him or even implied but what I do see is the tender loving care applied to the life of a broken sorrowful dejected discouraged man of God that's what I see in the way that the angel ministered to this man remember all the people of God are but men they're frail they're fragile so for that reason

I do not read into this searching question that it is one of rebuke but I see it as an invitation to unfold his inner burden his cares and circumstances to the Lord or you might ask me did God not already know what was caused in the prophet such distress of course God knew because God is omniscient that's a factor of encouragement rather than of fear and that is how it's certainly viewed by the psalmist Psalm 139 when I sit arise to you as known from afar my inner thoughts you ponder both my goings out and lying down all my ways you know I speak no word but you know it perfectly again the omniscience of the Lord was cause for appeal by a hurting

[ 34 : 35 ] Peter when he was being scrutinized by the Lord and restored to public office Lord you know all things you know that I love you he was appealing to the omniscience of God and so it seems to me that God is saying here through the question addressed to Elijah tell me tell me your inner thoughts what's going on in your life what leaves you like this as if he was saying to Elijah just spit it all out and the picture that I have in my mind is of a mother with a sick child who has eaten something disagreeable and the mother saying to the child get it out and you know how lost children are to get out what they've taken in and the mother will say vomit it out and you'll feel better and the child unwilling to do so and it seems to me that

God by means of this question is saying to the prophet spill it all out reveal what is what is troubling you and you know it can be very helpful to unburden yourself in God you know how sometimes it helps even to share a burden with a fellow being when you've got a crushing burden and just to talk about it it helps but it helps even more if you unburden yourself in God why does it help mold if you unburden yourself in God because he understands you better even than you understand yourself he is able to minister to you in ways that are suited to your needs and the prophet discloses what primarily leaves them troubled and distressed it is the cause of God in

Israel that's what is at the heart of his complaint the children of Israel forsaken your covenant torn down your altars killed your prophets with a sword God now I know that many adopt a different approach and see the prophet here as one who is wallowing in the trough of self pity I prefer to see him as one concerned about the Lord's cause in his day and I also see in the answer of the prophet a rebuke to ourselves if we are complacent about the cause of Christ in our own day and we ought to be asking ourselves do we share the burden that is felt by the prophet for the cause of Christ are we concerned about the faithfulness of the church to the truths of scripture this man had a zeal for the glory and the honour of

God so he's asked a searching question he's in a specific place thirdly a startling revelation we are presented in the context with a picture of a spectacular display of what we might term the forces of nature as God passes in majestic power go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord and behold the Lord pass by and a great and strong wind rent the mountains break in pieces the rocks before the Lord but the Lord was not in the wind and after the earthquake the Lord was not in the earthquake after the earthquake a fire but the Lord was not in the fire and you notice the writer doesn't seek to interpret these unusual events but merely states that they took place and whatever we might say about the strong wind the earthquake and the fire all these three are forces that serve to show the weakness and the impotence of man even to this day we are reminded how these forces can paralyze areas of the world how they can create tremendous havoc and destruction and man is unable to prevent it happening forces that are even instrumental in being the cause of death yet we ought always to remember that all these forces great as they are are under the authority of one who is the great creator

God the one whom the psalmist reminds us death raved and you see he reigns in all of these and what the writer here states is this and he does it three times for emphasis but the Lord was not in the wind or in the earthquake or in the fire and then we are told after the fire a still small voice that might be translated the sound of a low whisper a sound of a gentle blowing and it's difficult to catch the nuance of the original Hebrew here now note the contrast between the powerful display of energy forces frequently destructive and an almost inaudible sound surely that is significant and it is obviously effective how is it effective well when

[ 41 : 18 ] Elijah heard it notice what happened notice reaction he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave wasn't the wind or the earthquake or the fire that compelled him to come to the entrance of the cave it was this sound of a gentle blowing or the sound of a low whisper what do you make of that wouldn't we all want to know what God whispered to Elijah well I certainly would like to know why would I like to know because it was the means of getting

Elijah to the entrance of the cave when Elijah heard it he went out and stood in the entrance of the cave but there's no indication in the Bible of what was whispered you know generally when someone whispers something to you it's not for the ears of someone else it's for you alone so what I understand from this is that this was a personal message from the omnipotent God for Elijah alone and in this episode we see the weakness of power wind earthquake fire no effect on the prophet but we also learn the power of weakness the whisper brought him out God using means that one might think easy to oppose and reject and he makes the whisper irresistible whatever was spoken in a whisper it is evident that

Elijah recognized in it the presence of God how do we know for this simple reason when the Lord spoke in this way you notice what else has told us that he wrapped his face in his mantle in other words he was as it were hiding his face he swapping his face in his cloak hiding his face in the presence of God doesn't remind you of something else that is said in the Bible in the prophecy of Isaiah we were told about the seraphim with two he covered his feet two he flew and one called to another and said holy holy it's the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory did you notice the seraphim they didn't cover their ears so they could hear the command of

God nor did they cover their mouths to prevent them from praising God Elijah here covered his face but he heard the whisper it was the means of bringing him out of the cave God didn't come as an enemy but as a friend a true friend at a time when the prophet felt most alone God making known as he did to Moses he will not leave you nor forsake you as God also teaches through the prophet Isaiah can a woman forget her nursing child that she don't know compassion on the son of her womb even these may forget yet I will not forget you behold I have engraved you on the palms of my hands an unrevealed message but powerful in its effect and is this not how God works as he breathes the message of truth into your soul bringing you out of darkness to his marvelous light in times of discouragement bringing uplift it went right to the heart of this man a powerful message couched in gentleness mercy and grace oh how how deeply mysterious is the work of the spirit of

God enjoying people to himself God is a gentle God you see it in the life of the saviour gentle with the sick touching wounds to heal gentle with those who are grieving gentle with little children gathering them up in his arms gentle with disciples and restoring them to fellowship after they are denied and he is still gentle with the wounds of our souls and the sins of our hearts because here is one who says come unto me all you who labor under heavy lid and I will give you rest so a startling revelation a searching question a specific place finally sound advice it's in verses 15 and 16 and in this advice that is given we can see how

[ 47 : 05 ] God rules in his sovereignty he places rulers in the seats of power he is progressing his own purpose Elijah was to be involved in matters that went far beyond his own day you you shall anoint to be prophet in your place you see the work of God progresses at different levels sometimes quickly sometimes slowly at least as we view it God through our providences as well as especially through his truth is teaching us trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding that's where we need to rest rest in the Lord and patiently wait for him as one person put it in bardic forum tweaks gleams of joy and clouds of doubt our feelings come and go our daily status tossed about in ceaseless ebb and flow no mood of feeling form of thought is constant for a day but thou

O Lord thou changes not the same thou art always thy purpose of eternal good let me but surely know on this I lean let change in mood and feeling come or go 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 mountain of the Lord he didn't know then that he was going to stand on that mountain that he was going to stand on another mountain along with Moses and that he would see the Lord Jesus in his transfigured glory as they discussed the exodus he was about to accomplish in going out of

Jerusalem and possibly then he understood the small place that he had and the great sovereign purpose of God when he heard the voice resounding from heaven this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased listen to him oh that does not change well here is this man self isolated in a specific place asked a searching question presented with a startling revelation and given sound advice wouldn't you like to hear the whispering of God in your own life this evening let us pray oh eternal God there is so much in thy truth help us to understand it more and to see more of the gracious and marvelous dealings that thou hast with thine own people in this life as a source of encouragement as a source of uplift as a source of calling out to others to put their trust in this same

God that they too might be familiar with the whisperings of God and the glory shall be thine in Jesus name we ask it amen let us conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 147 Psalm 147 praise ye the Lord for it is good praise to our God to sing for it is pleasant and to praise it is a comely thing God doth build up Jerusalem and he it is alone that the dispersed of Israel doth gather into one those that are broken in their heart and grieved in their minds he healeth and their painful wounds he tenderly abides let us sing these verses in conclusion praise ye the



Lord the Lord call in his good praise to the love to sing all in his fast and none to face it is garden we Him just saw Christ and He gave us our whole.

[ 53 : 02 ] Christ in thou Christ gains there pas acid and national Ou signs And gather into all Those that are broken in their heart And hidden in their minds In fields and weapons In fields and fields and weapons Now I forgot to make this intimation at the beginning I made it in the morning But perhaps it's necessary to make it again God willing the funeral of the late Malcolm D. McKeever Will take place from the church here

At twelve noon tomorrow The funeral service at 11.30am And there will be worship conducted In the church here this evening At nine o'clock Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father Fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit Rest on and abide with you all Now and forever Amen Amen Amen