

Elijah In A Cave

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[0 : 01] Let us now turn to the passage that we read. First book of Kings, chapter 19, and reading again at verse 9.

First Kings, chapter 19, and at verse 9. There he came to a cave and lodged in it.

There he came, that is Elijah, and lodged in it. Earlier in this chapter you find this man Elijah under a broom tree.

I don't think that you could say that that was his finest hour. A prophet, a man of God, under a broom tree.

And when you ask the question, why was he under the broom tree? The answer that comes back is that he was in deep dejection.

[1 : 05] As if the prophet, the man of God, was sitting on the very edge of the deep pit of despair. Without actually being in that dark and dismal pit.

And yet you cannot fail to notice the pastoral care of God that was exercised towards this man in his dejection through the ministry of an angel.

Not just that he was fed by the angel, but he enjoyed the benefit of the companionship of an angel. What better companion could he have other than the Lord himself in a time of dejection? You don't read of any angels who are dejected.

Any one of us would have been of no benefit. But an angel is never dejected. They are always upbeat.

[2 : 15] And not only that, but the prophet is given a time and an opportunity to rest. The writer makes several contrasts in the early part of the chapter.

He tells us that this man ran for his life. And yet 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 Scripture who did not die.

Not peculiar. He wanted death. His request was refused. And as far as we can ascertain from the Bible, he did not die.

He is encouraged by the angel to arise and eat. He is actually commanded. Because the journey is too great for him.

As if God were saying to the prophet through the angel, I have worked for you yet to do. In other words, this is not the end of the road for you in this life.

[3 : 34] Remember, Elijah himself thought, there was no further need for him in the service of the Lord. But God knew differently.

And you know, we can sometimes be so mistaken in our views, and even so dogmatic about our views, and God saying something very different to the views that we adopt.

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 was not fed and strengthened for no purpose.

He was fed and strengthened for the purpose of further service. Perhaps I should pass comment on the fact that we are told the angel touched him.

[4 : 43] Why did the angel touch him? Well, one reason that I can think of is that it was to assure this man that this was no dream or illusion, but reality.

He had to travel a lonely road. We are told that he went in the strength of the food that was given to him 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

There is no indication that he stopped off anywhere, the impression that is created, that he was constantly on the move. No mention that he received any more food.

No mention that he met any other persons on this journey. And what I read into that is this, that there may be occasions in our lives where we have had and enjoyed experience of the blessing of

God.

And that can sometimes be followed by a period of intense loneliness where no one else is able to be with you or where you have to go.

[5 : 57] a solitary figure, alone with your thoughts in the solitude of the wilderness, with whatever state of soul you may have at that moment.

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, a period of loneliness where you cannot disclose your circumstances or your spiritual state to any but the Lord himself.

There is no mention either that he complained of lack of food on this journey. The psalmist certainly could speak of a time in his own life where you find him stating, My heart 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 himself in solitude, like pelican in wilderness, forsaken I have been, like an owl in desert town that nightly there doth moan.

I watch and like a sparrow on the housetop alone. We do not read that the prophet was felt like the psalmist, that he was aware of acute solitude, because nothing is told us of the thought process in the mind of the prophet during these 40 days and nights.

[7 : 34] Why, I wonder, are we told that it was 40 days and 40 nights? There must have been some purpose in recording this information.

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

Did he remember the faithfulness of God throughout these 40 years? Did he reflect on the purpose for which they spent 40 years in the wilderness?

Remember, the Bible tells us that they were 40 years in the wilderness in order to be humbled, in order to be tested whether they would keep the commandments of the Lord 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.

[8 : 49] It is worth remembering that solitary lesson. Did the 40 days and 40 nights have anything to do with the time that Moses spent on the top of the mountain?

Well, this man who was under a broom tree is now in a cave. I'd like to set four thoughts before you. A specific location, a searching conversation, a startling revelation, and fourthly, sound advice.

A specific location, a cave, some would say it is the cave at Horeb. As you know, Horeb is a place of great historical significance in the Bible.

It's a Hebrew word meaning dryness or desolation. A desolate figure in a place of desolation.

[9 : 54] 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. There are memorable incidents recorded in the Bible with regard to Horeb.

It is known as the mountain of the Lord and that in itself I would suggest is a loaded statement. probably known in this way because the Lord revealed himself in this area on more than one occasion.

And I think that is worth remembering too. It was at Horeb that God revealed himself to Moses after a silence of over 400 years.

from the time that God spoke to the early fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And then there is this silence for 400 years until he revealed himself to Moses.

[11 : 18] And you remember how 40 comes into the equation there. Moses was 40 years and medium cut off from his own people. Now there weren't years of failure but years of self-assessment and training for the work to which Moses was being called.

It was at Horeb that God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Horeb 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 says Paul.

Christ alone is ultimately able to satiate the thirsting soul. The psalmist speaks of it 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 as from great depths. How great are the depths?

[12 : 52] in Christ. You're still plumbing these depths and you've never come to a place where you can say you've reached the bottom of these depths.

Horeb was the place where the children of Israel stripped off their ornaments in the spirit of penitence. And as I already stated Mount Sinai is part of this ridge.

You remember that is the place where the law was given. It was the place where Moses went when seeking to see the glory of God.

He had the petition please show me your glory. He wanted to see more of the radiance and the splendor of God. He had already experienced the revelation of God in the glory cloud but he wanted the Lord to go further in revealing himself.

Too much for his human faculties to perceive God as he is in himself because of the sinfulness of man.

[14 : 03] He couldn't be exposed to the fullness of the radiance of the divine glory and so God said you cannot see my face for man shall not see me and live.

And I will put you in a cleft in the rock. There is a very real sense I believe in which the desire to behold the face of God is a walk in the lives of everyone who is quickened to spiritual life.

And although our sinfulness is a barrier yet the child of grace has a hope that is better expressed by the psalmist when he says as for me I shall behold your face and righteousness when I awake I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

And perhaps you're saying well you've gone a long way from Elijah. Well I don't think so for the reason that this may be exactly what brought Elijah to Horeb to see the face of God.

We are not told that he was commanded to come here but some would argue that because of the instruction given by 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 and we are told that at the end of that journey he came to a cave or some might translated the cave and lodged in it.

[16 : 01] I don't know about you but I tend to think of a cave as somewhere that is not very comfortable a cold dank place.

A cave could be symbolic of darkness or of loneliness. We know that David also spent time in a cave the cave system at Adala and there I am of the view that the cave system is symbolic of the fact of the way in which David took refuge in God in you my soul takes refuge in the psalm that we sung tonight psalm 57 in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge this man goes into a cave on the mountain of God some would say it is the same cleft of the rock where the Lord placed Moses years before remember God is preparing this man for further service and so I ask the question again was it a desire to behold the glory of God that lay behind this journey of forty days and forty nights the specific place the place that is reminiscent of blessed and glorious revelations in the past and is there not a sense in which you and

I seek the same do we not seek to meet the Lord where he met with us in the past around the truth in the fellowship of God's people under the sound and proclamation of the preaching of the gospel and the psalmist gives expression to that desire in his own life that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face as I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place a specific place the cave a place of great biblical significance secondly a searching question we read there he came to a cave and lodged in it and the impression is created that he did not have much time to rest in the cave for we read behold the word of the

Lord came to him now the word behold in the Bible is most times used to focus our attention on something of significance and importance and the Bible states here behold the word of the Lord came to him 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 I remember correctly I think Pink in his book on Elijah was of that mind we are told before now in the preceding chapters 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 and go to Saraphath after many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah and the third year crying saying go now show yourself to Ahab but here

there is a difference the word behold the word of the Lord came to him and he said to him you don't find that in the previous instances where it is used the word of the Lord came to him and he said to him and you could say if this is a theophany that addressed Elijah in the cave you could say that he is calling him back to God to what God says calling him back to the one from whom we receive covenantal promises that is where God calls us when we are prone to wander and to stray from the word of

[20 : 47] God he calls us back and he reminds us of the promises that he gives in his truth for those of you who are familiar with pilgrim's progress do you remember how Christian and hopeful were prisoners at one stage in doubting castle owned by giant despair his wife was named Mrs.

Dividends Banyan had an amazing way of communicating these thoughts with such names that led you to understand the purpose of his book and there they were mistreated and there they were wretched until Christian remembered something he had a key called promise and the key called promise opened the doors and the gates of the castle and so they were able to make good their escape in the cave the question is asked of Elijah what are you doing here Elijah many commentators see this searching question as a form of rebuke to Elijah as if there was implied in the question you should not be here

Elijah some just see it as a searching question and I'm sure perhaps you have heard evangelistic sermons or sermons with an evangelistic thrust from that very question what are you doing here I'm not altogether convinced in my own mind by that line of approach why well when the angel came to this man Elijah in deep in his deep dejection under the broom tree I do not read that the Lord administered any rebuke or that any rebuke is implied in the approach and the ministry of the angel but what I do see under the broom tree is the loving tender care of the

Lord applied to the life of a broken sorrowful man of God and for that reason I do not read into this searching question that it is that a rebuke is implied but what I do read into it is an invitation to unfold his inner burden his cares his feelings and his emotions and circumstances to the Lord that the Lord is asking him to cast his burden upon himself did God not already know what was causing the prophet such distress of course he did God is omniscient it's a factor of encouragement rather than fear for the psalmist when I sit arise to you is 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 and so it seems to me that God is saying in this question to Elijah tell me your inner thoughts what's going on turmoil of your inner life what leaves you like this and the picture that I have in my mind is this to give a very mundane example you know sometimes children they've eaten something and they're feeling very unwell but for a child to vomit that up is worse than death itself and they tend to hold on to it despite the encouragement from a parent and the parent knows if they're able to eject this from their system that they will feel much better the moment they get rid of it and it seems to me that is what is happening here that the eternal father in his grace and mercy and tender love and care is coming to his covenant child and asking him to get rid of what it is that is causing the turmoil in his life that leaves him broken and sorrowing and in dejection and so you find the prophet saying that the main cause of his dejection is this the cause of

[25 : 59] God in Israel that's what is at the heart of his complaint for the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant thrown down your altars killed your prophets with the sword now I know that many adopt a very different approach and see the prophet as wallowing in the trough of self pity I tend to see him as one who is concerned about the Lord's church and the status of the church in his 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 do we share the burden felt by the prophet are we concerned about the faithfulness of the church to the truths of scripture this man had a zeal for the glory and the honor of God a searching question a specific place thirdly a startling revelation we are presented with a picture of awesome power as

God passes in majestic power go out and stand as the command of God on the mount before the Lord and behold the Lord passed by and you're told of the great strong wind that tore the mountains and broken pieces the rocks before the Lord and the Lord was not in the wind and an earthquake and then a fire the writer doesn't seek to interpret fires 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 three are forces that serve to show the weakness and the impotence of man even recently we have been reminded of the power of the wind and the havoc and destruction that took place over in the

Bahamas and so on we are reminded of how these forces can paralyze areas of the world and create tremendous havoc and destruction and man is incapable of preventing it happening despite the advances made in technology we are incapable of preventing these forces from overwhelming us and demonstrating to us the feebleness of man the force of the wind the paralyzing effect of an earthquake the destructive power of a fire and so on and so forth and yet all these forces are under the authority and the power of the one who is the great creator

God and we are told the Lord was not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire and then we are told after this the sound of a low whisper what do you make of that the sound of a low whisper the authorized version translates it as the still small voice when we all want to know what God whispered because you see it was the means of getting Elijah out of the cave when Elijah heard it he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave we're not told what was in the low whisper but when people whisper to one another it's usually for the purpose of preventing others from hearing what they're communicating so you might say that the low whisper here was personal communication from

God to the prophet wasn't for your ears or for mine it truly speaks of the intimacy of the relationship that existed between God and his servant and I think in many ways it demonstrates to us the weakness of power the wind the earthquake the fire didn't have an effect on the prophet that we are told of we see the weakness of power but we also see in this the power of weakness the whisper of God brought him out of the cave wasn't these huge forces that brought him to the entrance of the cave powerful as they might be and what we might tend to think of as being weak is the very power that brought him to the door of the cave so

I say again we see the weakness of power but also the power of weakness and whatever was spoken it is evident that he couldn't resist or oppose the whisper whatever was spoken it's evident that Elijah recognized it in this whisper in the presence of God how do we know because we are told he wrapped his face in his cloak and that reminds you or ought to remind you of another place in the Bible where we read of the seraphim who veiled their faces not their ears but their faces they didn't veiled their ears this man heard the low whisper and it was the means of extricating him from the depths of the cave

[32 : 55] God came to him not as an enemy but as a friend a true friend and how indebted the prophet must have felt at a time when perhaps he felt most alone when all he says the prophets have been slain by the sword and even I I only am left how much you appreciate the presence of a true friend at a time of acute loneliness in your life God making the prophet aware as he made Moses aware that he will not leave nor forsake and so he comes to the door of the cave he comes out this message of the low whisper reached into the very core of his being a powerful message couched in gentleness mercy and grace and often that is how the

Holy Spirit of God works in the hearts and lives of men and women and boys and girls God is a gentle God and we see that in the way Christ deals with men and women during his ministry gentle with the sick gentle with those who were grieving gentle with little children gathering them up in his arms gentle with his disciples and restoring to fellowship after they're denied might and he is also gentle with the wounds that are in your soul and mine and the sins of our hearts because he is the one who says to you and to me come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls a startling revelation a searching question a specific place finally sound advice my time is gone

God says to this man go return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus and he gives him instructions to anointed kings and a prophet a successor to himself and surely in this sound advice that is given by God you can see the sovereignty of God displayed in the advice that is given God is the one who places people in positions of power he puts them on thrones he is working out his own purpose he involves Elijah and matters that go far beyond the days and the times of Elijah because the work of God proceeds is not dependent on me or you or anyone else God's purpose is out worked sometimes the work goes ahead at different paces sometimes quickly sometimes very slowly in our estimation and in all of this

God is saying to you and to me trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding rest in the Lord and patiently wait for him for his purpose will be outworked if I can put it in the words of someone who wants to compose something tweaks gleams of joy and clouds of doubt our feelings come and go our daily state is tossed about in ceaseless ebb and flow thy

purpose of eternal good let me but surely know on this I lean lest let changing mood and feelings come or go no mood of feelings form of thought is constant for a day but thou O 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 he didn't know then what we know now that one day he would stand on another mount along with Moses that he would see the Lord Jesus Christ in human nature transfigured in glory enjoying a conversation about the exodus that was going to be in the life of the only begotten son of God and perhaps then he saw the small minute place that he had in the sovereign purpose of God as he heard the voice of God state this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased listen to him that message does not change

[39 : 03] Elijah in a cave a specific place a searching question a starting revelation sound advice so wherever you are this evening whether you feel you are in a cave whether you feel you are isolated and cut off your God can reach you he can reach right into the core of your being may you too hear the whispering of your eternal and precious friend let us pray or other other res Students