

## **Elijah in the Cave at Horeb**

What is the Bible?

In short, it is the way God has principally revealed Himself to Mankind.

How was it given?

Through men inspired (that is, given the specific words) to write down the truth of God. These men are called Prophets. New Testament Prophets are chiefly the Apostles who were the authenticators of scripture, and they were the last prophets. Once the Apostles died, obviously they could no longer authenticate any scriptures, so the Bible was complete, no more books to be added and no more need for prophets anymore. These men were authenticated by great signs, either miracles or short term future predictions. Elijah was such a man. A man who represented God to men. He is seen as the archetypal old testament prophet.

This is the only way man can really know anything, by God revealing the truth to him. Without God Himself revealing truth, we couldn't trust our senses or our minds to objectively know ultimate truth. Why? Because we'd have no basis to trust them- Without God telling us how we got them, and that they are trustworthy, we would just have to assume their reliability arbitrarily. But if they didn't come into being based on truth and reliability, but by some mindless process based on preserving your genes, then there is no basis to know anything is true. So, what men like Elijah were given to say and write by God is vital to us.

In the account before us, Elijah retreats to a cave in fear of his life. We haven't time to go into the details of why that was, but the fact is, he is being persecuted and men and women seek to destroy him- just like mankind has sought to destroy God's word throughout the ages.

God asks him gently why he is there (see how gently and kindly God deals with his Children, it's similar to Jonah and the gourd)

Elijah is despondent because the covenant is forsaken, God's word is not believed and people are trying to kill him (therefore silence the voice and stop the work of God). He has suffered much and been through many trials and feels utterly alone. Here we find him cast down, he can't see how things could work out and he's had enough of life. But God has brought him here for good reason and he will be shown why. We won't dwell on this, suffice to say, I think we must view the heroes of faith like Elijah through the interpretive lense of Hebrews 11, and not overly condemn him as a mere coward, as some do. This is part of what it says of the great men of faith in the Old Testament;

Heb 11.37b *"they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

Was he referred to as those who dwelt in caves and the world wasn't worthy of him in Heb 11? I think so, and these men are commended. There was some unworthiness in his retreat to the cave and a fear, however I think we must be very careful not to condemn such a mighty figure as Elijah, and we must be more ready to judge his motives as good rather than

bad, even if they were ill judged and display his old earthly nature more than his regenerate one. This man went up against Ahab and Jezebel and all the Prophets of Baal, alone! I for one will not be calling him a coward. He was definitely despondent (who wouldn't be, would we have done better!?) But he hadn't 'back slidden' and his despondency came from a desire for God's word to be known, loved, honoured and followed.

God answers Elijah and fires up His prophet's zeal once again.

How?

With a lesson through his eyes and ears.

With 4 things;

- 1). A Strong wind (rocks broken)
- 2). An Earthquake
- 3). A Fire
- 4). A Still small voice

But what do these mean?

Well, not primarily what I'm going to say, but if we're just looking at the natural aspect of it we can say that, quite apart from the spiritual application of these aspects of the created realm, we could apply this to what we observe from nature in our world. I often think that the Scientists shouldn't have the monopoly on interpreting the natural world. Let loose the intelligence of the artists, poets and designers! What do they see in the patterns and shapes and mechanisms of the natural world. I think they wonder at the beauty and genius of the artistry and design they see. In the forces of nature seeing power to inspire awe and humility. And if they don't attribute these things to the hand of the Creator then they are fighting against their own plain intuition. Even with such things as storms, earthquakes and fires.

But to see the layering of teaching and go deeper, as it were, into the spiritual application is preferable, and will do more for our souls.

This is a fundamental lesson from God to correct His prophet's thinking and to restore his ongoing faith and zeal.

It's a reminder of the importance of the Gospel in the light of the state and condition of Mankind.

We shouldn't interpret the first three things as one lesson if the Holy Spirit has already evidently separated them in the narrative. So for example- they're all to instill a sense of awe and humility in Elijah at God's power. They certainly do do this, but the distinct nature of the three separate elements demand a more separate treatment. Especially because each one ends with the comment of God being not in it, except with the last where He is in it.

One of the keys to correct interpretation of symbols in the Bible is that it should be the most simple and obvious thing that that particular symbol brings to mind. They're not meant to be complex puzzles to solve.

An important aspect to this is the location it happens. The location is significant. Elijah comes to the same mountain range as where the law was given. Whether he did this knowingly or not, God designed it as a providential move of His will, just like a river moves a

fish even though the fish swims freely in the water. It was the place of Sinai where the 10 commandments were given.

This can be an interpretive key.

Now let's look at the different elements as symbols.

- 1) *And, behold, the LORD passed by, and **a great and strong wind** rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind:*

These are the elements of the first event. What can we glean from this in it's most obvious aspects.

A violent wind is often spoken of as an 'act of God', indeed here it's the result of the LORD passing by (that is YHWH the self existent One). The breaking of the rocks is specifically mentioned- this must therefore be significant. Considering the place in which this took place, the breaking of God's law must be what this refers to.

Applied to the individual, this is to be owned by us all. Do you think you'll be counted guiltless by the Perfect Judge of all things? No, there's one thing that unites Mankind in these days of division- we're all law breakers and guilty before God. Have you ever lied? Then you're not good enough for God. Have you committed fornication in your mind? -Spoiled. Have you dishonoured your parents? You're a law breaker. Have you treated the Lord's day just like any other? The tablets are broken. Have you esteemed something as more important than God, even worshipped and served something like an idol? The rocks are broken by the mighty wind before God.

- 2) *"and after the wind **an earthquake**; but the LORD was not in the earthquake:"*

What happens in an earthquake? Creation shakes and the things of man fall. What's the most obvious, simple thing that this brings to our minds? Following on from the breaking of the law of God comes a destructive shaking in the history of Mankind, a resulting fall from a right relationship with Him. The fall of man is like a great earthquake in humanity.

Earthquakes are often taken in Scripture as a symbol of the sudden change in society as a consequence and expression of God's wrath at sin.

Applied to the individual, we can see this in the disasters that can happen in someone's life. Broken relationships, chiefly with God. Fear and pain enter in after the fall and there's a shaking. You no longer have true knowledge, righteousness or holiness. Your mind is fallen from the heights of spiritual understanding. Your character crumbles, the consequences of sin bring conflict and trouble like a disaster. Terrible events come suddenly into your life like the earthquake. A man may be shaken if he's asleep, in order to wake him. Or shaken if he's acting irrationally or foolishly, in order to bring him back to his right mind. In the same way God will shake the lives of individuals to warn. Has he shaken you with things in your life? Caused you to see your lost estate? Consider it a warning.

- 3) *"And after the earthquake **a fire**; but the LORD was not in the fire:"*

This is much more obvious. A Biblical symbol for God's holiness and His great wrath against all sin. This is finally shown in hell. Earthly fiery judgements and warnings and then ultimately the final judgement.

The wrath of God is often avoided by some preachers in a desire not to scare and offend their hearers. But the Bible doesn't avoid it. It's often said Christ spoke more about hell than

heaven. Therefore we shall not avoid it either. The Bible says God is a consuming fire, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God who is angry at sin everyday. It says He will take vengeance, is furious, reserves wrath for His enemies, will not acquit the wicked, His way is in the whirlwind and the storm and the earth is burned before His presence, who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

You may say, "But God is love!". But God was 'not in the whirlwind, the earthquake or the fire'. Not in His love or mercy. These defining attributes of God you'll know nothing of without Christ! Without the atoning work of Christ the Saviour, all you'll be left with of God is His wrath and fierce judgement. His work on Calvary is there for all those that put their trust in Him. Why? Because the wrath due them was taken by Him. The next thing Elijah heard speaks of this.

4) *"and after the fire a **still small voice**."*

God was in this. Still- a whisper, calm. A voice not great in the world, but small- and yet God is in it. Are you searching for truth? The very voice of God. Don't look for it amongst the loud and brash voices of the world. From the loud exhibitionists of the entertainment world. From the chants of the protest crowds or the football stadiums. No, it's heard in a quiet church or read by a parent to a child from the Bible before a child sleeps. The Gospel of peace. Elijah heard it. But some haven't heard it, pity them. Send out the missionaries! But you've heard it. What are you going to do with it? Ignore it? Men will be judged according to what they know. You may say, "But my school friends are much worse than me!". Maybe they weren't taken to church, maybe they don't own a Bible. But you do. You'll be held more responsible.

Why run from God anyway. He's not pursuing you to catch a ruin you. He's pursuing you to free you. Don't be like the frightened animal caught in a trap who struggles against the man who is trying to free it. Christ is the man, let Him release you from your sins and clean you up and restore you to health.

So here we have the voice of God, still and small. What does it say? Well here are ten verses for us to hear what it says:

*Matthew 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

*Mark 10:45: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

*Romans 5:8: God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*Romans 6:23: The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*Romans 8:1: There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

*Romans 8:32: He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

*2 Corinthians 5:21: For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*1 Timothy 1:15: The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.*

*John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

*1 John 4:10: In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

The voice speaks, can you hear it? Elijah the prophet heard it. It caused him to come out of the cave. He covered his face with his garment. This can be seen as a picture of coming to God. The voice calls to you, come out of that cave you've been living in. A cave is cold and damp, no place for a home. This is a cold dark world without God in your life. Wrap your face with humility and come out before God just as you are. He'll ask you, "What doest thou here?". Tell Him. Tell Him how you came to be in such a state of sin, in such a condition of corruption. And He'll speak comforting words to you. Words about a remedy, a way out, a cleansing, a justification, about forgiveness and a new life. You can't hear it if you stay in the cave.

Elijah once again saw things as they really were and the importance of the cause of the Gospel. It was revealed to him that he was not alone after all, there were many others with him in the land, and he goes on to bear much fruit for God to honour and serve Him.

If you're a believer here today, trust God always, even when you can't see His hand in the events of life, trust His heart of kindness and wisdom. He's God, He knows what He's doing! You already know this. Walk in your faith, exercise it daily.

If you're not a believer here today, the message is much the same, except that, you need to step out in faith for the first time. Who are you going to trust? Without God you can't be sure of anything, you don't know what tomorrow may bring or even if there will be a tomorrow. Tomorrow is promised to no man. You can't trust yourself, by this point in life you must have realised how easily you can let yourself and others down. You're a human being after all, with the same condition as all others, that corrupt sinful nature, prone to self deceit. Don't believe in the lie that says "I'm not like everyone else I don't need saving", until you realise you're just like everyone else and you'll spend the endless ages in the same place of condemnation as everyone else who refused such a gracious salvation.

So, we've seen; The broken law, the fall of man, the fire of judgement and the Gospel message. This is the teaching of the Bible from beginning to end. No wonder it restored God's prophet Elijah. Learn the lesson of God today. They were shown to Elijah so they can be written down and shown to us. These are the revealed things of God's word. Recognise their truth by faith and find Him today, don't leave it until tomorrow. Tomorrow is the Devil's council. The Devil will tell you at the beginning of your life- "It's too soon! Wait a while." But at the end of your life he'll tell you- "It's too late!". Don't allow yourself to be manipulated by the Enemy of your own soul.

