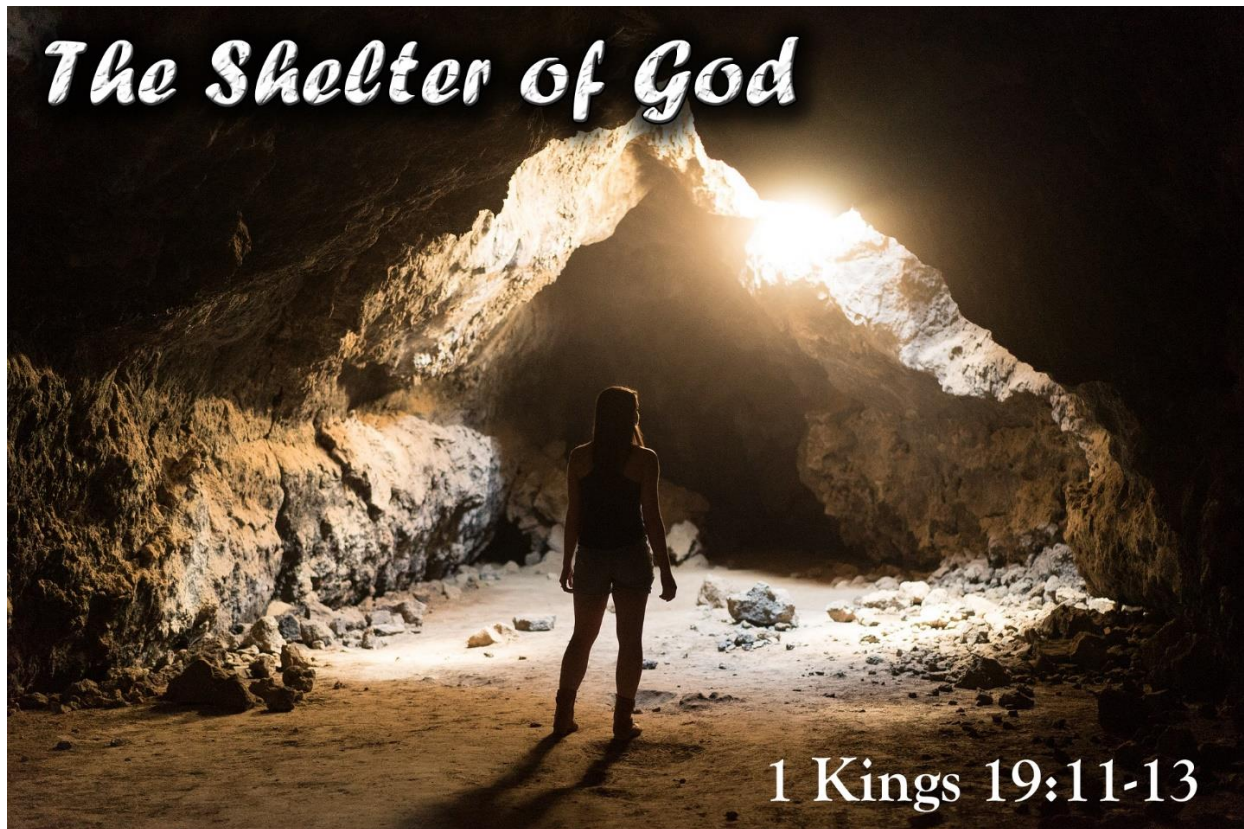


Spiritual Essentials



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Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Special Music: Shelter – Carrollton

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_vVwVaKpmU

We are working our way through a series of sermons based on the Essentials for a Spiritual Life. We started out by noting the fact that there were 5 essential elements necessary for survival when it comes to our physical bodies and that these elements also correlated to elements in our spiritual lives. These elements were:

Air

Water

Food

Shelter

And Rest

We then began to explore that correlation with our spiritual lives. We talked about how air correlated with the Breath of God and how we needed God to breathe into us on a regular basis to keep us focused on His will.

Next, we talked about Living Water and how it is Abundant, Satisfying, Refreshing and Free.

Last week we discussed The Bread of Life and how we need to allow God to take care of our physical needs and how Jesus is the Bread of Life. Anyone who believes in Him will not go hungry. We also touched on how accepting The Bread of Life fills us so that we can feed others.

Today, we are going to talk about The Shelter of God.

There are numerous scriptures in the Bible that deal with the Shelter of God and how God provide shelters to protect us in our time of need. The scripture passage we are focusing on is not generally one of those passages. But I want to show you that God doesn't just provide shelter to protect us but by providing shelter to us, God is also providing a higher level of access to His thoughts, His way and His plan. We will discover that when God provides us with shelter, it is a way of commanding our attention by removing all obstacles between our God and ourselves. It provides a defining moment that let's God speak into us, concisely so that we can comprehend His plan for us.

So, let's see what leads up to this passage of scripture and how it can teach us that God's shelter is more than just protection; that it is a platform for greater things to come.

Elijah's importance to the Jews is undeniable. God used him in a mighty way to speak truth into the children of Israel. When we remember the mount of transfiguration in the New Testament, Peter is wanting to build three tabernacles on the side of the mountain; one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah.

Just like Moses, Elijah is a pivotal character in the old testament. He is revered.

Elijah's story is a long and fascinating one, but we want to pick up that story at the lowest point of his ministry. He had just experienced the greatest spiritual high in all of his ministry. He had challenged the priests of Baal to a battle of the Gods. You remember the story. Elijah challenges the priests of Baal to build an altar for sacrifice in the desert and the Israelites were to build a like altar to Jahovah. Elijah lets the 150 priests of Baal go first and gives them most of the

day to get Baal to bring down fire and consume their sacrifice. Elijah taunts and teases them and then calls upon God to rain fire down on the Israelites sacrifice and the sacrifice is consumed by a ball of fire from heaven. Then Elijah has all the priests of Baal killed. This was truly one of those “Oh, WOW!” moments in the Bible. Followed just as quickly by one of those “Uh, Oh!” moments in the Bible. You see, Elijah suddenly realized what he had done. Queen Jezebel already wanted his head and he had just killed 150 of her priests that supported Baal. He knew that she would be sending an army after him to kill him. And sure enough, a messenger arrived from Jezebel saying just that. So, Elijah, in fear of his life runs to Beersheba in Judah. He leaves his servant there and takes a day’s journey into the wilderness. Well, the past few days have caught up with him and the reality of his situation sinks in, so he just takes a moment and plops himself down under a broom bush. He prays to Lord to just let him die with these words **“I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”** And then he fell asleep.

Have you ever been there? You know I am talking about. That point in your life where you just can’t have one more thing go wrong. That point where you can’t go on if one more person is removed from your life. Where you just can’t handle one more person telling you that you are worthless. Where the next lie, putdown, slander or backstab will surely end you. The straw that will break the camel’s back. The point where you say “I have had enough, Lord. Take me now because I can’t take one more step.” Where sleep seems the only escape and when you wake up, you feel like the world has caved in on you; that you have been run over

by an 18-wheeler. Your mind is numb and every muscle in your body aches. You can't think straight and truly believe that you don't have a friend in the world.

Where all you want to do is curl back up in bed and await your demise.

It was at that this lowest point of his life that the Lord sent an angel to minister to Elijah. The angel gave him, wait for it... Bread and Water. He went back to sleep and got more rest and when he woke up, there was more... Bread and Water. The angel touched him and said, **“Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.”**

Now, I'm no Elijah but I am pretty sure that my question would have been “What journey?” After all, I have had enough and all I want to do is die. But Elijah seems to know just what the Lord wants him to do so he eats the bread and drinks the water and starts on a journey that takes... 40 days and 40 nights. At the end of the journey he arrives at Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God and enters a cave to sleep for the night.

For those of you that might be jumping ahead saying “I see it coming! God provided Elijah with bread and water and now he is providing him with shelter.” I need you to take a step back.

In the morning when Elijah awakens, God speaks to him and says, **“What are you doing here, Elijah?”**

This seems to be totally contrary to what we already know. Somehow, Elijah came to mount Horeb and we believe that it is because God told him to come there and we want to believe that it was because God wanted to provide him with

shelter from the armies of Jezebel. So why would God ask Elijah **“What are you doing here, Elijah?”**

In verse 10, Elijah proceeds to let God know what he thinks God wants to hear. **“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”** Do you really think God doesn't already know all of this? The problem here is that Elijah doesn't understand the question or the situation.

I want to interject something here similar to the issue we had last week when I spoke about seeing a passage of scripture as a whole and not taking things out of context. This is one of those occasions. If we had read through 1 Kings chapter 18, we would have witnessed a conversation that occurred between Obadiah and Elijah that speaks to the passage we are examining now. Elijah was trying to get Obadiah to set up a meeting between Elijah and Ahab which was significant because Ahab hated Elijah and wanted to kill him just like Ahab's wife, Jezebel wanted to. But during the course of the conversation between Elijah and Obadiah we learn that Obadiah has hidden 100 prophets, 50 in two different caves. But this seems to have slipped Elijah's mind when he tells the Lord that he is the only one left. But we shouldn't be too

hard on Elijah. After all, he just spent 40 days and nights in the desert subsisting on bread and water. Not to mention that he was depressed and suicidal.

When we get depressed because we are at the end of our rope, truth has a tendency to blend with fiction into a hybrid truth where rumor becomes fact and fantasy becomes reality. What we are convinced is absolute truth may only be partially true and some things bear no resemblance to truth at all. That is why it is important to have a strong group of people, like a church family, that loves us and keeps us straight on the truth we perceive.

Which brings us to our scripture today. God has placed Elijah in an environment free of distractions so that He can get Elijah's full attention and bring Him out of his funk and back to reality. The shelter is not the cave, it is the place that God has brought Elijah to so that they can commune, which really could have been anywhere that was free of distractions. The cave was for the sake of Elijah. The relationship was for the sake of God. So, when we read this passage of God revealing himself to Elijah we have to understand it was God's way of healing Elijah even when Elijah does not comprehend the level of his brokenness.

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Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

God whispered to Elijah. He breathed into him. He gave Elijah space to breathe and reflect. He allowed for a moment of total communion. And then God asked the same question again.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

And Elijah replied back with the same answer: “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

And patiently God replies, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put

to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

What is God saying here? Why is He not acknowledging Elijah’s concerns? What He is telling Elijah is this: “You don’t have all the answers. You think you are alone, but you are not alone. I have seven thousand men who stand true to me. I reigned down fire from heaven at your command. I have just revealed myself to you in a way that I have revealed myself to no other man. I have whispered into you. I have breathed into you. There is work to be done. And I have your back. Go back the way you came and get back to work! What are you doing here, Elijah?”

I once had the opportunity to visit the home of one of my college buddies. He was from McAlister Oklahoma. I had the opportunity in the morning to stroll around the property and came to a breathtaking plateau. A valley stretched out below me and there was a storm coming in off the mountains. There was that point where the cool wind pushing the storm hit me in the face and smelled of magnificent, rain-soaked mountain air. It was totally awe inspiring and I sat on the edge of that

plateau over an hour, just gazing in wonder knowing that God was sitting right there beside me. It was at that moment that I realized that shelter had nothing to do with caves or buildings. I realized that being in the presence of the creator of the universe is all the shelter I need.

That is how I know when he says to me “What are doing here, Walt?” I know that it is time to get to work; that I am not alone; that God has a better understanding of my situation than me; that he is my shelter and I need no other; and the same God that rained down fire from heaven for Elijah, parted the waters of the Red Sea for Moses, saved Daniel from the Lion’s Den, and sent his only begotten son into this world teach me how to live life and to redeem me so that I can have a relationship with the Almighty, is the same God that has my back.

He is the same God that has your back. He is the same God that breathes into you, gives you Living Water, feeds you with the Bread of Life and provides shelter for you wherever you are and whatever situation you are in. That is how very much God loves you. I beg that you do not push Him away. He wants to make your life beautiful and fulfilling. He wants all of us to lean into Him. He wants to carry us when we can’t take another step. He wants to be our shelter.

Amen

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