



LESSON X.—SEPT. 4.

Elijah Encouraged.

I. Kings xix, 9-18.

Golden Text.

Fear not thou, for I am with thee. Isaiah xlii, 10.

Home Readings.

Monday, Aug. 29.—I. Kings xix, 9-21.  
Tuesday, Aug. 30.—Num. xi, 16-30.  
Wednesday, Aug. 31.—Ps. xxxvii, 12-24.  
Thursday, Sept. 1.—Ps. xxxvii, 27-40.  
Friday, Sept. 2.—Ps. xxix, 1-11.  
Saturday, Sept. 3.—Job xxxviii, 1-15.  
Sunday, Sept. 4.—Rom. xi, 1-12.

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

10. 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, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.

11. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. 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: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

12. And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

13. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

14. 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 the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.

15. And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:

16. And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.

17. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.

18. 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 him.

(By R. M. Kurtz.)

INTRODUCTION.

We take up the Scripture lesson just where we left it last week. Elijah was at Mount Sinai after his long journey, sustained forty days and forty nights by the food miraculously given to him.

Weary with the years of wickedness and idolatry on the part of Israel, and of his own hiding from a wicked king, Elijah wanted to die out there in the desert. But God, instead of yielding to this prayer of his weary servant, supplied nourishment for sustaining his life, and in the strength so given Elijah turns his face toward Mount Sinai, sacred to the Jews as the place where God met with Moses and gave him their laws and institutions.

It seems to have been the yearning of his downcast spirit to get nearer to God, to find him where Moses did, that prompted Elijah

to plod his way across the Arabian wilderness.

THE LESSON STUDY.

Elijah's Complaint. 9, 10. 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'

Elijah came and lodged in a cave in the mountain. It has been suggested that it was the very 'cleft of the rock' where Moses hid when God passed by. Read Exodus xxxiii, 12-23, and notice the similarity between the experiences of these two servants of God.

Soon the word of the Lord came to Elijah, and he was asked, 'What doest thou here?' There were no idolaters here to be brought back to God, no evil king to reprove, no prophets of Baal to put to confusion. Elijah seems to have somehow come to the conclusion that he is unable to accomplish anything for the Lord, so he retreats to a place where he may find, alone and away from men, communion with the God he serves.

He was not the last servant of God to feel thus. Many a faithful pastor, Sunday-school teacher, and Christian worker has felt the same way, when all his efforts have seemed to fail. But God does not hold us responsible for results. Our joy should be chiefly in the fact that we are doing God's will, though it is greatly increased when we see men brought to Christ as a result of our labor.

'I have been very jealous for the Lord,' Elijah answers the question by recounting the evil deeds of Israel, and says that he alone is left of the prophets of God. He has been faithful and anxious that God be worshipped, but now he has fled for his life.

Elijah's Vision of God. 11-14. 'And after the fire a still small voice.'

God does not answer Elijah directly, but bids him go forth and stand upon the mountain. Then God passed by, and his passing was manifested first by a terrific wind, so great as to break in pieces the rocks. But God himself was not in the wind; it indicated his presence but not his character, nor his way of working out his purposes.

Next came an earthquake but God was not in that. Then followed a fire, but God was not in the fire. All these were manifestations of violent physical forces; they had in them nothing that suggested the high nature of God, in his patient dealings with wayward or discouraged men.

But after the fire came 'a still small voice.' Elijah's spiritual perceptions are alive to the true presence of God, and in that still small voice, following the tumult of nature, he recognizes the God with whom he has to do, and its soft tones soothe the prophet's troubled soul.

Wrapping his mantle about his head as though to hide his face from God he goes out and stands to receive further communication from the Lord. Then God asks him the same question that he asked at first, and Elijah repeats his answer. Outwardly the conversation shows nothing new, but Elijah had received a lesson between his first and second answer.

Perhaps he may now have been led to remember the flood, the mighty plagues that afflicted the Egyptians, the opening of the earth to receive Korah and those with him in the wilderness, the punishments of Israel, the recent trial by fire at Mount Carmel. Yet, in spite of all the wrath of God, men still sinned. God was teaching him by the still small voice that, while Israel might be punished, he could not be saved from his waywardness, and God's purposes be accomplished merely by violent outbursts of wrath.

New Duties for Elijah. 15-17. 'And the Lord said unto him, Go.'

Elijah had been successful in his journey to Sinai, for he had met God there, and had talked with him. Now God shows that he has more work for him to do.

He is told first that he is to anoint Hazael king over Syria. This was a Gentile nation, and we are reminded here that God ordains rulers, not only for his chosen people but for the world. 'The powers that be are ordained of God.'

Hazael was the trusted officer of the king reigning over Syria when this message was given, but later, as King of Syria, he was instrumental in punishing Israel.

Next Elijah was told to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel. Jehu also became instrumental in punishing the house of Ahab, and in restoring the worship of Jehovah.

There was another one to be anointed, and

this must have been of great personal concern to Elijah. God told him to anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah, to be his successor. At the same time, Elijah was not to be taken from his earthly labors at once, but his successor was to be appointed now, so that he would have the opportunity of fellowship with and training by Elijah. Read the account of the call of Elisha in the last verses of this chapter.

Verse 17 may cause a little trouble at first reading, as it would indicate from its literal reading that the three persons ordered to be anointed were to destroy all of Israel. However, we must read the record as a whole. God was here referring to the punishment to be meted out to his enemies. Israel's long term of idolatry and wickedness, in spite of their words and deeds, such as at the scene on Mount Carmel, was to bring a time of reckoning. God was now preparing the way of it, and his chief instruments are to be, a Gentile king, a king of Israel, and his own prophet.

The Word of Encouragement. 18. 'Yet will I leave me seven thousand in Israel.' (Revised Version.)

In his complaint to God, Elijah had said, 'I, even I only, am left.' Now God shows him that not only is he to continue his work as a prophet of God, and to have a successor to carry it on when he is gone, but the Lord is to have seven thousand in Israel who would not bow to Baal.

The visit to Sinai was rich in results to Elijah. A season alone with God always is for the discouraged and doubting. The prophet was now encouraged and equipped for new service. So may you be when you hear and obey the still small voice after your struggle with enemies and hostile conditions.

The lesson for Sept. 11 is 'Elijah Taken up into Heaven.' II. Kings ii, 1-11.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Sept. 4.—Topic—New courage for new work. Ps. cxliv, 1-15; Acts xxviii, 15.

Junior C. E. Topic.

JOSEPH'S TRIALS.

Monday, Aug. 29.—An unwise father. Gen. xxxvii, 1-4.

Tuesday, Aug. 30.—The dreamer. Gen. xxxvii, 5-11.

Wednesday, Aug. 31.—The cruel brothers. Gen. xxxvii, 18-22.

Thursday, Sept. 1.—The obedient son. Gen. xxxvii, 12-17.

Friday, Sept. 2.—A prayer in time of trouble. Ps. cxliii, 7-10.

Saturday, Sept. 3.—A promise of deliverance. Ps. l, 15.

Sunday, Sept. 4.—Topic—A great trial and its lessons. Gen. xxxvii, 23-28; l, 29.

How to Make the Most of the Library.

Sometimes the use of a public or Sunday-school library is so hemmed about with restraints that the object seems to be how to prevent, rather than how to promote its use. We had narrated to us the other day a very striking example of the very contrary of this, showing 'how to do it,' instead of 'how not to do it.' It was a neighborhood which after fifty years' settlement was still without a Methodist church. The people started a school and bought a library of good books. Not only the members of the school but the members of the congregation, and even those who went to no church were invited to avail themselves of the books. It was objected that the books would soon be worn out. 'Of course they would,' was the response, 'that is what they are made for, and the sooner they are worn out the sooner we will get a new library.'

The result was what might have been expected, the school increased in a short time from thirty-five to seventy members, also a preaching appointment was taken up, a congregation was gathered and before long a neat church was built and paid for and a flourishing centre of religious, social and intellectual life was established. We strongly urge schools and churches to make the most of this potent influence for uplifting the people, brightening dull, dark lives, and for creating an interest in church life and religious themes.