

The Sunday-School.

THIRD QUARTER,
LESSON X.—Sept. 4.

ELIJAH ENCOURAGED.

I KINGS 19: 9-18.

THE LESSON.—The remainder of the chapter, including the revelation to Elijah and the anointing of Elisha to succeed him. Also, a rapid survey of I Kings 20-22, the story of Naboth, the wars with Syria, and the death of Ahab.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Isa. 41: 10.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—Time.—Forty days after the last lesson. About B. C. 907 (common chronology), B. C. 870 (revised chronology).

Place.—Mt. Sinai, between the northern arms of the Red Sea, "Sinai and Horeb are practically interchangeable."—Hastings' Dict. of the Bible.

Rulers.—Ahab, king of Israel; Jehoshaphat, king of Judah; Ben-hadad II, king of Syria.

Place in the History.—Elijah, the great great religious leader of Israel, receives a new revelation of Jehovah in the place where Jehovah revealed himself to Moses. He learns of great changes to come in the government of Israel and Syria.

Learn by heart Vs. 15-18; Psa. 46: 10; Zech. 4: 6.

ELIJAH GETS COURAGE FROM A NEW VIEW WITH GOD.—Vs. 9-12. And he came thither. To Horeb, Mount Sinai. This is, next to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the most sacred place on earth, because here the law was given to Moses. Unto a cave. It may be that the cave was the very "cleft of the rock" where Moses is said to have been hid while Jehovah passed by when he proclaimed his glorious name. And lodged there. Passed the night there. The word of the Lord came to him. Probably in vision as he slept. What doest thou here, Elijah? Is there no more work to be done? It was a question full of tender reproof.

Practical. "Life is the time for doing. The world is a great workshop, in which there is no room for drones. There is plenty to do. Evil to put down; good to build up; doubters to be directed; prodigals to be won back; sinners to be sought."

I have been very jealous. Unwilling that any other god should have the worship. For the Lord (Jehovah) God of hosts. The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant. The command against idolatry. I only, am left. Though Obadiah had preserved a hundred prophets in a cave, they had not stood with Elijah on Carmel. And he said, Go forth. From the cave. A great and strong wind. A hurricane, common in the region of Sinai. The Lord was not in the wind. After the wind an earthquake. No manifestation of nature is more terrifying. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. It was but the slightest manifestation of his almighty power.

After the earthquake a fire. The blaze of Eastern lightning. After the fire a still small voice. At once Elijah recognized the presence of Jehovah, wrapped his face in his mantle in reverent awe, went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave to receive God's further teachings.

The Lessons for Elijah. 1. That he

did not understand God, and needed to learn.

2. That God's ways are not man's ways.

3. That the world is in God's hands, and safe.

4. That though God is sometimes, as on Carmel, the God of fire, yet he prefers less startling modes of work. These truths must have dawned upon Elijah slowly. They were the basis of the new courage that animated him to the close of his life.

ELIJAH GETS COURAGE FROM A NEW START IN WORK.—Vs. 13-21. Elijah was left to ponder the lesson of Jehovah's gentle manifestation. God's next word was a command which was a lesson in humility. What doest thou hear? Perhaps a day had elapsed since Jehovah asked the same question. Return on thy way back to Israel to the wilderness of Damascus, which had been recently traversed. And when thou comest. To Damascus. Anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. Ben-hadad II was king of Syria at the time, and Hazael was his confidential officer. Hazael became a powerful king. Something of this future may have been disclosed to Elijah. Jehu the son (grandson) of Nimshi. He was the commanding general over the army of Israel, who, in the days of Jehoram, Ahab's son, slew him, his mother Jezebel, and all Ahab's descendants, restoring the worship of Jehovah. All this also may have been disclosed to Elijah. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah. Abel-meholah was west of the Jordan not far from Elijah's native Gilead. To be prophet in thy room. Not immediately, but to be in training for the work.

How Did Elijah Obey? He went at once to Elisha, and threw his mantle over him—a sign equivalent to anointing. In God's time, though long afterward, on Elisha's instigation and at the hands of an unknown prophet, Jehu was anointed; and Elisha, doubtless on Elijah's instruction, told Hazael that he was to be king. The sword of Hazael. For the record of the punishment inflicted by Hazael see 2 Kings 8: 28, 29; 10: 32, 33; 13: 3. The sword of Jehu. For the bloody deeds of Jehu see 2 Kings 9: 24, 27, 33; 10: 1-7, 18-25. Shall Elisha slay. There is no record that Elisha slew any with his own hand. Elisha slew God's enemies "by the words of his month."

Elijah Lonely No Longer. Yet I have left me. Not only are the seven thousand faithful now; they will continue faithful. Seven thousand in Israel. These figures are obviously symbolic, indicating a larger number of persons. Every mouth which hath not kissed Baal. Kissing images was a sign of idolatry then as it is now. The foot of the statue of St. Peter in Rome is worn away with kisses.

Elijah's New Courage, therefore, came from: 1. The new vision of God on Horeb.

2. The knowledge that God had other ways than one of carrying out his purposes.

3. The knowledge that matters were already in better shape than he had thought, and were to be better still.

4. The revelation of the power of quiet, peaceful obedience, the "still, small voice" of God speaking through his faithful, trusting children.

5. Something given him at once to do.

6. A noble and inspiring associate and co-worker added to his life.

ELIJAH THE AVENGER OF NABOTH. — I Kings 21: 1-29. For five or six years after these events Elijah emerged from the retirement into which he seems to have gone, quietly instructing Elisha and other young prophets. Naboth was a bold and consistent follower of Jehovah (V. 3). He owned a vineyard next to Ahab's palace at Jezreel, and when the king wished to buy it to add to the palace grounds, he refused. Jezebel sent orders to the magistrates of Jezreel, bidding them carry out a diabolical plot. A fast was appointed, to mourn over some great wrong and impiety committed by the city against the king and God; and while Naboth was occupying the conspicuous place in the assembly to which he was entitled; hired informers were openly to accuse him of cursing God and the king.

The programme was followed. With scarce the pretense of a trial Naboth was condemned and stoned to death. His sons also were slain, and his property confiscated.

While Ahab was in the coveted vineyard, Elijah appeared and pronounced an awful doom upon him, his cruel wife and his posterity. The king's swift and profound repentance procured a postponement of the sentence, but ultimately it was all accomplished. See I Kings 22: 37, 38; 2 Kings 9: 24, 25, 30-37.

AHAB, A CONTRAST TO ELIJAH. — I Kings, 20, 22. These two chapters relate the remainder of Ahab's life, his wars and his death.

A CONTRAST.

AHAB.

Had command of a nation's wealth. Commanded the armies of Israel.

Was surrounded by throngs, yet must often have been lonely.

Wore rich robes, and a troubled heart beneath them.

Ate the richest food the world could supply, and yet had a starved soul.

Lived in palaces, sumptuous within and without,—and tormented himself for one bit of land the more.

Was king of Israel, yet under the thumb of a wicked woman.

Gave way to his feelings like a child when he was thwarted.

Worshipped idols and fostered their abominations.

Lived for self, and gained misery.

Died a violent death, in defeat and disgrace.

Is pilloried in history as a mean rascal, the curse of his country.

ELIJAH.

Was heir to the infinite riches of God.

Was attended by the hosts of heaven.

Was almost always alone, but was never lonely, for God was with him.

Wore a rough sheepskin cloak, with a peaceful, confident heart beneath it.

Ate bird's food and widow's fare, and was a physical and spiritual athlete.

Lived in caves and in a widow's poor abode, and always had a happy home.

Had no least office or authority, yet every one obeyed him.

Grieved only when God's cause seemed tottering.

Was acquainted with the one God, and served him faithfully.

Lived for others and gained happiness.

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THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

God's revelation of himself to Elijah. There is always more to learn about God.

God is always revealing himself in different ways to different men, according to their needs and the needs of their times; to Moses, a flaming bush; to Ezekiel, a flaming man; to Elijah, a still, soft voice; to John, the sound of many waters; to Samuel, as a call in the darkness; to Paul, as a light above the midday sun; to Korah, as an earthquake; to Nadab and Abihu as lightning; to Job, as a whirlpool; at Pentecost, as a rushing wind. Do not condemn another's vision of God because it is different from ours.

God is very patient with our slow comprehension and our failures to understand him.

Whoever will work with God must learn to work.

The final lesson for us is not to wait for some startling manifestation of God, but learn to see him in the common things and quiet, daily events.



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