

September 20- September 26

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

“After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing.”

1 Kings 19:12

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 16-21

QUOTATION FOR MEDITATION

“The most sublime of God’s works are not his prodigious acts of power but his acts of grace” (p. 19).

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Sep 20	2 Sam 16	2 Cor 9	Eze 23	Ps 70, 71
Sep 21	2 Sam 17	2 Cor 10	Eze 24	Ps 72
Sep 22	2 Sam 18	2 Cor 11	Eze 25	Ps 73
Sep 23	2 Sam 19	2 Cor 12	Eze 26	Ps 74
Sep 24	2 Sam 20	2 Cor 13	Eze 27	Ps 75, 76
Sep 25	2 Sam 21	Gal 1	Eze 28	Ps 77
Sep 26	2 Sam 22	Gal 2	Eze 29	Ps 78:1-37

PERSONAL REFLECTION

BIBLE LESSONS IN TIGHT PLACES

BRENDON JOHNSON

Suffering, the New Testament tells us, is the Lord's means of perfecting His people (Heb. 5:7-9; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). When He leads through dark valleys, into dry deserts, or down roads that seem like dead ends, His main purpose (not always immediately obvious) may be to teach His servant some truth. I offer a few examples from my experience in Christian work.

Half a dozen years ago I was in church listening to a sermon. I do not recall what the sermon was about; I may not have been paying much attention. It was a time of personal crisis—for a friend, not for myself—and my mind was wrestling with the problem of a Christian who did not see the need to live God's way.

I had enough awareness of the preacher to follow him to Psalm 119. While he commented on another verse, my eyes fell on these words: "It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law" (verse 126). The original reference, no doubt, was to the "oppressors" (v. 121), but the verse was just what I needed to hear. I can gratefully report that God did work in that situation, but more memorable than the change He made in my friend's heart was the lesson He taught me. A challenging ministry problem with no apparent resolution should not make me feel that I am stuck with nowhere to turn. When someone flouts His law, just then it is time for God Himself to work.

Another lesson, learned by those only who have experienced loss in the Lord's service, is the knowledge of what Paul calls the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. The inability to make any headway with people you are trying to help is one kind of ministry hardship. Another is the effect such difficulty has on you personally. From my experience working with university students, two or three cases come to mind of a person who makes a series of ungodly choices and walks away from the way of righteousness. If you have ever worked with people, you know something of the wounds that can result.

Yet here, too, the Lord has a lesson for His servants. It is all over the Bible, especially the New Testament. It came to me once from the Lord's words after His last supper, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). Reflecting on a period of intense personal sorrow, I wrote that year in my annual Easter meditation that our sharing in Jesus' life allows us to rejoice in suffering, even in death. Suffering is part of our discipleship, and His promise of life means that our present trouble is not the end. It leads to glory.

One more example. At a time when I was confronted with the failure of people who should have been fellow laborers in the ministry, I read Psalm 61 in my regular Bible reading. How many times had I read these words? Yet this time, they came with a fresh message: "Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name" (verse 5). If God has given me eternity, where is room for disappointment in His service today? That promise kept me from what could have been discouragement.

I could go on, but no doubt you can add examples from your own life. The Lord works when I can do nothing. He assures me of His fellowship, especially in suffering. He gives hope that lasts forever. Because I was letting the Bible speak to me when I faced hard times, I learned such precious truths as these.

Does the Lord bring His people into tight places? Yes. Places so tight that only His wings can protect them. Places so narrow that they can turn only to Him. Places so guarded that the enemy cannot get at them. Places where they can hear no voice but His.

In those places, He teaches them.