**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 KINGS-004. GREAT PREPARATIONS FOR A GREAT WORK by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father: for Hiram was ever a lover of David. 2. And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, 3. Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the Lord his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. 4. But now the Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. 6. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto My name. 6. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians. 7. And. it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the Lord this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people. 8. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: and I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. 9. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household. 10. So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees, and fir trees, according to all his desire. 11. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat, for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year. 12. And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as He promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together."*

*1 Kings 5:1-12*

The building of the Temple was begun in the fourth year of Solomon's reign (1 Kings vi. 1). The preparations for so great a work must have taken much time, so that the arrangement with Hiram recorded in this passage was probably made very early in the reign. That probability is strengthened if we suppose, as we must do, that the embassy from Hiram mentioned in verse I was sent to congratulate Solomon on his accession. If so, the latter's proposal to get timber and stones from the Lebanon would be made at the very commencement of the reign. Three years would not be more than enough to get the material ready and transported. Great designs need long preparation. Raw haste wastes time; deliberation is as needful before beginning as rapid action is when we have begun.

**I.** Verses 3-5 set forth very forcibly the motives which impelled the young king to the work, and may suggest to us the motives which should urge us to diligence in building a better temple than he reared. He begins by reference to his father's foiled wish, and to the reason why David could not build the house. Not only was it inappropriate that a warlike king should build it, but it was impossible that, whilst his thoughts were occupied and his resources taxed by war, he should devote himself to such a work. In Assyria and Egypt the great warrior kings are the great temple-builders, but a divine decorum forbade it to be so in Israel.

Solomon next thankfully describes his own happier circumstances. Observe his designation of Jehovah in verse 4 as my God, and compare with verse 3, where He is called David's God. The son had inherited the divine protection and the father's sense of personal relation to Jehovah. That is a better legacy than a throne. Well had it been for Solomon if he had held by the faith of his first days of royalty! Such a sense of a personal bond of love protecting on the one hand, and love trusting and obeying on the other, is the spring of all true service of God, whether it is busied in temple-building or in anything else.

We note also the grateful recognition of benefits received, and the tracing of peace and outward prosperity to God's care. There was not a cloud in the sky. The horizon was clear all round, and it was the Lord my God, who had made this ease for Solomon. We are often more ready to recognise God's hand in sorrows than in joys. When He smites, we try to say It is the Lord! Do we try to say it when all things are smooth and bright?

The effect of blessings should be thankfulness, and the proof of thankfulness is service. So Solomon did not take prosperity as an inducement to selfish luxurious repose, but heard in it God's call to a great task. If all the rich men and all the leisurely women who call themselves Christians would do likewise, there would be plenty of workers and of resources for Christ's service, which now sorely lacks both. How many of such lay up treasure for themselves, and are not rich toward God! How many fritter away their leisure in vanities, having time for any amusement or folly, but none for Christian service!

The man whom Jesus called Thou fool! not the wise king, is the pattern for a sad number of professing Christians. Thou hast much goods laid up for many years. What then? I purpose to build an house for the name of the Lord? By no means. I will build greater barns, and that will give me something to do, and then I will take mine ease.

We note, too, that Solomon was impelled to his great work by the knowledge that God had appointed him to do it. The divine word concerning himself, spoken to his father, sounded in his ears, and gave him no rest till he had set about obeying it (v. 5). The motives of the great temple-builders of old, as they themselves expound them in hieroglyphics and cuneiform, were largely ostentation and the wish to outdo predecessors; but Solomon was moved by thankfulness and by obedience to his father's will, and still more, to God's destination of him. If we would look at our positions and blessings as he looked at his in the fair dawning of his reign, we should find abundant indications of God's will regarding our work.

Solomon uses a remarkable expression as to the purpose of the Temple. It is to be an house for the name of the Lord. That is not the same as for the Lord. Pagan temples might be intended by their builders for the actual residence of the god, but Solomon knew that the heaven of heavens could not contain Him, much less this house which he was about to build. We are fairly entitled, then, to lay stress on that phrase, the Name. It means the whole self-revelation of God, or, rather, the character of God as made known by that self-revelation.

The Temple was, then, to be the place in which the God who fills earth and heaven was to manifest Himself, and where His servants were to behold and reverence Him as manifested. The Shechinah was the symbol, and in one aspect was a part, of that self-revelation. However, in common speech the Temple was spoken of as the house of Jehovah. The same thought which is expressed in Solomon's fuller phrase underlay the expression,--He dwelt not in temples made with hands but His name was set there, and the structure was reared, not so much for Him as that worshippers might there meet Him.

**II.** The rest of the passage deals with Solomon's request to Hiram, and the preparation of the material for the Temple. Solomon's first care was to secure timber and stone. His own dominions can never have been well wooded, and there are many indications that the great central knot of mountainous land, which included the greater part of his kingdom, was comparatively treeless. He therefore proposed to Hiram to supply timber from the great woods on Lebanon, which have now nearly died out, and offered liberal payment.

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles makes Solomon offer specified quantities of provisions for Hiram's workmen, and makes Hiram accept the terms. Verse 11 of this chapter says that the provisions named there were for the Tyrian king's household. This may possibly mean the workmen, who would be regarded as Hiram's slaves, but, more probably, household means court, and Solomon had not only to feed the army of workmen, but to supply as much again for the great establishment which Hiram kept up. The little slip of seacoast, with the mountain rising sharply behind, which made Hiram's kingdom, could not grow enough for his people's wants. His country was nourished by Palestine, long centuries after this time (Acts 12:20), and the same was the case in Solomon's period. In verse 11, the quantity of oil is impossibly small as compared with that of wheat. 2 Chronicles reads twenty thousand instead of twenty, and the Septuagint inserts thousand in verse 11, which is probably correct.

With all his Oriental politeness and probably real wish to oblige a powerful neighbour, Hiram was too true a Phoenician not to drive a good bargain. He was king of a nation of shopkeepers, and was quite worthy of the position. Nothing for nothing seems to have been his motto, even with friends. He would love Solomon, and send him flowery congratulations, and talk as if all he had was his ally's, but when it came to settling terms he knew what his cedars were worth, and meant to have their value.

There are a good many people who get mixed up with religious work, and talk as if it were very near their hearts, who have as sharp an eye to their own advantage as he had. The man who serves God because he gets paid for it, does not serve Him. The Temple may be built of the timber and stones that he has supplied, but he sold them, and did not give them, therefore he has no part in the building.

How different the uncalculating lavishness of Solomon! He knows no better use for treasures than to expend them on God's service, and all for love, and nothing for reward. That Is the true temper for Christian work. He to whom Christ has given Himself should give himself to Christ; and he who has given himself should and will keep back nothing, nor seek for cheap ways of serving the Lord, He who gives all, be it two mites, or a fishing-boat and some torn nets, or great wealth like that which Solomon found in his father's treasuries and devoted to building the Temple, gives much; and he who gives less than he can gives little.

Solomon's work was, after all, outward work, and fitter for that early age than the imitation of it would be now. The days for building temples and cathedrals are past. The universal religion hallows not Gerizim nor Jerusalem, but every place where souls seek God The spiritual religion asks for no shrines reared by men's hands; for Jesus Christ is the true Temple, where God's name is set, and where men may behold the manifested Jehovah, and meet with Him. But we have work to do for Christ, and a temple to build in our own souls, and a stone or two to lay in the great Temple which is being built up through the ages. Well for us if we use our resources and our leisure, for such ends with the same promptitude, thankful surrender, and sense of fulfilling God's purpose, as animated the young king of Israel!