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

**1 KINGS-008. PROMISES AND THREATENINGS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do. 2. That the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared unto him at Gibeon. 3. And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before Me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put My name there for ever; and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually, 4. And if thou wilt walk before Me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep My statutes and My judgments: 5. Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. 6. But if ye shall at all turn from following Me, ye or your children, and will not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: 7. Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house which I have hallowed for My name, will I cast out of My sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people: 8. And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and to this house? 9. And they shall answer, Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the Lord brought upon them all this evil.--."*

*1 Kings 9:1-9*

The successful end of a great work is often the beginning of a great reaction. When the tension is slackened, the whole nature of the worker is relaxed, and the temptation to slothful self-indulgence is strong. God knows our frame, and mercifully times His manifestations to the moments of special need. So, when Solomon had finished his great task, the Lord appeared the second time, as He had appeared at Gibeon. There had been no manifest token of approval during all the years of building the Temple, for none was needed; but now there was danger that the finished work might be followed by languor and indifference, and therefore once more God spoke words of stimulus, both promises and warnings.

A solemn alternative is set before the king, both parts of which are fitted to rouse his energy and inspire him to faithful obedience. The same alternatives are presented to each of us. In verses 3-5 God promises blessed results from clinging to Him and keeping His statutes; in verses 6-9 He mercifully threatens the tragic issues of departure. In applying these to ourselves we must remember that outward prosperity was attached to a devout life more closely in Israel than it is now. But, though the form of the blessings dependent on doing God's will alters, the reality remains unaltered.

**I.** The promises to Solomon are preceded by the assurance that his prayer had been heard. The answer corresponds very beautifully to the petitions. God has put His name in the Temple, as the descent of the Glory to rest between the cherubim visibly showed, and thus has fulfilled Solomon's petition; but the answer surpasses the prayer in that the presence of the Name is promised for ever. Similarly, in Psalm 132., the answer to the petition Arise into Thy rest transcends the petition which it answers, and adds the same promise of perpetuity, This is My rest for ever. Again, Solomon had prayed, that Thine eyes may be open towards this house, and God answers with the expanded promise that not His eyes only, but His heart shall be there perpetually. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, and He delights to surprise us with over-answers to our prayers. We cannot widen our desires so far but that His gifts will stretch beyond them on every side.

But the promise of perpetual dwelling in the Temple is conditional, as appears in the latter part of God's answer, though no condition is stated at first. The promises to Solomon individually are all contingent. The all-important if at the beginning of verse 4 governs the whole. The divine eulogium on David, which introduces these promises, suggests how mercifully God regards the imperfect lives of His servants. That merciful interpretation of conduct is removed by a whole universe from palliation of sin. It affords no ground for our thinking little of our inconsistencies. David's crime was sternly rebuked and sorely punished, but still his life, in its main drift and outline, could be presented as a pattern, as being marked by integrity of heart and uprightness. The moon shines like a disc of silver, though its surface is pitted with extinct volcanoes.

We may note, too, the pregnant description in outline of the elements of a devout life, as here enjoined on Solomon. The first requisite is to walk before God; that is, to nourish a continual consciousness of His presence, and to regulate all actions and thoughts under the thrilling and purifying sense of being ever in the great Taskmaster's eye. Only we are not to think of Him as only a Taskmaster, but as a loving Friend and Helper. A child is happy in its little work or play when it knows that its father is looking on with sympathy. The sense of God's eye being on us should make a sunshine in a shady place, should lighten labour and sweeten care. It is at the root of practical obedience, as its place in this sequence shows; for there follow it, in verse 4, integrity of heart and uprightness, on which again follow obedience to all God's commandments.

First must come the clear recognition of God's relation to us. That recognition will influence our relation to Him, bending hearts to love and wills to submit, and the whole inward being to cleave to Him. Thence, and only thence, will issue in the life the streams of practical obedience. It is vain to seek to produce righteous deeds unless our hearts are right, and it is as vain to labour at making our hearts right unless thoughts of what God is to us have purified them. Morality is rooted in religion. On the other hand, no knowledge of the truth about God is worth anything unless it touches the hidden man of the heart, and then passes outward to mould conduct. Faith without works is dead. Correct theology and glowing emotions lack their consummation if they do not impel to holy and God-pleasing living.

The reward promised in verse 5 is for Solomon alone. His throne is to be established for ever. The duration intended by that expression is therefore not absolutely unlimited, but equivalent to during thy lifetime. Solomon could only affect himself by his obedience. The continuance of the kingdom after him depended on his successors. His possession of the throne during his life was the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise to David referred to in verse 5, but it was only the beginning, and, like all God's promises, it was contingent on obedience. We receive no outward kingdom if we are servants of God; but, in deepest truth, the righteous man is a king, lord of himself, though not of lands. All creatures serve the soul that serves God, and all Christ's brethren share in His royalty.

**II.** The second part of this divine utterance is addressed to the whole nation, as is marked by the ye there compared with the thou in verse 4, and it lays down for succeeding generations the conditions on which the new Temple, that stood glittering in the bright Eastern sunshine, should retain its pristine beauty. While the address to Solomon incited to obedience by painting its blessed consequences, that to the nation reaches the same end by the opposite path of darkly portraying the ruin that would be caused by departure from God. God draws by holding out a hand full of good things, and He no less lovingly drives by stretching out a hand armed with lightnings.

A plain declaration of the evils that dog disobedience is as loving as a bright vision of the good that attends on submission. The sternest threatenings of Scripture are spoken that they may never need to be executed. There is no more foolish misconception of Christianity than that which calls it harsh because it reveals that the wages of sin is death. Note that the threatenings come second, not first. God's heart is averse to smite. To lavish blessing is His delight, and judgment is His work, His strange work, forced on Him by sin.

The special sin against which Israel was warned was that to which it was specially prone and tempted by its circumstances. When all the nations worshipped stocks and stones, it was hard to keep thy faith so pure as to have no share in the universal bewitchment. So the whole history of the people is one of lapses into idolatry and of chastisements leading to temporary amendment, until the long, sharp lesson of the Captivity eradicated the disposition to be as the nations around. No doubt, idolatry in its crudest forms is outgrown now in Western lands, but sense still craves material embodiment of the unseen, and still feels the pressure of the material and palpable. Hence the earthward direction of so many lives. Asthmatical patients often breathe more easily in the slums of a city than in pure mountain air, and sense-bound men find difficulty in respiration on the heights of a religion which minimises the appeal to sense.

The penalty attached to departure from God was the loss of the land. Israel kept it on a tenure like that of some of our English nobility, who hold their estates on condition of doing some service to the sovereign. Of course, that connection between serving God and national prosperity involved continual supernatural intervention, and cannot be applied entirely to national prosperity now; but it still remains true that moral and religious corruption saps the foundations of a people's well-being, and, when carried far enough, destroys a people's existence. The solemn threat of becoming a proverb and a byword among all peoples is quoted, apparently from Deuteronomy xxviii. 37, and has been only too terribly fulfilled for weary centuries.

The promise in verse 3, that God's eyes and heart should be perpetually on the Temple, has now the condition attached that Israel should cleave to the Lord. Otherwise it will be cast out of His sight, and be a mark for scorn and wonder. The vivid representation of a dialogue between passers-by is quoted from Deuteronomy 29:24-26, where it is spoken in reference to the nation. It carries the solemn thought that God's name is made known among the heathen by the punishment of His unfaithful people, not less really, and sometimes more strikingly, than by the blessings bestowed on the obedient. If we will not magnify Him by joyous service, by rewarding which, with good He can magnify Himself, He will magnify Himself on us by retribution, the more severe as our blessings have been the greater. The lightning-scathed tree, standing white in the forest, witnesses to the power of the flash, as its leafy sisters in their green beauty proclaim the energy of the sunshine. Israel has, perhaps, been a more convincing witness for God, in its homeless centuries, than ever it was when at rest in the good land. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.