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

**2 CHRONICLES-019. A LOVING CALL TO REUNION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel. 2. For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. 3. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. 4. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. 5. So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written. 6. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. 8. Now, be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into His sanctuary, which He hath sanctified for ever: and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. 9. For if ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from you, if ye return unto Him. 10. So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. 11. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. 12. Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the Lord. 13. And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation."*

*2 Chronicles 30:1-13*

The date of Hezekiah's passover is uncertain, for, while the immediate connection of this narrative with the preceding account of his cleansing the Temple and restoring the sacrificial worship suggests that the passover followed directly on those events, which took place at the beginning of the reign, the language employed in the message to the northern tribes (vers. 6, 7, 9) seems to imply the previous fall of the kingdom of Israel, If so, this passover did not occur till after 721 B.C., the date of the capture of Samaria, six years after Hezekiah's accession.

The sending of messengers from Jerusalem on such an errand would scarcely have been possible if the northern kingdom had still been independent. Perhaps its fall was thought by Hezekiah to open the door to drawing the remnant that were escaped back to the ancient unity of worship, at all events, if not of polity. No doubt a large number had been left in the northern territory, and Hezekiah may have hoped that calamity had softened their enmity to his kingdom, and perhaps touched them with longings for the old worship. At all events, like a good man, he will stretch out a hand to the alienated brethren, now that evil days have fallen on them. The hour of an enemy's calamity should be our opportunity for seeking to help and proffering reconciliation. We may find that trouble inclines wanderers to come back to God.

The alteration of the time of keeping the passover from the thirteenth day of the first month to the same day of the second was in accordance with the liberty granted in Numbers ix. 10, 11, to persons unclean by contact with a dead body or in a journey afar off. The decision to have the passover was not taken in time to allow of the necessary removal of uncleanness from the priests nor of the assembling of the people, and therefore the permission to defer it for a month was taken advantage of, in order to allow full time for the despatch of the messengers and the journeys of the farthest northern tribes. It is to be observed that Hezekiah took his subjects into counsel, since the step intended was much too great for him to venture on of his own mere motion. So the overtures went out clothed with the authority of the whole kingdom of Judah. It was the voice of a nation that sought to woo back the secessionists.

The messengers were instructed to supplement the official letters of invitation with earnest entreaties as from the king, of which the gist is given in verses 6-9. With the skill born of intense desire to draw the long-parted kingdoms together, the message touches on ancestral memories, recent bitter experiences, yearnings for the captive kinsfolk, the instinct of self-preservation, and rises at last into the clear light of full faith in, and insight into, God's infinite heart of pardoning pity.

Note the very first words, Ye children of Israel, and consider the effect of this frank recognition of the northern kingdom as part of the undivided Israel. Such recognition might have been misunderstood or spurned when Samaria was gay and prosperous; but when its palaces were desolate, the effect of the old name, recalling happier days, must have been as if the elder brother had come out from the father's house and entreated the prodigal to come back to his place at the fireside. The battle would be more than half won if the appeal that was couched in the very name of Israel was heeded.

Note further how firmly and yet lovingly the sin of the northern kingdom is touched on. The name of Jehovah as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, recalls the ancient days when the undivided people worshipped Him, and the still more ancient, and, to hearers and speakers alike, more sacred, days when the patriarchs received wondrous tokens that He was their God, and they were His people; while the recurrence of Israel as the name of Jacob adds force to its previous use as the name of all His descendants. The possible rejection of the invitation, on the ground which the men of the north, like the Samaritan woman, might have taken, that they were true to their fathers worship, is cut away by the reminder that that worship was an innovation, since the fathers of the present generation had been apostate from the God of their fathers. The appeal to antiquity often lands men in a bog because it is not carried far enough back. The fathers may lead astray, but if the antiquity to which we appeal is that of which the New Testament is the record, the more conservative we are, the nearer the truth shall we be.

Again, the message touched on a chord that might easily have given a jarring note; namely, the misfortunes of the kingdom. But it was done with so delicate a hand, and so entirely without a trace of rejoicing in a neighbour's calamities, that no susceptibilities could be ruffled, while yet the solemn lesson is unfalteringly pointed. He gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Behind Assyria was Jehovah, and Israel's fall was not wholly explained by the disparity between its strength and the conquerors'. Under and through the play of criminal ambition, cruelty, and earthly politics, the unseen Hand wrought; and the teaching of all the Old Testament history is condensed into that one sad sentence, which points to facts as plain as tragical. In deepest truth it applies to each of us; for, if we trespass against God, we draw down evil on our heads with both hands, and shall find that sin brings the worst desolation--that which sheds gloom over a godless soul.

We note further the deep true insight into God's character and ways expressed in this message. There is a very striking variation in the three designations of Jehovah as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (ver. 6), the god of their [that is, the preceding generation] fathers (ver. 7), and your God (ver. 8). The relation which had subsisted from of old had not been broken by man's apostasy, Jehovah still was, in a true sense, their God, even if His relation to them only bound Him not to leave them unpunished. So their very sufferings proved them His, for What son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But strong, sunny confidence in God shines from the whole message, and reaches its climax in the closing assurance that He is merciful and gracious. The evil results of rebellion are not omitted, but they are not dwelt on. The true magnet to draw wanderers back to God is the loving proclamation of His love. Unless we are sure that He has a heart tender with all pity, and open as day to melting charity, we shall not turn to Him with our hearts.

The message puts the response which it sought in a variety of ways; namely, turning to Jehovah, not being stiff-necked, yielding selves to Jehovah, entering into His sanctuary. More than outward participation in the passover ceremonial is involved. Submission of will, abandonment of former courses of action, docility of spirit ready to be directed anywhere, the habit of abiding with God by communion--all these, the standing characteristics of the religious life, are at least suggested by the invitations here. We are all summoned thus to yield ourselves to God, and especially to do so by surrendering our wills to Him, and to enter into His sanctuary, by keeping up such communion with Him as that, however and wherever occupied, we shall still dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives.

And the summons to return unto God is addressed to us all even more urgently than to Israel. God Himself invites us by the voice of His providences, by His voice within, and by the voice of Jesus Himself, who is ever saying to each of us, by His death and passion, by His resurrection and ascension, Turn ye! turn ye! why will ye die? and who has more than endorsed Hezekiah's messengers assurance that Jehovah will not turn away His face from us by His own gracious promise, Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.

The king's message met a mingled reception. Some mocked, some were moved and accepted. So, alas! is it with the better message, which is either a savour of life unto life or of death unto death. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay. May it be with all of us as it was in Judah--that we have one heart, to do the commandment and to accept the merciful summons to the great passover!