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

**2 SAMUEL-005. THE PROMISED KING AND TEMPLE BUILDER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"4.* *And it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying, 5. Go and tell My servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build Me an house for Me to dwell in! 6. Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. 7. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed My people Israel, saying, Why build ye not Me an house of cedar! 8. Now therefore so shalt thou say unto My servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel: 9. And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. 10. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, 11. And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house. 12. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish His kingdom. 13. He shall build an house for My name; and I will establish the throne of His kingdom for ever. 14. I will be his father, and He shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten Him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: 16. But My mercy shall not depart away from Him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16. And thine home and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.."*

*2 Samuel 7:4-16*

The removal of the ark to Jerusalem was but the first step in a process which was intended to end in the erection of a permanent Temple. The time for the next step appeared to David to have come when he had no longer to fight for his throne. Rest from enemies should lead to larger work for God, else repose will be our worst enemy, and peace will degenerate into self-indulgent sloth. A devout heart will not be content with personal comfort and dwelling in a house of cedar, while the ark has but a tent for its abode. There should be a proportion between expenditure on self and on religious objects. How many professing Christians might go to school to David! Luxury at home and niggardliness in God's work make an ugly pair, but, alas! a common one.

Nathan approved, as was natural. But he knew the difference between his own thoughts and the word of the Lord that came to him, and, like a true man, he went in the morning and contradicted, by God's authority, his own precipitate sanction of the king's proposal. Clearly, divine communications were unmistakably distinguishable from the recipient's own thoughts.

The divine message first negatives the intention to build a house. In 1 Chronicles a positive prohibition takes the place of the question in verse 5, but that is only a difference of form, for the question implies a negative answer. From David's last words (1 Chron. 28:3) we learn that a reason for the prohibition was because thou art a man of war, and hast shed blood. His wars were necessary, and tended to establish the kingdom, but their existence showed that the time for building the Temple had not come, and there was a certain incongruity in a warrior king rearing a house for the God whose kingdom was in its essence peace.

The prohibition rests on a deep insight into the nature of Jehovah's reign, and draws a broad distinction between His worship and the surrounding paganism. But the reason given in the text is very remarkable. God did not desire a permanent Temple. If we may so say, He preferred the less solid Tabernacle, as corresponding better to the simplicity and spirituality of His worship. A gorgeous stone Temple might easily become the sepulchre, rather than the shrine, of true devotion. The movable tent answered to the temporary character of the dispensation. The more fixed and elaborate the externals of worship, the more danger of the spirit being stifled by them. The Old Testament worship was necessarily ceremonial, but here is a caveat against the stiffening of ceremonial into stereotyped formalism.

The prohibition was accompanied by gracious and far-reaching promises, designed to assure David of God's approbation of his motive, and to open up to him the vision of the future and the wonders that should be. We need say little about the retrospective part of the message (verses 8, 9 a). God had been the agent in all David's past, had lifted him from the quiet following of his sheep, had given him rule, which was but a delegated authority. Israel was My people, and therefore he was but an instrument in God's hand, and was not to govern by his own fancies or for his own advantage.

Every devout man's life is the realisation of a plan of God's, and we sin against ourselves as well as Him if we do not often let thankful thoughts retrace all the way by which the Lord our God has led us.

With verse 9b the prophecy turns to the future. David personally is promised the continuance of God's help; then a permanent, peaceful possession of the land is promised to the nation, and finally the perpetuity of the kingdom in the Davidic line is promised. The prophecy as to the nation, like all such prophecies, is contingent on national obedience. The future of the kingdom will stand in blessed contrast with the wild times of the Judges, if--and only if--Israel behaves as My people should.

But the main point of the prophecy is the promise to David's seed. In form it attaches itself very significantly to David's intention to build a house for Jehovah. That would invert the true order, for Jehovah was about to build a house, that is, a permanent posterity, for David. God must first give before man can requite. All our relations to Him begin with His free mercy to us. And our building for Him should ever be the result of His building for us, and will, in some humble way, resemble the divine beneficence by which it has been quickened into action. The very foundation principles of Christian service are expressed here, in guise fitted to the then epoch of revelation.

But the relation of the two things, God's building and Solomon's, is not exhausted by such considerations. The consolidation of the monarchy in David's family was an essential preliminary to the rearing of the Temple. That work needed tranquil times, abundant resources, leisure, and assured dominion. So the prophet goes on to promise that David shall be succeeded by his seed, who shall build the Temple.

Further, three great promises are given in reference to David's seed,-- a perpetual kingdom, a personal relation of sonship to Jehovah, and paternal chastisement, if necessary, but no such departure of Jehovah's mercy as had darkened the close of Saul's sad reign. Then, finally, the assurance is reiterated of the perpetuity of David's house and throne. The remarkable expression in verse 16, established before thee (that is, David), if it is the true reading, suggests a hint of the life after death, and conceives of the long-dead king as in some manner cognisant of the fortunes of his descendants. But the Septuagint reads before Me, and that reading is confirmed by verses 26 and 29, and by Psalm lxxxix. 36 b.

Now it is clear that these promises were in part directed to, and fulfilled in, Solomon. But it is as clear that the great promise of an eternal dominion, which is emphatically repeated thrice, goes far beyond him. We are obliged to recognise a second meaning in the prophecy, in accordance with Old Testament usage, which often means by seed a line of successive generations of descendants. But no succession of mortal men can reach to eternal duration.

Apart from the fact that the kingdom, in the form in which David's descendants ruled over it, has long since crumbled away, the large words of the promise must be regarded as inflated and exaggerated, if by for ever is only meant for long generations. A seed, or line of perishable men, can only last for ever if it closes in a Person who is not subject to the law of mortality. Unless we can with our hearts rejoicingly confess, Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, we do not pierce to the full understanding of Nathan's prophecy.

All the glorious prerogatives shadowed in it were but partially fulfilled in Israel's monarchs. Their failures and their successes, their sins and their virtues, equally declared them to be but shadowy forerunners of Him in whom all that they at the best imperfectly aimed at and possessed is completely and for ever fulfilled. They were prophetic persons by their office, and pointed on to Him.

He has built the true Temple, in that His body is the seat of sacrifice and of revelation, and the meeting-place of God and man, and inasmuch as through Him we are built up into a spiritual house for an habitation of God. In Him is fulfilled the great prophecy of My Servant the Branch, who shall build the Temple of the Lord and be a Priest upon His throne. In Him, too, is fulfilled in highest truth the filial relationship. The Israelitish kings were by office sons of God. He is the Son in ineffable derivation and eternal unity of life with the Father, and their communion is in closest oneness of will and mutual interchange of love. In that filial relation lies the assurance of Christ's everlasting kingdom, for the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand.

The prophecy is echoed in many places of Scripture, and is ever taken to refer to a single person. The angel of the annunciation moulded his salutation to the meek Virgin on it, when he declared that her Son shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.