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

**DEUTERONOMY-005. A CHOICE OF MASTERS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; 48. Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies ... in want of all things: and He shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until He have destroyed thee."*

*Deuteronomy 28:47-48*

The history of Israel is a picture on the large scale of what befalls every man.

A service--we are all born to obedience, to depend on and follow some person or thing. There is only a choice of services; and he who boasts himself free is but a more abject slave, as the choice for a nation is either the rule of settled order and the sanctities of an established law, or the usurpation of a mob and the intolerable tyranny of unbridled and irresponsible force.

**I. The service of God or the service of our enemies.**

Israel was the servant in turn of Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and Rome. It was every invader's prey. God's invisible arm was its only guard from these, and an all-sufficient guard as long as it leaned on Him. When it turned from Him it fell under their yoke. Its lawful Lord loved it; its tyrants hated it.

So with us. We have to serve God or enemies. Our lusts, our passions, the world, evil habits--in a word, our sins ring us round. God is the only defence against them.

The contrast between the one and the many--a king or an ochlocracy. The contrast of the loving Lord and the hostile sins.

**II. A service which is honour or a service which is degradation.**

God alone is worthy of our absolute submission and service. How low a man sinks when he is ruled by any lesser authority! Such obedience is a crime against the dignity of human nature, and the soul is not without a galling sense of this now and then, when its chains rattle.

**III. A service which is freedom because it is rendered by love, or a service which is hard slavery.**

With joy for the abundance of all things. How sin palls upon us, and yet we commit it. The will is overborne, conscience is stifled.

**IV. A service which feeds the spirit or a service which starves it.**

The soul can only in God get what it wants. Prison fare is what it receives in the other service. The unsatisfying character of all sin; it cloys, and yet leaves one hungry. It is that which satisfieth not. Broken cisterns which hold no water.

**V. A service which is life or a service which is death.**

The dark forebodings of the text grow darker as it goes on. The grim slavery which it threatens as the only alternative to joyful service of God is declared to be lifelong penal servitude, and not only is there no deliverance from it, but it directly tends to wear away the life of the hopeless slaves. For the words that follow our text are and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. That is dismally true in regard to any and every life that has shaken off the service of God which is perfect freedom, and has persisted in the service of sin. Such service is suicidal; it rivets an iron yoke on our necks, and there is no locksmith who can undo the shackles and lift it off, so long as we refuse to take service with God. Stubbornly rebellious wills forge their own fetters. Like many a slave-owner, our tyrants have a cruel delight in killing their slaves, and our sins not only lead to death, but are themselves death.

But there is a bright possibility before the most down-trodden vassal of sin. The bond-servant abideth not in the house for ever. He is not a son of the house, but has been brought into it, stolen from his home. He may be carried back to his Father's house, and there have bread enough and to spare, if a deliverer can be found. And He has been found. Christ the Son makes us free, and if we trust Him for our emancipation we shall be free indeed, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.