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

**GENESIS-012. ABRAM AND THE LIFE OF FAITH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south."*

*Genesis 12:1-9*

A great act of renunciation at the divine call lies at the foundation of Israel's history, as it does at the foundation of every life that blesses the world or is worth living. The divine Word to Abram first gives the command in all its authoritativeness and plain setting forth of how much had to be surrendered, and then in its exuberant setting forth of how much was to be won by obedience. God does not hide the sacrifices that have to be made if we will be true to His command. He will enlist no recruits on false pretences. All ties of country, kindred, and father's house have to be loosened, and, if need be, to be cut, for His command is to be supreme, and clinging hands that would hold back the pilgrim have to be disengaged. If a man realises God's hold on him, he feels all others relaxed. The magnetism of the divine command overcomes gravitation, and lifts him high above earth. The life of faith ever begins as that of the Father of the Faithful began, with the solemn recognition of a divine will which separates. Further, Abram saw plainly what he had to leave, but not what he was to win. He had to make a venture of faith, for the land that I will shew thee was undefined. Certainly it was somewhere, but where was it? He had to fling away substance for what seemed shadow to all but the eye of faith, as we all have to do. The familiar, undeniable good of the present has to be waived in favour of what common sense calls a misty possibility in the future. To part with solid acres and get nothing but hopes of an inheritance in the skies looks like insanity, and is the only true wisdom. Get thee out is plain; the land that I will shew thee looks like the doubtful outlines seen from afar at sea, which may be but clouds.

But Abram had a great hope blazing in front, none the less bright or guiding because it all rested on the bare promise of God. It is the prerogative of faith to give solidity and reality to what the world thinks has neither. The wanderer who had left his country was to receive a land for his own; the solitary who had left his kindred was to become the founder of a nation; the unknown stranger was to win a great name,--and how wonderfully that has come true! Not only was he to be blessed, but also to be a blessing, for from him was to flow that which should bless all the earth,--and how transcendently that has come true! The attitude of men to him (and to the universal blessing that should descend from him) was to determine their position in reference to God and blessings or cursings from him. So the migration of Abram was a turning-point in universal history.

Obedience followed the command, immediate as the thunder on the flash, and complete. So Abram went, as the Lord had spoken unto him,--blessed they of whose lives that may be the summing-up! Happy the life which has God's command at the back of every deed, and no command of His unobeyed! If our acts are closely parallel with God's speech to us, they will prosper, and we shall be peaceful wherever we may have to wander. Success followed obedience in Abram's case, as in deepest truth it always does. That is a pregnant expression: They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. A strange itinerary of a journey, which omits all but the start and the finish! And yet are these not the most important points in any journey or life,--whither it was directed and where it arrived? How little will the weary tramps in the desert be remembered when the goal has been reached! Dangers and privations soon pass from memory, and we shall think little of sorrows, cares, and pains, when we arrive at home. The life of faith is the only one which is always sure of getting to the place to which it seeks to journey. Others miss their aim, or drop dead on the road, like the early emigrants out West; Christian lives get to the city.

Once in the land, Abram was still a stranger and pilgrim. He first planted himself in its heart by Sichem, but outside the city, under the terebinth tree of Moreh. The reason for his position is given in the significant statement that the Canaanite was then in the land. So he had to live in the midst of an alien civilisation, and yet keep apart from it. As Hebrews says, he was dwelling in tabernacles, because he looked for a city. The hope of the permanent future made him keep clear of the passing present; and we are to feel ourselves pilgrims and sojourners, not so much because earth is fleeting and we are mortal, as because our true affinities are with the unseen and eternal. But the presence of the Canaanite is connected also with the following words, which tell that the Lord appeared unto Abram, and now after his obedience told him that this was the land that was to be his. He unfolds His purposes to those who keep His commandments; obedience is the mother of insight. The revelation put a further strain on faith, for the present occupiers of the land were many and strong; but it matters not how formidably and firmly rooted the Canaanite is, God's children can be sure that the promise will be fulfilled. We can calmly look on his power and reckon on its decay, if the Lord appears to us, as to Abram--and He surely will if we have followed His separating voice, and dwell as strangers here, because our hearts are with Him.

After the appearance of God and the promise, we have an outline of the pilgrim's life, as seen in Abram. He signalised God's further opening of His purposes, by building an altar on the place where He had been seen by him. Thankful recognition and commemoration of the times in our lives when He has most plainly drawn near and shown us glimpses of His will, are no less blessed than due, and they who thus rear altars to Him will wonder, when they come to count up how many they have had to build. But the life of faith is ever a pilgrim life, and Bethel has soon to be the home instead of Shechem. There, too, Abram keeps outside the city, and pitches his tent. There, too, the altar rises by the side of the tent. The transitory provision for housing the pilgrim contrasts with the solid structure for offering sacrifices. The tent is pitched, and may be struck and carried away to-morrow, but the altar is builded. That part of our lives which is concerned with the material and corporeal is, after all, short in duration and small in importance; that which has to do with God, His revelations, and His worship and service, lasts. What is left in ancient historic lands, like Egypt or Greece, is the temples of the gods, while the huts of the people have perished long centuries ago. What we build for God lasts; what we pitch for ourselves is transient as we are.