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

**GENESIS-014. COMING IN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"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."*

*Genesis 12:5*

If life has a clear, definite aim, and especially if its aim is the highest, there will be detachment from, and abandonment of, many lower ones. Nothing worth doing is done, and nothing worth being is realised in ourselves, except on condition of resolutely ignoring much that attracts. They went forth; Haran must be given up if Canaan is to be reached. Artists are content to pay the price for mastery in their art, students think it no hardship to remain ignorant of much in order to know their own subject thoroughly; men of business feel it no sacrifice to give up culture, leisure, and sometimes still higher things, such as love and purity, to win wealth. And we shall not be Christians after Christ's heart unless we practise similar restrictions. The stream that is to flow with impetus sufficient to scour its bed clear of obstructions must not be allowed to meander in side branches, but be banked up in one channel. Sometimes there must be actual surrender and outward withdrawal from lower aims which, by our weakness, have become rival aims; always there must be subordination and detachment in heart and mind. The compass in an iron ship is disturbed by the iron, unless it has been adjusted; the golden apples arrest the runner, and there are clogs and weights in every life, which have to be laid aside if the race is to be won. The old pilgrim fashion is still the only way. We must do as Abram did: leave Haran and its idols behind us, and go forth, ready to dwell, if need be, in deserts, and as sojourners even when among cities, or we shall not reach the land that is very far off. It is near us if we forsake self and the things seen and temporal, but it recedes when we turn our hearts to these.

Into the land of Canaan they came. No man honestly and rightly seeks God and fails to find Him. No man has less goodness and Christ-likeness than he truly desires and earnestly pursues. Nearer aims are often missed, and it is well that they should be. We should thank God for disappointments, for hopes unfulfilled, or proving still greater disappointments when fulfilled. It is mercy that often makes the harvest from our sowing a scanty one, for so we are being taught to turn from the quest in which searching has no assurance of finding, to that in which to seek is to find. I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. We may not reach other lands which seem to us to be lands of promise, or when we do, may find that the land is evil and naughty, but this land we shall reach, if we desire it, and if, desiring it, we go forth from this vain world. The Christian life is the only one which has no failures, no balked efforts, no frustrated aims, no brave settings out and defeated returnings. The literal meaning of one of the Old Testament words for sin is missing the mark, and that embodies the truth that no man wins what he seeks who seeks satisfaction elsewhere than in God. Like the rivers in Asiatic deserts, which are lost in the sand and never reach the sea, all lives which flow towards anything but God are dissipated and vain.

But the supreme realisation of an experience like Abram's is reserved for another life. No pilgrim Zion-ward perishes in the wilderness, or loses his way or fails to come to the city of habitation. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. And when they appear there, they will think no more, just as this narrative says nothing, of the sandy, salt, waterless wildernesses, or the wearinesses, dangers, and toils of the road. The experience of the happy travellers, who have found all which they sought and are at home for ever in the fatherland towards which they journeyed, will all be summed up in this, that they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.