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

**JEREMIAH-013. A SOUL GAZING ON GOD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary."*

*Jeremiah 17:12*

I must begin by a word or two of explanation as to the language of this passage. The word is is a supplement, and most probably it ought to be omitted, and the verse treated as being, not a statement, but a series of exclamations. The next verse runs thus, O Lord! the hope of Israel, all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed; and the most natural and forcible understanding of the words of my text is reached by connecting them with these following clauses: O Lord! the hope of Israel, and, regarding the whole as one long exclamation of adoring contemplation, A glorious throne, or Thou glorious throne, high from the beginning; the place of our sanctuary, O Lord! the hope of Israel.

**I. If we look at the words so, we have here, to begin with, a wonderful vision of what God is.**

A glorious throne, or, as the original has it, a throne of glory,-- which is not quite the same thing--high from the beginning, the place of our sanctuary. There are three clauses. Now they all seem to me to have reference to the Temple in Jerusalem, which is taken, by a very natural figure of speech, as a kind of suggestive description of Him who is worshipped there. There is the same kind of use of the name of a place to stand for the person who occupies or inhabits it, in many familiar phrases. For instance, The Sublime Porte is properly the name of a lofty gateway which belonged to the palace in Constantinople, and so has come to mean the Turkish Government if Government it can be called. So we talk of the Papal See having done this or that, and scarcely remember that a see is a bishop's seat, or, again, the decision of the Chair is final in the House of Commons. Or, if you will accept a purely municipal parallel, if any one were told that the Town Hall had issued a certain order, he would know that our authorities, the Mayor and Corporation, had decreed so and so. So, in precisely the same way here, the prophet takes the outward facts of the Temple as symbolising great and blessed spiritual thoughts of the God that filled the Temple with His own lustre.

A glorious throne--that is grand, but that is not what Jeremiah means--A throne of glory is the true rendering. And to what does that refer? Now, in the greater number of cases, you will find that in the Old Testament, where glory is ascribed to God, the word has a very distinct and specific meaning, viz. the light which was afterwards called the Shekinah, and dwelt between the cherubim, and was the symbol of the divine presence and the assurance that that presence would be self-revealing and would manifest Himself to His people. So here the throne on which glory rests is what we call the mercy-seat within the veil, where, above the propitiatory table on which once a year the High Priest sprinkled the blood of sacrifice, and beneath which were shut up the tables of the covenant which constituted the bond between God and Israel, shone the Light in the midst of the darkness of the enclosed inner shrine, the token of the divine presence. The throned glory, the glory that reigns and rules as King in Israel, is the idea of the words before us. It is the same throne that a later writer in the New Testament speaks of when he says, Let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace. For that light of a manifested divine presence was no malign lustre that blinded or slew those who gazed upon it, but though no eye but that of the High Priest dared of old to look, yet he, the representative and, as it were, the concentration of the collective Israel, could stand, unshrinking and unharmed, before that piercing light, because he bore in his hand the blood of sacrifice and sprinkled it on the mercy-seat. So was it of old, but now we all can draw near, through the rent veil, and wall rejoicingly in the light of the Lord. His glory is grace; His grace is glory.

This, then, is the first of Jeremiah's great thoughts of God, and it means--The Lord God omnipotent reigneth, there is none else but He, and His will runs authoritative and supreme into all corners of the universe. But it is glory that is throned. That is equivalent to the declaration that our God has never spoken in secret, in the dark places of the earth, nor said to any seeking heart, Seek ye My face in vain. For the light which shone in that Holy Place as His symbol, had for its message to Israel the great thought that, as the sun pours out its lustre into all the corners of its system, so He, by the self-communication which is inherent in His very nature, manifests Himself to every gazing eye, and is a God who is Light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

But reigning glory is also redeeming grace. For the light of the bright cloud, which is the glory of the Lord, shines still, with no thunder in its depths, nor tempests in its bosom, above the mercy-seat, where spreads the blood of sprinkling by which Israel's sins are all taken away. Well may the prophet lift up his heart in adoring wonder, and translate the outward symbol into this great word, The throne of glory; Jehovah, the hope of Israel.

Then the next clause is, I think, equally intelligible by the same process of interpretation--High from the beginning. It was a piece of the patriotic exaggeration of Israel's prophets and psalmists that they made much of the little hill upon which the Temple was set. We read of the hill of the Lord's house being exalted above the tops of the mountains. We read of it being a high hill, as the hill of Bashan. And though to the eye of sense it is a very modest elevation, to the eye of faith it was symbolical of much. Jeremiah felt it to be a material type, both of the elevation and of the stable duration of the God whom he would commend to Israel's and to all men's trust. High from the beginning, separated from all creatural limitation and lowness, He whose name is the Most High, and on whose level no other being can stand, towers above the lowness of the loftiest creature, and from that inaccessible height He sends down His voice, like the trumpet from amidst the darkness of Sinai, proclaiming, I am God, and there is none beside Me. Yet while thus holy--that is, separate from creatures--He makes communion with Himself possible to us, and draws near to us in Christ, that we in Christ may be made nigh to Him.

And the loftiness involves, necessarily, timeless and changeless Being; so that we can turn to Him, and feel Him to be the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. No words are needed, and no human words are anything but tawdry attempts to elaborate, which only result in weakening, these two great thoughts. High--from the beginning.

The last of this series of symbols, even more plainly than the other two, refers originally to the Temple upon the hill of Zion; and symbolically, to the God who filled the Temple. He is the place of our sanctuary. That is as though the prophet would point, as the wonderful climax of all, to the fact that He of whom the former things were true should yet be accessible to our worship; that, if I might so say, our feet could tread the courts of the great Temple; and we draw near to Him who is so far above the loftiest, and separate from all the magnificences which Himself has made, and who yet is our sanctuary, and accessible to our worship.

Ay! and more than that--Lord! Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. In old days the Temple was more than a place of worship. It was a place where a man coming had, according to ancient custom, guest rights with God; and if he came into the Temple of the Most High as to an asylum, he dwelt there safe and secure from avengers or foes.

The place of our sanctuary, then, declares that God Himself, like some ancestral dwelling-place in which generation after generation of fathers and children have abode, whence they have been carried, and where their children still live, is to all generations their home and their fortress. The place of our sanctuary implies access to the inaccessibly High, communion with the infinitely Separate, security and abode in God Himself. He that dwelleth in God dwelleth in peace. These, then, are the points of the prophet's vision of God.

**II. Note, further, the soul rapt in meditation and this vision of God.**

To me, this long-drawn-out series of linked clauses without grammatical connection, this succession of adoring exclamations of rapture, wonder, and praise, is very striking. It suggests the manner in which we should vivify all our thoughts of God, by turning them into material for devout reverence; awe-struck, considering meditation. There is nothing told us in the Bible about God simply in order that we may know it. It is all meant to be fuel to the fire of our divine affection; to kindle in us the sentiments of faith and love and rapturous adoration. It is easy to know the theology of the Old and the New Testaments, and a man may rattle over the catalogue of the divine attributes, as they are called, with perfect accuracy, and never be a hair the better for knowing all of them. So I urge, on you and on myself, the necessity of warming our thoughts and kindling our conceptions of what God is until they melt us into fluidity and adoration and love.

I believe that there are few things which we Christian people more lack in this generation, and by the lack of which we suffer more, than the comparative decay of the good old habit of frequent and patient meditation on the things that we most surely believe. We are so busy in adding to our stock of knowledge, in following out to their latest consequence the logical effects of our Christianity, and in defending it, or seeking to be familiar with the defences, against modern assaults, or in practical work on its behalf, that the last thing that a great many of us do is to feed upon the truth which we know already. We should be like ruminant animals who first crop the grass--which, being interpreted, means, get Scripture truth into our heads--and then chew the cud, which being interpreted is, then put these truths through a second process by meditation on them, so that they may turn into nourishment and make flesh. He that eateth Me, said Jesus Christ (and He used there the word which is specially applied to rumination), shall live by Me. It does us no good to know that God is the Throne of Glory, high from the beginning, the place of our sanctuary, unless we turn theology into devotion by meditation upon it. Suffer the word of exhortation --in busy, great communities like ours, where we are all driven so hard, there is need for some voices sometimes to be lifted up in pressing upon Christian people the duty of quiet rumination upon the truths that they have.

**III. We may see in our text, further, the meditative soul going out to grasp God thus revealed, as its portion and hope.**

As I have already said, the text is best understood as part of a series of exclamations which extends into the following verse. If we take account of the whole series, and regard the subsequent part of it as led up to, by the part which is our text, we get an important thought as to what should be the outcome of the truths concerning God, and of our meditative contemplation of them.

My relation to these truths is not exhausted even when I have meditated upon them, and they have touched me into a rapture of devotion. I can conceive that to have been done, and yet the next necessary step not to have been taken. What is that step? The next verse tells us, when it goes on to exclaim, O Lord! the hope of Israel. I must cast myself upon Him by faith as my only hope, and turn away from all other confidences which are vain and impotent. So we are back upon that familiar Christian ground, that the bond which knits a man to God, and by which all that God is becomes that man's personal property, and available for the security and the shaping of his life, is the simple flinging of himself into God's arms, in sure and certain trust. Then, every one of these characteristics of which I have been speaking will contribute its own special part to the serenity, the security, the godlikeness, the blessedness, the righteousness, the strength of the man who thus trusts.

But such confidence which makes all these things my own possessions, which makes Him a throne of glory, to which I have access; which makes Him a place in which I dwell by this exercise of personal faith; which makes Him my hope, has for its other side the turning away from all other grounds of confidence and security. The subsequent context tells us how wise it is thus to turn away, and what folly it is to make anything else our hope except that throne of glory. They that depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters. If we say, O Lord! Thou art my hope, we shall have the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, which entereth within the veil, and fixes on Him who is within it, the throned Grace between the cherubim, our Brother and our Hope. So we may dwell in God, and from the secure height of our house look down serenely on impotent foes, and never know the bitterness of vain hopes, nor remove from the safe asylum of our home in God.