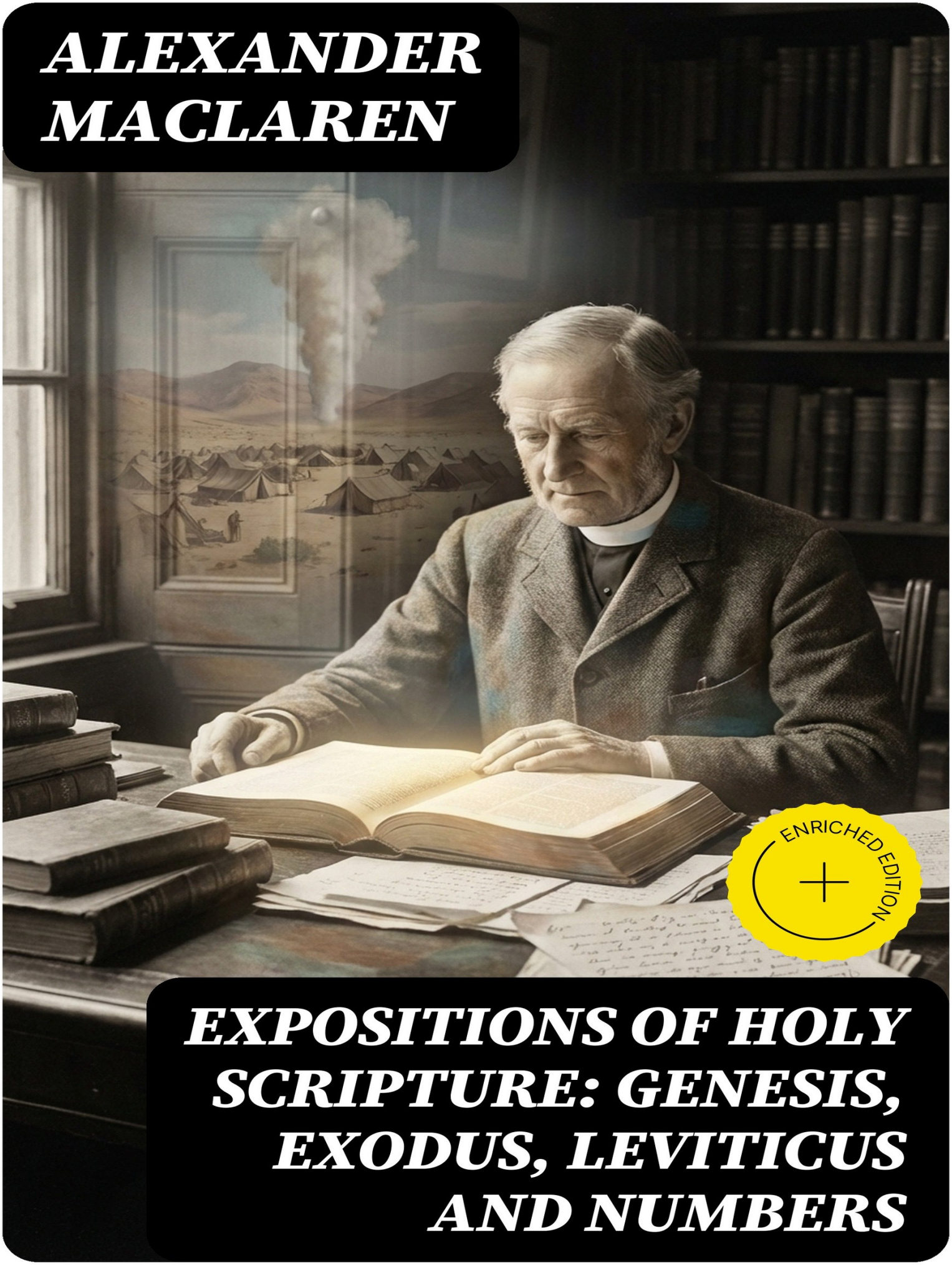
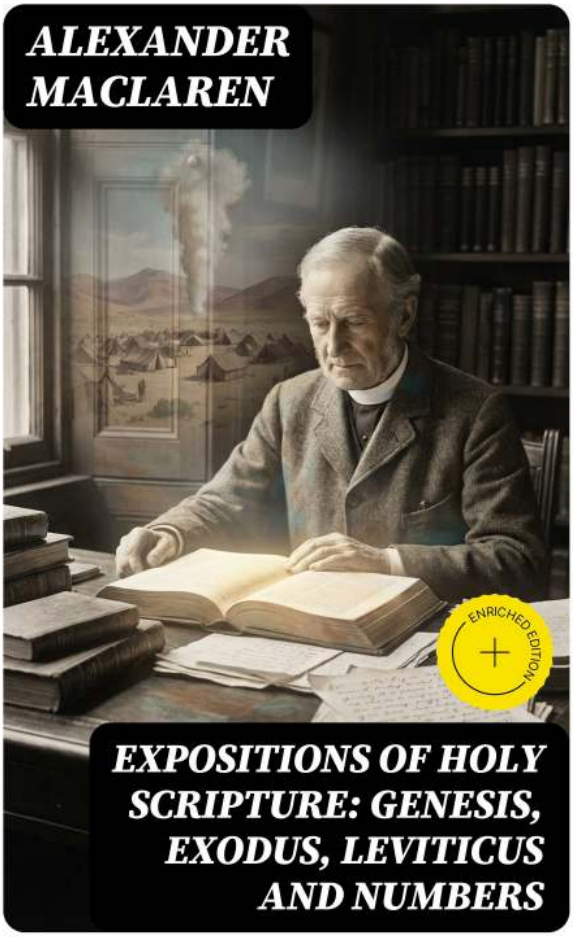
ALEXANDER MACLAREN



ENRICHED EDITION

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE: GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS AND NUMBERS


ALEXANDER MACLAREN
ENRICHED EDITION
EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE: GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS AND NUMBERS

Alexander Maclaren

Expositions of Holy Scripture: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Miles Fenner

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Expositions of Holy Scripture: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers brings together Alexander Maclaren's sermons and homiletic essays on the Bible's opening narrative and law. Drawn from his wider multi-volume Expositions of Holy Scripture, these pieces were first preached to congregations and then carefully shaped for readers in print. The aim is not an exhaustive technical commentary, nor a miscellany of detached reflections, but a sustained pastoral unfolding of the text. Arranged to follow the canonical order from creation to the wilderness march, the collection seeks to inform the mind, quicken the conscience, and nourish devotion, presenting Scripture as living address rather than distant document.

This is a book of expository sermons—homilies that move verse by verse or scene by scene—supported by brief devotional essays where needed. The titles signal themes and turning points, but the substance is close engagement with the biblical narrative, its commands, and its promises. Maclaren's pages show the preacher's craft: plain speech, careful structure, and steady application to ordinary life. He addresses general readers as well as ministers and students, avoiding specialist debates in favor of clear explanation and moral insight. The result is a genre-blending sequence that can serve for private meditation, group study, or as a quarry for thoughtful proclamation.

In Genesis, Maclaren traces beginnings—of the world, of sin, and of grace—as the story moves from creation to the patriarchs. Early chapters explore the tragedy and hope embedded in primal scenes, then yield to extended portraits of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The studies on Abraham treat faith as a lived journey, marked by guidance, waiting, testing, and provision. Jacob's transformations and Joseph's providential rise become lenses for character, reconciliation, and trust. Throughout, the preacher reads narrative as moral schooling, neither flattening its complexities nor leaving it remote, and he consistently invites readers to see their own steps in these ancient paths.

Exodus receives sustained attention as the drama of deliverance, calling, and covenant. Maclaren follows the rise of Moses, the summons at the bush, the Passover's double meaning of rescue and remembrance, the sea-crossing and song, the gift of bread in the wilderness, and the battles fought under God's banner. He then turns to the law at Sinai and the furniture of worship, treating the Decalogue and the tabernacle's symbolism with pastoral sobriety. The episode of the golden calf and Moses' intercession is handled not as history alone but as perennial warning and mercy. Liberation, obedience, and worship keep close company in these expositions.

Leviticus is approached with the conviction that ritual can teach ethics and that worship shapes community. Maclaren considers offerings and priesthood, the holiness code, and climactic scenes such as the Day of Atonement. He reflects on zeal without obedience, the care of the sick and restored,

and the joy that rightly belongs to God’s people. The studies on sojourning, servitude, redemption, and release press the social implications of sacred practice without losing spiritual center. By showing how atonement, purity, and festal gladness belong together, he presents the book not as a relic of obscurities but as a disciplined school for grateful, holy living.

In Numbers, the preacher turns to pilgrimage under pressure—ordering a people, marching by a guiding presence, and meeting recurring tests. He follows episodes of weariness and complaint, the burden of leadership, counsel sought from companions, the fear stirred by formidable foes, and the call to trust despite reports that magnify obstacles. Passages on intercession, the healing given through a lifted sign, the enticements of gain, and the poignancy of hopes unfulfilled are read for shared wisdom. The emphasis is communal: service as warfare, guidance as gift, and perseverance as learned obedience, all gathered from a journey between promise and fulfillment.

What unifies these Old Testament studies is Maclaren’s steady union of exposition and exhortation. His style is lucid, warm, and restrained; his method proceeds from the text to doctrine to conduct; his gaze ranges across Scripture so that narrative, law, and worship illuminate one another. He emphasizes God’s nearness, the dignity and danger of human choice, and the long patience by which faith is formed. For contemporary readers, the significance lies in accessible depth: a guide that neither drowns in detail nor thins to generalities. As an essential portion of his lifelong

work, this volume offers durable help for understanding and for living.

Historical Context

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Alexander Maclaren (1826–1910), the Manchester Baptist preacher hailed as the “Prince of Expositors,” delivered the sermons later gathered as Expositions of Holy Scripture across his long pastorate at Union Chapel, Manchester (1858–1903). Addressing a rapidly industrializing city, he cultivated clear, devotional exposition for artisans and merchants alike, drawing from the English Nonconformist tradition of Bible-centered preaching. These Genesis–Numbers discourses grew from weekly pulpit work and weeknight lectures before being edited for print, a common Victorian practice that extended the reach of urban pulpits. Their themes—creation, sin, covenant, law, pilgrimage—echo anxieties and aspirations of Britain’s late nineteenth-century religious public.

Maclaren preached amid the ascent of biblical criticism that unsettled confidence in Mosaic authorship and early Israelite history. Bishop John William Colenso’s studies on the Pentateuch (1862–79) and Julius Wellhausen’s Prolegomena (1878) popularized documentary hypotheses in Britain. Without polemic, Maclaren positioned his expositions as spiritually certain and pastorally practical, stressing unity of revelation and reading Leviticus and Numbers through Christ’s atoning work. He occasionally cited the English Revised Version (Old Testament, 1885), reflecting the era’s textual scholarship, yet he retained the Authorized Version’s cadences that his hearers knew. His

approach offered an accessible alternative to theories many laypeople found disorienting.

The period’s scientific controversies also shaped the sermons’ emphases. After Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species (1859), materialist accounts of nature circulated widely, especially in industrial centers like Manchester. In addresses such as The Vision of Creation or The Growth and Power of Sin, Maclaren framed Genesis as moral revelation rather than proto-science, insisting on human responsibility, fallenness, and hope. He resisted Social Darwinist ethics by portraying Cain, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph as moral agents under God’s covenantal oversight. His audience, navigating factory discipline, urban vice, and new wealth, heard in Genesis both a diagnosis of modern temptation and a summons to disciplined personal faith.

Victorian evangelical energies further informed the series. The revival campaigns of Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey in Britain (1873–75, 1881–84), the Keswick holiness conventions from 1875, and the expanding missionary movement through the Baptist Missionary Society encouraged preaching on conversion, sanctification, and service. Maclaren’s Exodus and Numbers expositions, from The Warfare of Christian Service to The Guiding Pillar, translated Israel’s pilgrimage into motifs for disciplined discipleship and missionary steadiness. While sharing the Nonconformist “conscience” on sobriety and integrity, he avoided partisan controversy, shaping a piety suitable for shopkeepers, clerks, and mill workers whose faith needed ballast in a competitive, mobile society.

Nineteenth-century discoveries in the ancient Near East furnished a tantalizing backdrop. Layard’s excavations at Nineveh (1840s–50s), the Mesha Stele (1868), and the Merneptah Stele (1896), along with Egyptology’s growth after Champollion, piqued British curiosity about Israel’s world. Public lectures and illustrated magazines made “Bible lands” vivid. Maclaren rarely debated archaeology directly; instead he seized the heightened interest to expound narratives like Joseph’s rise in Egypt, the Passover, and the wilderness march as living theology. He assumed Scripture’s historical rootedness while directing attention to its moral and christological claims, thereby harnessing, not conceding to, the new prestige of oriental antiquities.

Urban reform and mass education also structured the sermons’ reach. The Elementary Education Act (1870) and cheap religious publishing expanded literacy and home reading, while Manchester’s philanthropic networks fostered Sunday schools and lecture series. Maclaren’s Decalogue sermons—on duties to God and neighbor—aligned with civic campaigns for temperance, fair dealing, and Sabbath observance without collapsing into politics. Delivered to crowded, mixed congregations and then issued in affordable volumes, the expositions became tools for lay classes, young ministers, and family worship. Their moral clarity, honed in a city of factories and marketplaces, suggested that ancient law could cultivate modern conscience.

Ecclesial debates over ritual and authority supplied another context. As the Oxford Movement’s ritualism spread in Anglican parishes, Nonconformists highlighted inward piety over sacerdotal ceremony. Maclaren’s treatment of

Levitical themes—the altar of incense, the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat—spiritualized Israel's cult without denying its historicity, reading it as typology fulfilled in Christ's priesthood. This approach affirmed Baptist convictions about the priesthood of all believers and evangelical atonement, while steering clear of polemical caricature. In an age of liturgical revival and disputed authority, his expositions offered a mediating path: reverent toward symbol, resolute about gospel essentials.

The collection's consolidation near the close of Maclaren's ministry ensured broad transatlantic circulation through London and American religious presses, finding readers among ministers, missionaries, and educated laypeople. Alongside Charles H. Spurgeon's sermons and J. C. Ryle's expositions, Maclaren modeled lucid, text-centered preaching that comforted believers facing intellectual change and social flux. While later scholarship probed Pentateuchal composition more deeply, these sermons endured as pastoral theology—serious about sin, radiant about grace, and attentive to daily obedience. Rooted in Manchester's pulpit yet ranging across Scripture's earliest books, they reveal how Victorian Nonconformity read Israel's story as the believer's pilgrimage.

Synopsis (Selection)

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Genesis: Creation and Fall (THE VISION OF CREATION; HOW SIN CAME IN; EDEN LOST AND RESTORED; THE GROWTH AND POWER OF SIN; WHAT CROUCHES AT THE DOOR; WITH, BEFORE, AFTER)

These sermons trace the world’s beginnings and humanity’s vocation, then follow the entry and spread of sin from innocence to fratricidal rivalry.

Maclaren’s tone is lucid and pastoral, analyzing temptation, conscience, and responsibility while holding out restoration through divine mercy.

Genesis: From Enoch to Noah (THE COURSE AND CROWN OF A DEVOUT LIFE; THE SAINT AMONG SINNERS; 'CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN'; THE SIGN FOR MAN AND THE REMEMBRANCER FOR GOD)

Focusing on Enoch and Noah, these expositions portray steadfast piety amid corruption and read covenant signs as anchors of memory for both God and humankind.

The emphasis falls on patient obedience and grateful hope after judgment, delivered with illustrative clarity and encouragement.

Genesis: Abraham—Call, Covenant, and Pilgrimage (AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH; ABRAM

AND THE LIFE OF FAITH; GOING FORTH; COMING IN; THE MAN OF FAITH; LIFE IN CANAAN; THE IMPORTANCE OF A CHOICE; ABRAM THE HEBREW; GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM; THE WORD THAT SCATTERS FEAR; FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS; WAITING FAITH REWARDED AND STRENGTHENED BY NEW REVELATIONS; A PETULANT WISH; 'BECAUSE OF HIS IMPORTUNITY'; THE INTERCOURSE OF GOD AND HIS FRIEND; THE SWIFT DESTROYER; FAITH TESTED AND CROWNED; THE CROWNING TEST AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH; JEHOVAH-JIREH; GUIDANCE IN THE WAY; THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM)

Following Abram’s call, journey, and covenant, Maclaren unfolds faith as responsive trust that matures through waiting, hospitality, intercession, and hard choices.

The tone blends doctrinal clarity with pilgrim counsel, highlighting divine initiative, moral testing, and providential provision without triumphalism.

Genesis: Esau and Jacob—Conflict, Discipline, and Renewal (A BAD BARGAIN; POTTAGE VERSUS BIRTHRIGHT; THE FIRST APOSTLE OF PEACE AT ANY PRICE; THE HEAVENLY PATHWAY AND THE EARTHLY HEART; MAHANAIM: THE TWO CAMPS; THE TWOFOLD WRESTLE—GOD'S WITH JACOB AND JACOB'S WITH GOD; A FORGOTTEN VOW)

These messages examine desire, deceit, reconciliation, and a transformative encounter with God that reshapes identity and vocation.

Maclaren balances realism about divided hearts with assurance of redemptive discipline, urging perseverance toward peace.

Genesis: Joseph—Providence and Reconciliation (THE TRIALS AND VISIONS OF DEVOUT YOUTH; MAN'S PASSIONS AND GOD'S PURPOSE; GOODNESS IN A DUNGEON; JOSEPH, THE PRIME MINISTER; RECOGNITION AND RECONCILIATION; JOSEPH, THE PARDONER AND PRESERVER; GROWTH BY TRANSPLANTING; TWO RETROSPECTS OF ONE LIFE; 'THE HANDS OF THE MIGHTY GOD OF JACOB'; THE SHEPHERD, THE STONE OF ISRAEL; A CALM EVENING, PROMISING A BRIGHT MORNING; JOSEPH'S FAITH; A COFFIN IN EGYPT)

The Joseph cycle presents hidden providence working through injustice, exile, and elevation to bring about preservation and reconciliation.

With reflective warmth and restraint, Maclaren stresses forgiveness, integrity, and the long view of God’s purposes.

Collection Frame (EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE; CONTENTS)

This frame situates the volume as homiletic exposition, moving closely through the text to bridge ancient Scripture and contemporary conscience.

Recurring motifs include faith under trial, covenant grace, moral responsibility, and worship as life, delivered with clear structure, vivid analogies, and practical application.

Exodus: Overview and Formation (THE BOOK OF EXODUS; FOUR SHAPING CENTURIES; DEATH AND GROWTH; THE ARK AMONG THE FLAGS; THE BUSH THAT BURNED, AND DID NOT BURN OUT; THE CALL OF MOSES)

Beginning with long bondage and the birth and calling of Moses, these sermons explore how a people is formed under promise and pressure.

The tone is rousing yet patient, emphasizing divine presence in hiddenness and the summons to costly leadership.

Exodus: Judgment and Redemption (A LAST MERCIFUL WARNING; THE PASSOVER: AN EXPIATION AND A FEAST, A MEMORIAL AND A PROPHECY; THOUGHT, DEED, WORD)

Maclaren reads the warnings and the Passover as converging acts of justice and mercy that create a liberated community.

He underscores memory, sign, and obedience, urging that decisive trust be matched by concrete practices.

Exodus: Deliverance and Praise (A PATH IN THE SEA; 'MY STRENGTH AND SONG'; THE

SHEPHERD AND THE FOLD; THE ULTIMATE HOPE)

From the sea crossing to songs of triumph, the focus shifts to worship as the immediate answer to rescue.

Hope and shepherding imagery frame liberation as movement toward a promised future, not merely escape from a past.

Exodus: Early Wilderness Tests and Provisions (MARAH; THE BREAD OF GOD; JEHOVAH NISSI; GERSHOM AND ELIEZER)

Episodes of thirst, hunger, conflict, and family naming become lessons in daily dependence and thanksgiving.

Maclaren’s pastoral angle pairs realism about complaint with steady reminders of provision and banner-like victory.

Exodus: Covenant and Commandments (THE DECALOGUE: I—MAN AND GOD; THE DECALOGUE: II.—MAN AND MAN; THE FEAST OF INGATHERING IN THE END OF THE YEAR; 'THE LOVE OF THINE ESPOUSALS')

The Decalogue and festivals are expounded as relational ethics—love to God and neighbor—embedded in communal rhythms.

The sermons stress that law protects love and that worship orders work, harvest, and memory.

Exodus: Tabernacle Signs and Duties (THE BREAD OF THE PRESENCE; THE GOLDEN

LAMPSTAND; THE NAMES ON AARON'S BREASTPLATE; THREE INSCRIPTIONS WITH ONE MEANING; THE ALTAR OF INCENSE; RANSOM FOR SOULS—I.; RANSOM FOR SOULS—II.)

These studies interpret furniture, garments, and incense as tangible theology—light, presence, intercession, and ransom woven into service.

Symbol and duty meet in a reverent, practical tone that links holiness to everyday responsibility.

Exodus: Apostasy, Intercession, and Renewal (THE GOLDEN CALF; THE SWIFT DECAY OF LOVE; THE MEDIATOR'S THREEFOLD PRAYER; GOD PROCLAIMING HIS OWN NAME; SIN AND FORGIVENESS)

Confronting communal failure, Maclaren highlights mediation, divine self-revelation, and the possibility of restored fellowship.

He warns of rapid spiritual decline while magnifying the patience that answers prayer and reconstitutes a people.

Exodus: Presence, Giving, and Pattern (BLESSED AND TRAGIC UNCONSCIOUSNESS; AN OLD SUBSCRIPTION LIST; THE COPIES OF THINGS IN THE HEAVENS)

These sermons consider unrecognized radiance, generous craftsmanship, and earthly patterns that witness to heavenly realities.

The theme is sustained presence made visible through humble service and shared sacrifice.

Leviticus: Overview and Holiness (THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS—both entries; STRANGE FIRE)

Maclaren frames Leviticus as a handbook of nearness, detailing how a holy God dwells with a called people.

Against presumption symbolized by illicit fire, he presses reverence, order, and heart-deep obedience.

Leviticus: Atonement and Cleansing (THE FIRST STAGE IN THE LEPER'S CLEANSING; THE DAY OF ATONEMENT; 'THE SCAPEGOAT')

Rituals of cleansing and the climactic Day of Atonement are read as pedagogy in purity, substitution, and restored fellowship.

The tone is explanatory and consoling, showing how enacted symbols tutor conscience without morbidness.

Leviticus: Joy, Pilgrimage, and Social Justice (THE CONSECRATION OF JOY; SOJOURNERS WITH GOD; GOD'S SLAVES; THE KINSMAN REDEEMER; THE OLD STORE AN THE NEW; EMANCIPATED SLAVES)

Festal joy, pilgrim identity, servanthood to God, and kinship economics culminate in jubilee themes of release and renewal.

Maclaren ties worship to equity and compassion, insisting that holiness reshapes time, property, and neighbor love.

Numbers: Overview and March (THE BOOK OF NUMBERS—both entries; THE WARFARE OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE; THE GUIDING PILLAR; HOBAB; THE HALLOWING OF WORK AND OF REST)

Introducing Numbers, Maclaren depicts a pilgrim army learning ordered movement under guidance, partnership, and rest.

Discipline and encouragement mingle as he treats service as warfare sustained by God’s directing presence.

Numbers: Rebellion and Intercession (MOSES DESPONDENT; AFRAID OF GIANTS; WEIGHED, AND FOUND WANTING; MOSES THE INTERCESSOR; SERVICE A GIFT)

These sermons track fear, complaint, and verdicts, then elevate the ministry of intercession and the grace of delegated service.

The emphasis is on courage, responsibility, and the gift-character of leadership rather than personal privilege.

Numbers: Discipline on the Way (THE WATERS OF MERIBAH; THE POISON AND THE ANTIDOTE; BALAAM; AN UNFULFILLED DESIRE)

Moments of frustration, plague, and prophetic ambiguity become occasions for correction, healing, and renewed focus.

Maclaren closes this arc with sober hope, acknowledging unfulfilled longings while keeping the horizon of promise in

view.

Expositions of Holy Scripture: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers

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aspiration, while 'The Heavenly Pathway and the Earthly Heart' and the paired wrestling at 'Mahanaim' depict inner negotiation that disciplines ambition without extinguishing desire. Leadership, in this frame, consists in discerning when yielding preserves promise and when it dissipates it, a discernment learned through solitude as much as strategy.

In the wilderness materials, prudence emerges as shared load rather than solitary prowess. 'Hobab' treats the appeal to experienced guidance as wise dependence, not abdication, while 'Moses Despondent' exposes the cost of bearing unmediated expectation. 'Service a Gift' recasts delegation as sacred distribution, aligning practical organization with vocational dignity. Maclaren’s tone here is pastoral and administrative, attentive to structures that prevent exhaustion. Compromise is not capitulation but the calibration of roles, where invitation, intercession, and institutional provision hold together the leader’s limits and the community’s varied capacities.

Yet Maclaren also marks the slope where prudence decays into accommodation. 'Afraid of Giants' and 'Weighed, and Found Wanting' trace how caution becomes paralysis when vision contracts to immediate risk. In 'Balaam,' spiritual office is portrayed as susceptible to incentives that mask self-interest as counsel, illustrating the peril of negotiating principle for advantage. Across these analyses, leadership is both ethical and imaginative: it must weigh costs without enthroning them, receive gifts without being bought, and sustain a horizon wide enough to resist the gravitational pull of fear.

Question 4

How does the journey motif structure Maclaren's theology of beginnings and ends?

Maclaren frames Genesis with departures and arrivals that interpret origins through pilgrimage. From 'The Vision of Creation' and 'Eden Lost and Restored' to the paired movements 'Going Forth' and 'Coming In,' beginnings are less a static state than a summons. 'Life in Canaan' and 'Two Retrospects of One Life' portray settled places as provisional, read in the light of promises that outlast location. The closing note in 'A Calm Evening, Promising a Bright Morning' and 'A Coffin in Egypt' keeps endings open-ended, coupling mortality with expectation that stretches beyond the immediate horizon.

Exodus amplifies the motif into communal passage, where thresholds become liturgies. 'A Path in the Sea' and 'Marah' map movement through deliverance and deprivation, while 'The Bread of God' and 'The Shepherd and the Fold' interpret sustenance and belonging as gifts received en route. 'The Ultimate Hope' and 'The Feast of Ingathering in the End of the Year' fold time into the journey, aligning seasonal rejoicing with remembered rescue. Maclaren's structuring suggests that progress is measured not only by miles but by practices that teach a people to carry origins toward promised futures.

In Leviticus and Numbers, travel becomes formation. 'Sojourners with God' and 'Emancipated Slaves' root identity in movement, where statutes educate desire for a land not yet held. Numbers sermons such as 'The Guiding Pillar' and 'The Hallowing of Work and of Rest' translate route and

rhythm into pedagogy, teaching when to advance and when to abide. 'The Warfare of Christian Service' and 'An Unfulfilled Desire' temper expectation with endurance, acknowledging contested progress and deferred attainments. Maclaren’s journey motif thus gathers beginnings into disciplined hope, rendering endings as transitions rather than closures.

Memorable Quotes

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1q "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

2q "The Unseen is the Real, and the Material is the merely Apparent."

3q "He believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness."

4q "It teaches that the essence of faith is absolute reliance, and that unites us with Him on whom we rely."

5q "The will is the man, the true action is the submission of the will."

6q "The seen is but a thin veil of the unseen."

7q "'But the Lord was with Joseph.'"

8q "Let God into your life, and its whole complexion and characteristics change."

9q "The touch of His hand is healing and life."

10q "Faith makes men energetic in the duties of the present."