



**B**Y the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. 2 We changed our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. 3 For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. 4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? (Psalm 137:1-4)

Though there may be sorrows to address in this lesson, today's devotion is not so full of woe as the previous few days, and a great hope is held forth. It addresses the sorrows of exile, but also the blessings of an ever-present Lord with His Elect people. He will never cast His own aside even when they are faced with severe testing and tribulation.

We have been addressing in Hosea last week the manner in which God views idolatry and apostasy. Those who engage in such excesses do not stand in favor with the Lord. In Israel of the northern ten tribes, the turning away from God was the norm and not the exception; however, there were those who remained faithful throughout the captivity and dispersion of the northern ten tribes. We observe the same in the case of Judah. There were many faithful among the greater idolatrous population that had not turned their backs on the Lord, and worshipped Him after the spirit and truth of the Promise made to Abraham. We shall see that God took special note of these and remained steadfastly beside them in all their travails and struggles.

Imagine, for example, the captivity of Judah as they were marched from Jerusalem to Babylon. Once they had arrived, their Babylonian oppressors made jest of them and taunted them in cruel ways. The change in venue from Jerusalem to Babylon was almost beyond the ability of the people to endure. The Prodigal Son found, as did Naomi in Moab, that the benefits of living in a far country is not in the least as joyful as spending one's days among familiar friends and gardens. But when the enemy has dragged you to that far country and takes pleasure in making sport of you, the misery mounts to the brazen heavens.

Let us consider the three children chosen for their perfect character and bearing to be raised up under Babylonian captivity: Daniel (meaning judge of God), Hananiah (God has favored), Mishael (Who is like God), and Azariah (God has helped). These were the Godly Hebrew names of the young men; but Nebuchadnezzar's prince of eunuchs gave to them heathen names that they might forget their God. This was an abysmal failure. To Daniel was given the name of Belteshazzar; to Hananiah the name Shadrach; to Mishael the name Meshach; and to Azariah the name Abednego. Daniel, however, and the others, were most often known by his Godly name.

We can see the over-ruling Providence of God for these faithful youth. They excelled in wisdom, knowledge, and physical well-being by adhering to the dietary standards of the Hebrews – both physical and spiritual diet, I mean. Please remember the courage of Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego whose faithfulness God so publicly rewarded before the eyes of the king. When the king made a law that all must bow down to the golden image of his making in Daniel, chap 3, these three refused to bow down to any image, idol or man except God. In a rage, the king had these three cast into a fiery furnace heated seven times more than was customary. The three were bound and cast into that furnace of hell-like fire. *And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; **and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*** (Daniel 3:23-25) Our Lord was right beside these even in the fiery furnace.

Let us now look to the courage of Daniel before the great King Darius, son of Cyrus the Great who had conquered Babylon. A trap was set for Daniel by his enemies of the king's court. They convinced King Darius to make a royal decree that any man who ask anything of any god or man for thirty days, except Darius, would be cast into the Lion's Den. In the laws of the Medes and Persians, even a king could not disannul his own ruling. So, the trap was set. You or I might seek a private closet in which to pray in order to save our skins, but not Daniel. *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.* (Daniel 6:10)

Daniel did not spare to pray, and that in public as always (knowing the consequences). There were numerous Christian children of Iraq and Syria under the treacheries of ISIS who, knowing the consequences, refused to renounce their faith in Christ and were beheaded for it. When Darius was informed of Daniel's failure to obey the decree, he was shaken to the core for he loved Daniel. He tried every means in his power to save Daniel but finally succumbed to the inevitable. *Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.* (Daniel 6:16-17)

There is a wonderfully meaningful painting in the Manchester Art Gallery in England painted by Briton Riviere in 1890 depicting Daniel in the Lion's Den. Daniel is standing with his back to the hungry lions and is looking up to the opening through which light is flowing. This, I believe, captures perfectly the character of Daniel. We all know the end of the story - how King Darius arose at first light and ran to the den to see if Daniel was still in the land of the living. Of course, he was because God was with him even in exile in Babylon as He had been with the other three.

What has this to do with the title of today's devotion, *EXILE AT HOME*? There is perhaps a worse exile than being dragged away to a strange country whose gods are impotent, and whose natures are wicked. Suppose the enemy were to come and take possession of your God-given country and place you in bondage there. You see all of the beauty of the past being trampled under-foot by knaves and scoundrels. You see the besmirching of your national escutcheon, and the total disrespect for the God who has attended your spirit from time immemorial. The altars are cast down, your monuments of the past pulled down, the Temple desecrated, and all that you cherish is destroyed before your very eyes. That would be far worse than the Babylonian captivity!

It may be that Lord will make us captive in the land of our beloved America. We may see our properties confiscated by a greedy and unenterprising enemy. We may continue to see our National shrines and monuments destroyed, our history erased, our churches either burned or turned into the dens of iniquity that many have already become. You may continue to see every mention of our Lord and Savior extinguished from even the whisper on the street. We may live to see the 'abomination that maketh desolate standing in the Holy Place, then you may know that the end is near. *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)* What is Christ referring to here? What does Daniel say? He refers to the antichrist: *And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate, (Daniel 11:31), and Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all. (Daniel 11:37)*

When I was in elementary school, I read Daniel and Revelations with eager enthusiasm – perhaps the monsters of dragons and seven-headed beasts kindled my imagination. But I could not understand the meaning of Daniel 11:37 as a child. Now, I believe I have some idea of what this verse means in view of the perversions of our day, and those very perversions standing in the pulpits of America. *(whoso readeth, let him understand:)*

But just as God did not abandon His elect in Babylon, neither will He abandon His elect if America is overtaken by these wicked and adulterous ideologies. . . . *for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (Hebrews 13:5-6) Remember, too, our Lord's final counsel prior to His ascension: . . .lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.Amen. (Matthew 28:20)*

We may rest in the sure knowledge that Christ will never abandon His own. Even in the fires of tribulation or among the beasts and demons of our society, He will be with us – right beside – come what may!