



# THE EXHORTER

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***“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40***

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***2 Kings 25:7 "And they slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon."***

Our verse today seems to be an odd selection for a devotional. Doubt you'll ever find this verse on a greeting card or stitched on a pillow. It's in our Bibles because God put it there. It's there for our learning. Beyond the historical context, there are lessons here.

Here's the background. Babylon was bearing down on Jerusalem. They were the instruments of God to punish Judah. The king of Judah, Jehoiachin, was led away to Babylon. This is about the time that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack and Abed-nego are taken captive. These events correspond with the book of Jeremiah, which is written from the perspective of life in Jerusalem, and Daniel, which is written from the perspective of life as a captive in Babylon. God allowed His holy temple to be desecrated by pagans. The gold furnishings and the utensils used in the temple to serve God were stolen and carried back to Babylon.

The Babylonian king appointed Zedekiah to be the new king of Judah. He was to be the puppet of Babylon. He disobeyed God. He served about eleven years. He rebelled against Babylon and Babylon attacked. It is here where our verse is found. Zedekiah's sons were killed before him. Then his own eyes were gouged out. The last thing he saw was the death of his sons. Tied up, he was taken back to Babylon.

What do we learn from all of this:

First, the depth of evil can seem bottomless. The words of our verse lack compassion. Some would say this is war, and bad things happen in war. But before war, heartless people filled with anger and hatred ruin the lives of others. The stories of crime, evil and wickedness fill the pages of history. Once the parameters of decency, goodness and godliness have been removed, there is no end to how wicked some can be. We read of Pharaoh and centuries later, Herod, killing innocent babies. Evil continues to hurt the innocent and the good.

Second, for a time it seems that evil is triumphant. Among the captives taken to Babylon were good men and women. People of faith were among those captives. The prayerful Daniel, the courageous Shadrach, Meshack and Abed-nego, were among those. They didn't start being faithful and prayerful when their city fell. This is the way that they were. Their entire world fell apart.

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This wasn't for a week or so. This was going to last seventy years, as God promised. Many would die in Babylon. The beyond city of David, the beautiful temple where worship was so important to them, would never be seen again. It must have been hard for them to understand these things and dozens and dozens of questions must have come to their minds. Why would God allow His temple to be destroyed? Why would God allow the ark of the covenant to be stolen? It seems that evil wins.

And, for us, we may feel the same. It may seem that wickedness reigns and decency, honesty and righteousness can no where be found anymore. It may seem that evil is winning. It may seem that the righteous are helpless and are along for the ride. The suffering saints in Peter's day must have felt this way. The suffering saints in Revelation must have felt this way.

Third, for the people of God, it seems that hope, prayer and faith are all that they have. But, that's enough. They do not raise up arms and fight. They are unable to overcome a powerful Babylonian empire. Yet, what do we find Daniel doing? Praying. Living righteously. Continuing on with the Lord. This is our call as well. We don't call the attorneys. We don't grab our guns. We don't form an army. What we do is to continue to assemble, continue to worship, and continue to trust in the Lord.

Fourth, there were things that God was doing that they never knew. God was using Babylon. God had Babylon in the palms of His hands. When it was time, God would crush Babylon. There are so many things going on all around us that we do not see, understand nor can appreciate. God is busy. He is doing things even this day. Ours is not to seek a life of comfort but of faithfulness to the Lord. What if America fell? What if our faith was outlawed? What if we were carried to a foreign land against our wishes? We would continue to pray, trust God and follow Him. We must remember that God does not have an American Flag on the walls of Heaven. Long before there was an America and long after America is no more, God remains God.

Fifth, it is easy to assume that Zedekiah got what he deserved. He disobeyed God and he rebelled against Babylon. He put himself in that place and his choices led to the terrible expressions in our verse today. However, does anyone deserve to get what they get? That thought swings both ways. I've heard people say that they deserve Heaven because they have had such a terrible life here. Or, someone deserves Heaven because they were so good here. No one deserves Heaven. And, really, no one deserves to be treated in a wicked, evil and cruel manner. Our lives are made up of choices. All choices have responsibilities and consequences. Some consequences lead to misery and pain. Some consequences lead us to blessings and comfort. If we all got what we deserved, then none of us would make it to Heaven.

Sixth, losing your eyes is not nearly as bad as losing your soul. A person can be blind and go to Heaven. The tragedy of Zedekiah was that he was disobedient to God. He was in the position where he could have made a difference. He didn't. He was the king. He had resources to influence others. He didn't. We get upset when someone is injured in a car accident, but it doesn't seem to register with us that the person may not be pleasing to the Lord. We pray for broken bones, but not a broken soul. We want the person to get well, but we forget about getting righteous. Zedekiah lost his sight. Most likely Zedekiah lost his soul.

Finally, what a contrast in Scriptures between our verse and the raising of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5. Here, the last thing Zedekiah saw was the execution and murder of his sons. A parents nightmare. But in Mark 5, Jesus calls the young girl back to life. He is holding her hand. As she opens her eyes, one of the first things she would have seen is Jesus, standing right in front of her.

I like to think among the righteous that we close our eyes in death and we open them to see Jesus. We open them to see Jesus and never have to close them again.

This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through...aren't you glad!

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)