MISSION OUT OF EXILE 2

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The Jews longed to go back home and whilst the false prophets made them think that everything was OK, Jeremiah came along and shattered this illusion, telling them that they were in for a lifetime of exile.

So the Jews sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept when they remembered Zion.

I have an impression that we have a similar reaction; we like hark back to a golden age, when Spurgeon was packing in the crowds at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Lloyd-Jones was expounding Romans in minute detail at Westminster Chapel, Hudson-Taylor was recruiting huge numbers of missionaries for China and everything in the garden was rosy. Of course, that time never existed, except through our rose tinted spectacles.

Yet, while we might look back to a mythical, wonderful past, we are less sure about the future.

The Danish physicist Neils Bohr said that it is difficult to make predictions, especially when it concerns the future. I think this can be applied to the situation of the church in the UK today. Â There is one school of thought that says we are living through a paradigm shift which will see an almost terminal decline in the church in Europe and a reawakening at the periphery. Others believe that things have more or less stabilised as they are. Our Grandchildren will be able to tell us how it all worked out.

I don't know what the future holds, but one thing I am sure of is that it won't be the past! We can't go back! Things are not like they used to be and they never will be again. Britain will never be the great missionary sending country that it was in the past â€“ it may, in God's mercy, be a different sort of great missionary sending country, but the social and political factors, not to mention the religious ones, which allowed for the great mission movements of the 19th and 20th centuries have ended. We need to look to a new sort of future and not try and revisit the past.