

Nursing In Babylon

The Christian's Situation

In the same way that Jesus said of his disciples in the Garden at Gethsemane...

They are not of the world... but ...I have sent them into the world

[John 17:16]

So Peter says of us...

We are aliens and strangers in the world... having been called to be a ...holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare...[his] praises

[1 Peter 2:11 & 9]

The difficulty for us as nurses and midwives is, on a practical level, what does that mean?

We know we're not called to be 'Sunday only' Christians – and we don't want to be, that's why we face so many frustrations at work, - so how do we set about doing a good job of work and remaining faithful Christians at the same time?

The Babylonian Situation

Read Jeremiah 29:4-14 – the *Letter to the Exiles*. The Israelites have been exiled to Babylon, exhorted to be in Babylon, but not of Babylon. To settle down, and even seek the prosperity of Babylon, but also to continue to seek God in all of this and to be ready to respond to his call. In effect we, as Christians, are in the same situation today as the Israelites were when Jeremiah wrote to them in Babylon. In trying to work out what it means for us as Christians to live as God's people in the world, but to keep ourselves from becoming of the world we can look at the example set for us by the Israelites in Babylon. A particularly good working example is to look at Daniel's experience in Daniel chapter 1.

Group Activity

Read Daniel 1. Before reading this article further, discuss among yourselves the particular challenges you think Daniel and his friends faced in maintaining their integrity as people of God.

The big issue here is when is it right to say "yes" or "no" in a pagan world? How far do we go along with the world as it is presented to us, and at what point do we say enough is enough?

Daniel and his friends are in a similar situation us as students.

- They are to attend the university of Babylon for 3 years learning the language and literature of the Babylonians and then graduate into the king's service.

They face the same 2 essential choices as us students:

- Do they just accept the situation they find themselves in and make the best of it or do they endeavour to remain distinctive in some way – to engage in their new environment, but not sell out to it?

Well we know they do the latter, but the issues on which they take their stand, at first glance seem rather surprising.

They don't object to being given new names, but they do object to eating the king's good food.

Again, at first glance there doesn't seem anything terribly awful about being given new names. I had a friend a church whose name was Chu'en, but this was simply too complicated for our English ears, so to make life simpler she changed her name to Jen. But that was just about comprehension. Names given to people in the bible had much more significance...

Daniel: <i>God is my judge</i>	Beltshazzar: <i>favourite of Bel</i>
Hananiah: <i>Yah has been gracious</i>	Shadrach: <i>Young friend of the king</i>
Mishael: <i>Who is what God is?</i>	Meshach: <i>the lamb</i>
Azariah: <i>Yah has helped</i>	Abednego: <i>servant of Nebo</i>

And yet they seem to accept these new names without quibbling. I'm not sure I would have done the same. If someone called me servant of Shivah, instead of Sally I think I would be pretty mad.

However the important thing is not what people call us, but what God calls us? Shadrach seems to be happy to be called *young friend of the king* as long as he is seen to be servant of the Living King, and the point on which they make their stand is this apparently trivial point about not eating the king's excellent food and wine, but instead opting for water and vegetables.

Why make their stand on this point, which to be fair seems pretty trivial by comparison to the slanderous names they have been given and accepted?

The issue is one of Divine Command.

God had given the Israelites no instruction about what they should be called, but he had given them instructions about what they should eat. On this issue they had a call to be distinctive which they obeyed.

But also notice the way they set about establishing their distinctiveness – with gentleness and respect, not with harsh words or public confrontation.

What are the lessons for us?

- It isn't wrong to learn the things the world has to teach us
- We do need to draw a line. There are battles we are called to fight, but also ones that are best left alone
- The line ultimately is drawn over matters of Divine Command – we therefore need to know God's nature, character and commands.
- We don't need to announce our objections in strident tones – to take up the placard and set up a picket line – we can be gentle and strategic.
- It's not enough to be called God's servants, we need to show ourselves to be God's servants

Group Activity

In order to Nurse in Babylon what we need to work out is:

Which battles in lectures and on the wards should we fight and which ones should we leave alone?

How do we fight these battles strategically and respectfully?

You might like to take some time to think through some of the challenges you have faced, or some of the challenges you know you are likely to face, and discuss in groups how you think you might respond to those challenges with integrity as Christians. It's always helpful to try to be as specific as you can about the situations and your responses.

You might also like to look at role of personal faith in **Daniel 6**.

- What is the specific command from God that Daniel refuses to break?
- In what ways are we under pressure from our lecturers to deny God and worship other things as god?
- How can we learn from Daniel's faithfulness?
- What do you need in order to practise the same level of faith as Daniel?
- Who is watching at your personal window of faith? Remember people watch our priorities as well as our words.