

Distinctives: thriving in Babylon

Paula Busuulwa considers Daniel's example

'Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'¹

The prophet Jeremiah, in his letter to the Jewish exiles taken to Babylon, exhorts them to seek the peace of the city, encouraging them to build, marry and settle down.² What a remarkably strange thing to say to a group of people who have been forcefully taken from their own country into the land of their enemies.³ The captives from Judah, to whom the letter in Jeremiah 29 was addressed, might have been perplexed at this advice but God promises this situation will be temporary and that he will bring about a positive end for his people.⁴

At the 2017 CMF Student Conference, Professor John Lennox challenged us to learn from the example of Daniel.⁵ As one of the captives taken from Judah, Daniel would have been one of those to whom Jeremiah's message was directed and his life shines as a positive example of how to thrive in

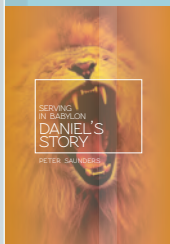
Babylon. Like the Jews who were only to remain in Babylon for 70 years,⁶ we the church are only called to earth for a short time and know this world is not our home⁷ but whilst here we should make the most of the time because the days are evil.⁸ How then might we apply the principles learnt from Daniel and the instructions of the prophet Jeremiah to our lives as 21st century Christian students and doctors in order to thrive in modern day Babylon?

Seeking the peace of the city means that we are keepers and seekers of the peace in our environment. We should still speak on issues which are important and demand a response, but serve without complaining and be active in seeking solutions to the challenges which we face in our work as students and doctors. A powerful example of this is seen in Daniel 2 where King Nebuchadnezzar makes a harsh decree ordering



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RESOURCE



If you are interested in reading more about this theme, CMF has recently published a booklet looking at how Christians can be fruitful yet distinctive as they serve God in the UK NHS. Christians face challenges not that different to those of Daniel. Living and serving as 'aliens and strangers' can lead to great pressure to close ranks or to forget who we are. £2 from cmf.org.uk

well as serving his people. Daniel used his gift of dream interpretation to serve successive Kings (see Daniel 2, 4 and 5) and flourished in Babylon.¹⁴

Thirdly, seeking the peace means we actively pray. Though last, this is by far the most important. Daniel prayed and God did amazing things through his life so we too need to pray for each other, our medical schools, hospitals, colleagues as well as those in positions of power in the NHS and beyond. If we hope to flourish in Babylon we need to pray not only that God would work through us and in us as individuals but also work in the lives of the people around us, for prayer can do great things as evidenced by the life of Daniel.

Daniel understood that in order to be successful in Babylon he had to engage whilst remaining undefiled and his life provides us with a good example of how to thrive in a foreign land and excel even in the face of opposition. Daniel's bravery, integrity and wisdom are amongst the many things we admire most about him and what ultimately allowed him not only survive but thrive in Babylon. It's something we can learn from even today.¹⁵ ■

REFERENCES

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| 1. Jeremiah 29:7 | 8. Ephesians 5:16 |
| 2. Jeremiah 29:5-7 | 9. Daniel 2:12 |
| 3. 2 Chronicles 36:20 | 10. Daniel 2:16-19 |
| 4. Jeremiah 29:10-11 | 11. Daniel 2:18-49 |
| 5. These talks are available at:
cmf.org.uk/resources/media | 12. Matthew 5:16 |
| 6. Jeremiah 29:10 | 13. Colossians 3:23-24 |
| 7. Hebrews 11:13-16 | 14. Daniel 1:17, 2:46-49 |
| | 15. 1 Corinthians 10:11 |

for the deaths of all the wise men in Babylon when none of them are able to tell him his dream and its interpretation.⁹ On hearing this, Daniel sought the king's permission to take time to understand the dream (in fact he prayed and sought God)¹⁰ and provided a God-honouring solution to Nebuchadnezzar's problem.¹¹ Daniel demonstrated leadership and was active in seeking a solution to the problem. It's important to understand that although Daniel may not have agreed with the king's request he did seek a solution when a problem arose.

Specific examples of what this might look like include being part of a local medical school or hospital juniors doctors' committee as well as engaging with national organisations like the BMA.

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In doing so, we can speak up on issues affecting us and our colleagues, we can also pioneer changes and improvements to the way things are currently done in our organisations that may alleviate stress and inefficiencies which frequently occur. If we are able to meet, either as individuals or through representation, then we should not shy away but rather embrace the opportunity to be a voice for others and let our light shine.¹²

Secondly, we find that seeking the peace of the city requires an action on our part. The captives are to build houses, plant gardens and eat of their produce, which implies being productive and fruitful in Babylon. We are fortunate as medical students to have many opportunities to develop in a multitude of areas such as writing, debating, research, leading and organising teams, all of these given by God and to be used to honour and glorify¹³ him as