

Daniel 4:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream.

Analysis

Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream.

Nebuchadnezzar's response mirrors his earlier dream in chapter 2—summoning Babylon's entire intellectual and religious establishment to interpret divine revelation. Despite previous failures (2:2-11, where they couldn't tell the dream or its meaning), the king defaults to human wisdom rather than immediately consulting Daniel, who had demonstrated unique interpretive ability granted by God.

This pattern reveals humanity's persistent tendency to seek answers apart from God. Even after witnessing God's power (chapter 2's revelation, chapter 3's fiery furnace deliverance), Nebuchadnezzar's first instinct is to consult human experts—magicians (אַשְׁפָּזָא/ashpaya), astrologers (גּוֹזְרָא/gozraya), Chaldeans (כַּשְׁדָּיִם/kasdaye), and soothsayers (כְּתוּמָא/chartumaya). These represent Babylon's sophisticated intellectual tradition—astronomy, divination, dream interpretation, and occult practices.

The decree (דְּבַר/te'em, royal command) demonstrates sovereign authority. Ancient Near Eastern kings could summon anyone, command any service. Yet all their learning proved useless before genuine divine revelation. Human wisdom, however sophisticated, cannot penetrate divine mysteries without supernatural illumination (1 Corinthians 2:14: 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of

God').

From a Reformed perspective, this illustrates the noetic effects of sin—humanity's intellectual faculties are affected by the fall, rendering us unable to discern spiritual truth apart from divine revelation and the Spirit's illumination. Babylon's wise men possessed impressive learning but lacked the crucial element: God's Spirit. Their failure prepared for Daniel's success, highlighting that spiritual insight comes through divine gift, not human achievement.

This pattern appears throughout Scripture: Pharaoh's magicians failed where Moses succeeded (Exodus 7-8); Babylonian astrologers failed where Daniel succeeded (chapters 2, 4, 5); worldly wisdom fails where gospel simplicity succeeds (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). God deliberately confounds human wisdom to demonstrate that salvation and revelation come solely through His grace.

Historical Context

Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar was the ancient world's intellectual center. Its astronomers mapped the heavens with remarkable precision, developing mathematics, calendars, and predictive systems. The Enuma Anu Enlil, a vast compendium of celestial omens, represented centuries of accumulated astronomical observation. Babylon's scribes preserved and transmitted Mesopotamian learning—literature, law codes, medical texts, and architectural treatises.

The 'wise men' (חֲכִימִין/hakimin) formed a professional class with specialized training. Magicians studied incantations and rituals; astrologers interpreted celestial phenomena; Chaldeans (ethnically Babylonian intellectuals) maintained astronomical records; soothsayers practiced divination through various means. These weren't charlatans but educated professionals operating within sophisticated theoretical frameworks.

Yet their systems, despite genuine learning, were rooted in false presuppositions—polytheistic worldviews attributing causation to multiple deities, deterministic assumptions about fate and destiny, and occultic practices forbidden by Scripture.

Their failure before God's revelation exposed the bankruptcy of intellectual systems built on false foundations.

For Jewish exiles, this scene demonstrated Yahweh's superiority over Babylon's vaunted wisdom. The empire that conquered Judah, destroyed the Temple, and scattered God's people couldn't interpret a dream. Meanwhile, Daniel—an exile, captive, and adherent of defeated Judah's God—possessed understanding that surpassed the empire's entire intellectual establishment. This vindicated biblical faith against pagan alternatives.

The early church faced similar situations. Greek philosophy (Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism) represented sophisticated intellectual traditions. Roman law and administration demonstrated organizational genius. Yet the gospel's 'foolishness' proved wiser than human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:25), converting philosophers, lawyers, and intellectuals who discovered that worldly wisdom couldn't satisfy the soul or solve the sin problem.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Why do we, like Nebuchadnezzar, often consult human wisdom before seeking God's guidance?
2. How does the failure of Babylon's sophisticated intellectual tradition challenge modern confidence in human reason and expertise?
3. What is the difference between human knowledge (which Babylon's wise men possessed) and spiritual wisdom (which only God grants)?
4. In what areas of life do Christians inappropriately rely on 'wise men of Babylon' (secular experts) rather than biblical wisdom?
5. How should we balance respect for human learning and expertise with recognition of its limitations in spiritual matters?

Interlinear Text

וּמִנִּי	שָׁ יָם	טֵעַ מֶ	לְהַנְעִלָהּ	קִדְמִי	לְכָל	חֲכִימֵי
Therefore	made	I a decree	to bring	before	in all	the wise
H4481	H7761	H2942	H5954	H6925	H3606	H2445
בְּבָבֶל	דִּי	פֶשֶׁר	חֲלֵמָא			
men of Babylon	H1768	unto me the interpretation	of the dream			
H895		H6591	H2493			

יְהוֹדְעֵנִי:
me that they might make known
H3046

Additional Cross-References

Daniel 2:2 (Parallel theme): Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.