

• *The next stage of Daniel's ministry*

1. Nebuchadnezzar is anxious and insecure.

• *The world's rich and powerful men are generally not as secure and calm as they pretend to be!*

2. In his anxiety Nebuchadnezzar wants to find someone who has supernatural knowledge.

• *People who are full of anxiety want to know what is going to happen in the future*

3. Nebuchadnezzar is aware of the danger of trickery in people who claim to have supernatural knowledge

• *A very simple way of testing their claims*

Now that Daniel has had some practical experience of living in a pagan empire, God is ready to use him in giving him revelations concerning future pagan kingdoms that will domineer over his people. The next stage of his ministry all begins when Nebuchadnezzar has a dream

1. **Nebuchadnezzar is anxious and insecure.** It is the year 604 BC. Nebuchadnezzar has only been emperor over Babylonia for one year. God gives him a dream. His mind is troubled and he cannot sleep ^{☞1}. God is capable of speaking to pagan emperors. We remember perhaps how he spoke to Abimelech, king of Gerar ^{☞2}, and how Pilate's wife had a dream about Jesus ^{☞3}. One would think that Nebuchadnezzar would be entirely confident. He is the world's richest man. He is the most powerful man in the greatest empire of his day, the empire of Babylonia. Yet he cannot get to sleep at night and is full of anxieties. We might ask: what is the value of being the world's richest and most powerful man if one cannot get to sleep at night and is full of anxiety? The world's rich and powerful men are not to be envied; they are to be pitied. They are generally not as secure and calm as they pretend to be!

2. **In his anxiety Nebuchadnezzar wants to find someone who has supernatural knowledge.** He summons his magicians and fortune-tellers of various kinds. People who are full of anxiety want to know what is going to happen in the future. For this reason they will often turn to anyone who claims to have some kind of supernatural knowledge. Nebuchadnezzar hopes these men who make claims to supernatural knowledge will be able to give him some kind of guidance and help ^{☞1}. People are desperate to find out about the future. They want to know what is going to happen to them. They will turn to astrologers and witch-doctors. They will listen to any philosopher or orator or politician who speaks with authority or charisma – even a charisma that comes from the devil. Why do people listen to such charlatans? Because they are so desperate to find some kind of answer to the questions of life.

3. **Nebuchadnezzar is aware of the danger of trickery in people who claim to have supernatural knowledge.** Although Nebuchadnezzar wants a supernatural answer to his anxiety, yet he is very careful to avoid any spiritual fraudulence. The various magicians and fortune-tellers of Nebuchadnezzar's court are only too ready to claim to be able to give him some kind of revelation. 'Tell us the dream, and we will interpret it', they say boldly and confidently ^{☞1}. But Nebuchadnezzar is not ready to listen to anyone who claims to have supernatural knowledge. Perhaps he has listened to these 'magicians' before, and has been disillusioned over what they have claimed!

So he has a very simple way of telling whether they are as supernaturally informed as they claim. Let them tell him what the dream was first, and **then** tell him what its interpretation is. It is a reasonable request. If they have supernatural ability to tell what ordinary people do not know, then let them supernaturally tell him what his dream was.

☞1 2:1

☞2 Genesis 20:3

☞3 Matthew 27:19

☞1 2:2-3

☞1 2:4

• *Nebuchadnezzar regards spiritual fraud as a very serious matter*

• *‘Do not believe every spirit’, says the New Testament, ‘but test the spirits’*

4. Spiritual frauds cannot pass reasonable examination

• *The real prophet knows what cannot be known in any natural way*

Nebuchadnezzar regards spiritual fraud as a very serious matter. If they do not in fact have the supernatural gift they claim, he will chop them into pieces ¹. If they really are able to give him supernatural information they will be generously rewarded ². The magicians try to persuade Nebuchadnezzar to tell them the dream ³, but he refuses. They must tell the dream to him without his help ⁴. Otherwise he will regard them as telling him lies and wicked things. ‘Tell me the dream, and then I shall know’, he says ⁵.

¹ 2:5
² 2:6
³ 2:7
⁴ 2:8
⁵ 2:9

It is all a typical picture from life at any stage of human history. Men and women are worried about what will happen. They long to have some idea of the future, and will turn to anyone who offers them some kind of answer. Frauds and charlatans step forward and claim to know what is ahead of us. But Nebuchadnezzar was a shrewd man. It was quite a reasonable request he made. We should be the same. ‘Do not believe every spirit’, says the New Testament, ‘but test the spirits’. Prophets and magicians should be watched very carefully. Supernatural knowledge ought to be able to show something that is obviously supernatural! Why should we believe someone just because he claims to have supernatural knowledge? Let them have some way of showing that what they know is indeed trustworthy. Nebuchadnezzar’s test is quite reasonable; Daniel will be able to pass it.

4. Spiritual frauds cannot pass reasonable examination. The answer of the magicians is extraordinary. ‘*There is no person on earth who can reveal what the king demands! ... No one can reveal it to the king except the gods.*’ An amazing confession! It shows that actually they do not believe in supernaturally revealed knowledge at all, and they do not expect any kind of divine help! So much for their supernatural gift! It was a revelation indeed – a revelation that previously they had been in the habit of deceiving their clients!

All of this is very helpful to us today. We still live in a world where there are plenty of people who reckon they can tell us what our future is. There are some simple tests we may apply. Let the supernatural knowledge be really something that could not be known in any ordinary way. Let it not be guesswork based on what is likely to happen! We can all play guessing-games once some big world events have already started to happen. The real prophet knows what cannot be known in any natural way. The fact is most ‘prophecies’ are totally unreliable. I certainly believe in predictive prophecy, but the real thing is not so common as some people think. Nebuchadnezzar’s common sense is needed.



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