

## **Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin**

*Daniel 5:1-31*

*5 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. <sup>2</sup> While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his <sup>[a]</sup>father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. <sup>3</sup> Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup> They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.*

*<sup>5</sup> In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. <sup>6</sup> Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. <sup>7</sup> The king cried <sup>[b]</sup>aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." <sup>8</sup> Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. <sup>9</sup> Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were <sup>[c]</sup>astonished.*

*<sup>10</sup> The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. <sup>11</sup> There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your <sup>[d]</sup>father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your <sup>[e]</sup>father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. <sup>12</sup> Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and <sup>[f]</sup>explaining enigmas*

were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.”

<sup>13</sup> Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel <sup>[g]</sup>who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my <sup>[h]</sup>father the king brought from Judah? <sup>14</sup> I have heard of you, that the <sup>[i]</sup>Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. <sup>15</sup> Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. <sup>16</sup> And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and <sup>[j]</sup>explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

<sup>17</sup> Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. <sup>18</sup> O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your <sup>[k]</sup>father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. <sup>19</sup> And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. <sup>20</sup> But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. <sup>21</sup> Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he <sup>[l]</sup>knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

<sup>22</sup> “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. <sup>23</sup> And you have <sup>[m]</sup>lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of <sup>[n]</sup>His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. <sup>24</sup> Then the <sup>[o]</sup>fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

<sup>25</sup> “And this is the inscription that was written:

<sup>[p]</sup>MENE, MENE, <sup>[q]</sup>TEKEL, <sup>[r]</sup>UPHARSIN.

<sup>26</sup> This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; <sup>27</sup> TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; <sup>28</sup> PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”<sup>[s]</sup> <sup>29</sup> Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

<sup>30</sup> That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. <sup>31</sup> And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

I concluded last week’s message by pointing out that at the end of Chapter 4 with Nebuchadnezzar’s final proclamation about the one true God that this was the end of what was said of Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel. We will hear his name, because he is the father of Belshazzar, who is going to take center stage in Chapter 5. The phrase in verse 2 reads like this: *While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his <sup>[a]</sup>father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.*

The statement that Nebuchadnezzar is his father means not that he was his dad, but that he was descended from Nebuchadnezzar. The phrase father is used for grandfathers as well. Jesus was called the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. Daniel does not say that the other kings did not reign between Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar. We know from other Biblical accounts that there were other kings between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Jeremiah 52 speaks of a king called Evil-merodach. I want you to notice that is his name. Evil-merodach, it is not necessarily a portrait of his character. We also read about Neriglissar, his brother-in-law, and Laborasoarchod who reigned for only nine months. Berosus makes Nabonidus, the last king, to have been *one of the people*, raised to the throne by an insurrection. But according to Jeremiah 27:7 Belshazzar is the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.

What is interesting about this passage though is the way in which we are introduced to Belshazzar. He is making a feast for a thousand of his noble lords. He is drinking wine and he makes a command to one of his subordinates to bring him the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had sacked from the temple in Jerusalem.

The very first mention of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 1 in verse 2 tells us about his taking the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. Not much is said about this after they are taken, but I think it is important to see that this offense against God is not forgotten. In Chapter 2, 3, and 4 of the Book Nebuchadnezzar battles with pride and arrogance and ultimately he is humbled and confesses the sovereignty of God. But now here we are in chapter 5 and the very first thing we encounter is another Babylonian King who in pride and arrogance is going to take what is holy and use it for profane purposes.

We are meant to see a comparison between Nebuchadnezzar and his response to the chastening of the Lord, and Belshazzar and his response. Now I know there is an objection to that statement, because it is an objection I myself have thought of. Yes Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself and exalted God, and we see Belshazzar confronted in his arrogance and he does not seem overly hostile to the Word of God and yet at the end of the passage we see “that very night” that he was killed. This is a classic example of one of those texts where we will attempt to find unfairness with God. Nebuchadnezzar stole the vessels from the temple and stole the Hebrew children away from Jerusalem. Daniel interpreted his dream about the great image and Nebuchadnezzar responded not by honoring the Kingdom of God but by building an image and threatening all who would not bow to be cast into the furnace of fire. And yet God continued to show him mercy, even though he continued in his pride. Nebuchadnezzar then had his heart changed to that of a beast, and then he finally acknowledged that it was the God of heaven who rules in the affairs of man. But then we see Belshazzar and he dishonors God by taking of the holy things, and that very night he pays the price with his life.

My tendency is to look at this and think, well if you gave Belshazzar as many chances as you gave Nebuchadnezzar perhaps he would have repented. But by asking that question we are forgetting that the story is not about Nebuchadnezzar, it is not about Belshazzar, the events being played out are being directed and controlled by God. God is sovereign and God is control and

we have to remember some of the last words recorded by Nebuchadnezzar toward the end of Chapter 4:

*All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing.  
He does according to His will in the army of heaven  
And among the inhabitants of the earth no one can restrain His hand  
Or say to Him, "What have you done?"*

The Sovereignty of God is not the most popular topic in the Church today, and yet the popularity of a topic does not change its truth or falsity. Here again we see God ruling amongst the nations, and in every case He is directing things according to His purpose and not mans.

Belshazzar and his concubines are drinking from the vessels, looted from the temple in Jerusalem and the story takes a very strange twist. We read that as they drank from the vessels they praised the gods of *gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone*. It is hard to imagine a more blatant example of idolatry. And yet there is a warning for us here. Their praises of these idols likely came in the form of sacrifices offered to them, or songs, or drinking of toasts, and ascribing great victories and conquests to these false gods. And they did this with the very implements of God's holy temple. How easy it is to misplace our trust and look to other things as the reason for our deliverance. Yes, these were pagan men, and this was a pagan king, but they would answer for their idolatry that very night. How much worse for those who are called by the name of the living God to fail to give praise to God for all things. We know that God uses means, but to praise institutions, and or leaders, and or discoveries, and refuse to give praise to God is a rank form of idolatry. Remember God's warning to Israel, "Beware that you forget not God..." They praised images that they could touch, see, and feel and they forgot where it was that their deliverance came from.

While they were doing this, we read that <sup>5</sup> *In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.*

I have been asked before if I could go back in time and witness one event from history what that event would be. I am not saying this is that event, but it is certainly a candidate. I love the next verse:

*<sup>6</sup> Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.*

You don't say. This makes sense. I can only imagine the atmosphere of the entire room changing rapidly as this event took place. We are told that the King's countenance changed, but I am sure that there were others in the room that had to be wondering what was going on. A festive mood quickly changed to a mood of concern.

Verse 7 through 12 then tell us details about how it was that Belshazzar and all those who were his noble lords reacted to this event and we learn a couple of interesting things. Everyone wanted to know what this meant. Everyone wanted to know what the writing on the wall was but it was not until the Queen came into the room that Daniel was even thought of or mentioned. What we learn from this, is that Daniel, who had spoke the Word of God to Nebuchadnezzar was unknown to Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar who had been proud was humbled at the words of Daniel, and he praised and gave honor to God. But sometime between the reign of Nebuchadnezzar God and His word had been forgotten. Again we see the wisemen, the astrologers, the soothsayers, and the Chaldeans being summoned and offered a reward if they could give the meaning of the writing on the wall. Whoever would do this would be honored, but there was none who could be found. That is until the Queen came in and spoke.

Now it is easy for us to read this and assume that the Queen was the wife of Belshazzar, however the Queen, according to historian Herodotus, was the queen mother, or *grandmother and her name was* Nitocris. She had not been at the feast. According to the commentaries and historians she was either the wife of Nebuchadnezzar or of Evil merodach; thus she was familiar with the work and ministry of Daniel. It says of her that she completed the great works which the former had begun. Hence Herodotus attributes them to her alone. This accounts for the deference paid to her by Belshazzar. She was respected by Belshazzar and so her words would be heard. And she brings his attention to the man Daniel with these words:

*There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.*

*Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."*

I want us to notice a couple of important things. Daniel, who proclaimed God's word was respected and honored in the days of Belshazzar's Father. Daniel is not even known by Belshazzar, prior to this. Since the days of Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean empire had been living on borrowed capital. Their King had in the past honored God, but now they were a nation consumed by idolatry and pride. The word of God which spoke to Nebuchadnezzar had been silenced.

How similar a situation we find ourselves in. When we read our history we cannot help but see that our forefathers at minimum gave a lip service to the God of the Bible. Many of our national and political leaders recognized that nations and kingdoms rise and fall by the hand of God. We can see this in their writings, we can hear this in their speeches. Yes, there were problems. I am often distraught and bothered by certain events and things in our history by these men, but there was a recognition by them that it was God who rules. Today, in our nation, the idea that God rules in the affairs of man is not even taught in many of our churches. We have leaned to our own understanding and our own way of doing things. When someone points it out to us, we refuse to hear because after all we live in a more sophisticated time.

Belshazzar then summons Daniel and after confirming Daniel is who he is looking for he tells him that he will honor him by clothing him with purple, the color of royalty and *placing* a chain of gold around his neck, and exalting him to be the third ruler in the kingdom.

It is interesting that under Nebuchadnezzar all of these honors had already been bestowed upon Daniel. I do not know that he had the chain of gold, and I do not know that he was dressed in purple, but Daniel, under Nebuchadnezzar ruled and he ruled wisely because Daniel spoke the

word of the Lord. I do not want us to have any illusions that Chaldea or Babylon were some great Godly utopia. They clearly were not, but I do want us to see clearly that there was a time in that nation where God had placed a man who spoke God's word and the King listened to him.

For many years though now, the Word of the Lord was not heard in Babylon. Some of the old remembered those days where God's word was spoke, for example the Queen. But now the Word of the Lord is going to be spoken again and this time the word is going to be a word of judgment upon Belshazzar and the entire nation of Babylon. They have forgotten the Word of God, and instead have worshipped idols of wood, stone, iron, clay, gold, silver and bronze. They have chosen to blaspheme God with his holy vessels and now when they find themselves in need they offer things that they would consider valuable to Daniel and he tells the King that he wants not part in it. He tells him to give this honor to another.

And he begins by giving a history lesson to Belshazzar the lesson he is meant to learn is the very same lesson that Nebuchadnezzar had to learn. And yet Belshazzar would learn this lesson in a very different way.

*O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor.*

*And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down.*

*But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him.*

*Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.*

Here is the lesson for Belshazzar

*"But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.*

*And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine*



*from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.*

So here is a question. Why was the Word of the Lord ignored or forgotten by the house of Nebuchadnezzar. Why did Nebuchadnezzar hear the word, and humble himself, and why did his son, his descendants forget? Notice, he is told to his face by the man of God that he knew the history and yet he had ignored it.

I can only answer that from what I know of people. I know that people claim to love the Word of God. I am not necessarily speaking only of believers here. I remember watching a televised discussion years ago where a woman who was clearly a pagan took great offense at her opponent referring to her as a God hater. Her every waking moment seemed to testify against the Word of God. She was a supporter of the killing of the unborn, she supported perversion, and she was a supporter of every wicked cause you can imagine, but when she was called a hater of God this angered her beyond belief. You see, in her mind she had created an image of what was right and what was wrong and when told there was a standard above her puny way of thinking she grew angry. But let's look at believers for a moment. Believers, people who claim to love the Word of God and claim to love Jesus, and yet they have forgotten His Word. Rather than repent from their sins and humble themselves and turn to God they pick and choose the words they will hear. Here is one thing I know, an idol of gold, silver, bronze, iron, clay or wood, will not call you to repent, and so in that sense they are much more desirable than the one true God. But I also know this, they cannot save you.

Many idols promise salvation, and we follow them because we like the path they offer, but we know that according to the Scriptures, the end thereof is death. And one thing we should learn from this account is that we do not know when the end will come for us. For Belshazzar it came that very night.

Hear again the Words that were written on the wall:

*"And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.*

*This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;*

*TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;*

*PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."*

Yesterday, I told my Grandson my sermon title: "*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.*" He did not believe me, He said, "So you are telling me you are not done with your sermon yet." Well here is the thing. I was not done, but I had already picked the title because I believe the words, though in Aramaic are very valuable for us today. Just as they had great value for Belshazzar at the time of his death.

The sovereign God of the Universe is speaking and here are His words. **Mene, Mene** - God had numbered your kingdom and finished it. One thing we must know is that every earthly kingdom, every earthly institution, and every individual is numbered by God. And everyone of them has an end. As believers we must recognize this. One of the Scriptures, I learned as a young boy was Hebrews 9:27 that it is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment. I am sure while Belshazzar was deep in his cups that night enjoying the feast his death and the end of his kingdom were far from his mind. And yet that very night he had an appointment that he would keep and it did not matter how much he drank, or how much he tried to erase that writing on the wall, he would be humbled that very night, and it seems in a very different way than Nebuchadnezzar.

**Tekel** - *You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;* There was a Heath Ledger movie a few years ago called "A Knights Tale." I like the movie, it was not a great but of cinematic history, but it was fun. But there is a scene at the end where the villain is confronted and he is told the following, "You have been measured, you have been weighed and you have most definitely been found wanting." Now, I did not see this movie in the theatre, but the way it was done you can almost hear the way the audience would have responded. Perhaps applause and laughter and every one goes home happy, because the good guy has triumphed and the evil guy, who they went out of the way to make you despise him got his comeuppance. A good fun movie and everyone is happy, except the problem is we all identify with the good guy, but the story of the Bible is that we are the bad guy. We too have been weighed in the balances and we are the ones found wanting.

Yes in our pride we see the evil in others and yet we miss it in our selves. We believe we are too

great to be judged. We believe we are not that bad, but the Word of the Lord does not show favoritism, we must humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, and that means identifying our own sins, and confessing our reliance upon him.

The last phrase in the writing on the wall is Upharsin. The context here is historical. The God who raises Kingdoms and the God who destroys kingdoms is ending the Babylonian empire that very night. The Head of Gold is ending. The Chest of Silver is now coming on to the scene. The Babylonians are being overthrown and their kingdom is going to the Medes and the Persians. According to certain sources this event took place on October 13, 539 B.C.

*<sup>29</sup> Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.*

*<sup>30</sup> That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. <sup>31</sup> And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.*

Let us learn the lesson of History. Let us learn the lesson of the Word of God. Let us learn who rules in the Kingdom of men, and let us humble ourselves and let us learn to trust in God. Lay down your pride, lay down the honors of men, and learn to trust in the only one who can save us.