

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

Daniel 5:1-31

Key Verse: 5:25

"This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE,
TEKEL, PARSIN."

Daniel chapter 5 is a story about the handwriting of a human hand on the wall during King Belshazzar's banquet for a thousand of the high officials, generals and dignitaries of his kingdom. In this story we learn the result of drinking and having no learning mind. We learn that the most serious problem comes from drinking and having no learning mind. Let's see about King Belshazzar so that we may not make the same mistake.

I. King Belshazzar's hedonistic party (1-16)

According to Babylonian history, King Belshazzar was the son and regent of Nabonidus (556-529 B.C.), a man of no esteem. In this Bible text, King Nebuchadnezzar is named as the father of Belshazzar (2,11,18). This does not contradict Babylonian history since Belshazzar may well have been related to King Nebuchadnezzar through his wife, who was a descendant in the line of Nebuchadnezzar. As there were many Caesars in Roman history, so there were many Nebuchadnezzars in the history of Babylon. Babylon looked secure. The city of Babylon was surrounded by the River Euphrates as the natural defense line of the Babylonian fortress. The Babylonian Empire had mighty army forces. Moreover, Belshazzar had stored a huge amount of crops in the fortress to meet the demand at the time of invasion and war. So the city of Babylon looked impregnable. But in reality, the Babylonian Empire was crumbling on account of the decay of the national fibre caused by people's moral corruption and easy-going mentality. In fact, the empire was on the verge of destruction.

At that time there was a newly rising world power. It was King Darius of Media and Persia. King Darius of Media and Persia besieged the city of Babylon with an irresistible army force and never withdrew, until King Belshazzar and his people were disheartened. This was the reason why King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles: He wanted to enhance the morale of his army generals and his high officials through the party. When Belshazzar got drunk and was pretty high, he felt good at first. But he soon lost his inhibitions and made an irrevocable mistake. There are many people in the Bible who made terrible mistakes after being drunk. For example, once Herod the tetrarch had an animal party. At the party he must have been drunk. In his drunken state he saw his step-daughter's dancing. Soon he sank into a lecherous feeling. So Herod promised to give her anything she wanted. Tempered by her mother, who nursed a grudge against John the Baptist, she asked for John's head. Thus Herod the tetrarch committed the sin of shedding the

innocent blood of a righteous man (Mk 6:27). Noah is another example. He was known as a righteous man. But when Noah was drunk he stripped off his clothes and lay naked in his tent. His youngest son happened to see his father's nakedness. As a result of Noah's drunkenness, his youngest son was cursed unfairly, charged with want of respect (Gen 9:27). Drunkenness causes even a righteous man to fall into trouble; how much more does it bring disaster on common people. King Belshazzar, in his drunkenness, gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem (2). Even the great king Nebuchadnezzar had never dared to use these sacred utensils, acknowledging that they were untouchable because they belonged to the holy God Almighty. But Belshazzar gave orders to bring the sacred utensils, which were used only to perform sacrificial rites in the temple of God Almighty. When the sacred utensils were brought in, the king and his nobles and his wives and even his concubines drank from them. In light of the Ten Commandments, he committed the sin of blasphemy. Blasphemy is the very act of denouncing the existence of God. Therefore it is unforgivable. In addition to this, Belshazzar praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone which were made by men's hands. He worshiped idols in order to appease his inner fear. In his drunken state, he committed the sin of idol worship. Idol worship is another sin of blasphemy, and it is unforgivable because it causes men to worship not God but something else. Drinking is deceptive, for at the beginning people drink wine, but in a matter of time, most people are drunken by wine and drunken people turn out to be a nest of demons. Drinking causes men to commit many kinds of terrible sins.

What happened? Look at verse 5. "Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote." On seeing the handwriting of a man, the king's face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. This was an unbearable suffering King Belshazzar had never expected. King Belshazzar felt a crisis. So he called out for all the wise men in his kingdom and said, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom" (7). But the wise men could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled (9). The party turned out to be a demons' carnival. It was worse than an animal party. When Belshazzar was drunk he ignorantly committed the sin of blasphemy and idol worship. His life itself was nothing but a horrible nightmare.

The queen was not invited to the banquet for some reason or other. But after sensing a great commotion in the banquet hall, the queen came in. When the queen saw the king, he looked like a zombie after he had seen the handwriting. The king was suffering from an anxiety attack. She said,

"Don't be alarmed. Don't look so pale!" To the queen, the king was like a lazy student who set the alarm clock and was alarmed when the alarm clock was continuously ringing in the late morning. The queen introduced Daniel, telling many historical facts in detail concerning Daniel. Let's read verses 11,12.

When Daniel was brought before the king, the king confirmed that he was Daniel and that he was one of the prisoners of war under his father's reign (13,14). The king continued resentfully, saying, "Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom" (16). The king saw Daniel as a POW from Judah. But the king begged his favor to read the handwriting and interpret it.

II. Daniel shepherds the king (17-31)

First, "you may keep your gift" (17). When the king asked for his reading and interpretation, what did Daniel answer? Look at verse 17. "Then Daniel answered the king, 'You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.'" King Belshazzar promised to give Daniel many gifts and a high promotion if he interpreted the meaning of the hand-writing. But Daniel refused his offer by saying, "You may keep your gifts for yourself." Daniel was not willing to receive any gift or ruling position from King Belshazzar. It was because he knew King Belshazzar's destiny was flickering like a candle before the wind since he had provoked God to anger through his blasphemy and idol worship. Daniel refused to receive any gift from King Belshazzar since he was nothing but a godless man and an idol worshiper; it would be shameful for Daniel to receive anything from such a base king. Also, it was not necessary for Daniel to try to receive a gift from the king because Belshazzar would soon perish in the invasion of King Darius, before having a chance to keep his promises. Moreover, Daniel was unwilling to receive a gift from him because he loved God and he loved the things of God. Daniel had a value system in God.

Daniel's story reminds us of an unknown soldier in David's army. Absalom rebelled against his father King David. His rebellion caused great fighting between David's men and Absalom's men. During the fighting, Absalom was riding his mule and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's head got caught in the tree. When one of David's men saw this, he ran to Joab, the commander of the army, and said, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree." Joab said to the man, "What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have given you a warrior's belt." Then the man replied, "I would not lift my hand against the king's son, because

the king commanded us, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake'" (2 Sa 18:12). As the man loved King David and was loyal to his king, he did not try to receive a warrior's belt, which all the soldiers wanted to get, just as all boxers want to obtain a championship belt. He was a common soldier. But he had a value system in God. Daniel loved God and was loyal to God. He didn't want to receive a gift from the king even though all the people of the world wanted to get gifts and a ruling position from the king. Man is man when he loves God and is loyal to God as a matter of life and death.

Second, Daniel rebukes King Belshazzar for having no learning mind (18-24). Look at verse 18. "O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor." Daniel said to King Belshazzar, "God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty to rule all the peoples and nations and men of every language. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and became an animal man with the mind of an animal until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men" (18-21). Daniel told the king the historical facts in light of Babylonian history. When we study this passage carefully, the author of Daniel wrote Daniel's personal profile repeatedly. It was not to give a lot of credit to Daniel, but to teach Belshazzar the historical facts so that he might learn something about God. But he was so proud that he did not learn anything from anybody. In reality he knew all this. But he did not give consideration to all that he knew. So Daniel rebuked him for having no learning mind. "But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this" (22). When he deliberately did not learn anything from anybody, he became an ignorant man. In his ignorance, he set himself up against the God of heaven by using the sacred utensils for his drinking party. King Belshazzar also praised many kinds of idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand, in order to beg blessings from them. His sins came from ignorance. Having no learning mind is not a small matter. Having no learning mind makes a man ignorant. And ignorance makes a man very proud. Moreover, ignorance can be a source of committing unforgivable sins. King Belshazzar's problem was having no learning mind. Because of this he became an abnormal man.

We see a good example of a normal man in Jesus. When Jesus was 12 years old he went to the temple at the time of Passover. After the Passover his parents were returning home. But the boy Jesus remained there for three days, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. St. Paul is also a good example of a man of learning mind. He had learned Jesus so much throughout his life. But St. Paul said in Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ..." Paul's single desire was to learn Christ. One medical doctor is very fruitful because he has a learning mind. He is always eager to learn something

and apply it to his ministry. These days there is a strong impression that learning something from others is sin. Learning something is not sin. John Potter, the famous educator, said, "I learned many things from many scholars. But I learned most from my neighbor children." A learning mind makes a man a normal man. Otherwise he becomes an animal man. When King Belshazzar had no learning mind, he became ignorant. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."

Third, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN." Look at verse 25. "This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN." "MENE" means God had numbered the days of his reign and brought it to an end (26). When King Belshazzar did not maintain God's blessing, God brought his reign to an end. God reigns over the world (Isa 52:7). When God blesses us we should not forget God. We must honor and thank God for his grace. In this way, we have to maintain God's blessing. This is the secret of overcoming our pride and humbling ourselves before God.

Look at verse 27. "Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting." "TEKEL" means when God weighed Belshazzar on the scale he was found too light to be a king. In the sight of God, as the king of Babylon, he should have been mature like a huge oak tree. He was supposed to be in the heavyweight category. But because of his drinking and having no learning mind his inner man did not grow. As a result, he remained immature and childish. In terms of character, he was a mosquito-weight. He was too light to be a child of God, not to mention being a king. He fell short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23). Probably his outer appearance was glamorous and fascinating. But in the sight of God he was worthless. He was a man of no contents.

Look at verse 28. "Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." "PARSIN" means his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians. In other words, his kingdom would fall and be invaded by Medes and Persians; he would be killed and his people dragged into captivity to suffer as slaves. This tells us the fruits of the king's sins. His sins would bear much fruit. In the future, he had to chew the fruit of his sins. The fruits of his sin would cause all his people to chew the fruits of sin until they could not take them anymore. According to Romans 6:23a, the fruits of sin are the same as the wages of sin, which lead man to death after much suffering. As soon as King Belshazzar heard what Daniel said to him, he commanded that Daniel be clothed in purple, have a gold chain placed around his neck, and be proclaimed the third highest ruler in his kingdom. That very night, King Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two (29-31).

In this passage we learn that King Belshazzar's sins were innumerable. Among them, his sin of having no learning mind was the worst.

Having no learning mind kept him from having a sense of history through the lessons God had given King Nebuchadnezzar. Having no learning mind made him ignorant. Though he was a king, he was a man of no contents and a man of ignorance. King Belshazzar's ignorance caused him to commit sins of blasphemy and idol worship. Having no learning mind is not a light matter. It is a great sin before God. May God help us to have a holy desire like St. Paul who said, "I want to know Christ."