

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

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King Belshazzar of Babylon was having a party to end all parties. He “made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand” (Daniel 5:1). He even had the gold and silver vessels of the Jewish temple brought to drink from as they praised their false gods.

In the midst of this drunken feast a sight appeared that scared Belshazzar so bad that his “countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other” (v. 6). What spoiled his party was the sight of a man’s hand writing on the plaster of the wall of his palace. This disembodied hand wrote the following message (v. 25):

**MENE MENE
TEKEL UPHARSIN**

Understandably, Belshazzar was anxious to know what this message meant. When his “wise” men could not figure it out, he was informed about Daniel who had “an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas...now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation” (v. 12).

Belshazzar offered Daniel fine clothes, beautiful jewelry, and great authority if he would give the interpretation. But Daniel, whose heart was free of covetousness, said, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another” (vv. 16-17). Daniel reminded Belshazzar about what had happened to king Nebuchadnezzar when he was caught up in sinful pride (vv. 18-21). Daniel then made the application to 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...and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified (vv. 22-23)

Daniel proceeded to explain that the message written on the wall was one of doom for Belshazzar and his kingdom (vv. 26-28):

MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it.

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

PERES: (singular form of Upharsin)

Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians

It was that very night that Belshazzar was slain, and his kingdom captured by the Medes and Persians (vv. 30-31).

Our English language uses the idiom “the writing on the wall” as a signal of doom or misfortune, or the coming end of something. We might say, “If he had seen the writing on the

wall, he would have known that he was going to be fired.” Seeing the “writing on the wall” means we understand the problem or see the trouble that is coming.

Some never seem willing to look for signs of danger and doom that lie along the path that they have chosen. No amount of counsel or warning will wake them up to the trouble they will encounter. If they finally see the “writing on the wall” it is too late. Being sober-minded and watchful will help us avoid the blindness that cannot see trouble ahead.

Sadly, Belshazzar ignored the lessons of the past and did not humble himself to glorify the God of heaven. By the time he saw the “writing on the wall” it was too late. Let us learn this lesson well and humbly live to obey and glorify our God.