

1. It was during the reign of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. The king held a great banquet, and a thousand guests attended. In front of them, Belshazzar ordered that the gold vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought in. Then suddenly, the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the wall: “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.”
2. The sight was so astonishing that one might expect everyone to faint, yet the king remained composed. Even in his fear, he summoned the wise men and magicians of Babylon and attempted to interpret the writing. The matter was so serious that he proclaimed whoever could interpret it would be made the third ruler in the kingdom, and would be clothed in purple and given a gold chain.
3. What is truly strange here is that none of the king’s wise men could read or interpret the writing. Babylon was an empire—comparable to a modern superpower like the United States. Just as agencies like the CIA or FBI can decipher any language, yet they could not read even this simple Aramaic or Hebrew text.
4. “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!” Here, “Mene, Mene” refers to a coin called a *mina*. Interestingly, the same word can also refer to the temple vessels that Belshazzar had brought out for drinking. Thus, the repetition “Mene, Mene” suggests counting—one mina, two minas, or one vessel, two vessels.
5. “Tekel” is a dialectal form of “shekel,” a unit of money much smaller than a mina—comparable to what we might call a euro today. The final word, “Upharsin,” means “and it has been divided,” referring to *peres*, which is half a shekel—like fifty cents. So “Tekel and Upharsin” indicates that one shekel has become two halves, like one euro divided into two fifty-cent coins.
6. It is said that the wise men of Babylon could not interpret this. But it would be more accurate to say they chose not to. Above all, they must have feared the consequences of such an interpretation. The king would be killed, the empire destroyed, and it would be divided and vanish into Persia and Media. To speak such words meant death; not to speak them also meant death.
7. Then they decided to shift the burden onto Daniel. Verse 11 says that he was a man from the time of the king’s father, endowed with insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar had appointed him chief over the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers. So they proposed that this matter be entrusted to that elder.
8. Compare this with the time of King Nebuchadnezzar. When he had his dream, he was troubled just as Belshazzar was now. At that time, Nebuchadnezzar threatened the

wise men, saying, “If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb and your houses shall be laid in ruins...” (Dan. 2:5).

9. Belshazzar is the son of that very Nebuchadnezzar—like father, like son. Therefore, when a dream or some mysterious revelation occurs, interpreting it and revealing the truth becomes a matter of life and death for some. For others, it becomes a justification to eliminate someone legally.
10. In v.16, King Belshazzar said to Daniel, “I have heard of you that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple, have a gold chain put around your neck, and be the third ruler in the kingdom.”
11. Though it is not stated explicitly, what would happen if he failed to interpret it? Death. As his father had declared, his house would be made a heap of ruins—Daniel and his family included. So while a gold chain is shown in front, a sword is being prepared behind.
12. To put this in a way that applies to us, it is as if the church is making a pastor preach. If the sermon is good, he is rewarded with the position of third ruler, along with purple robes and a gold chain; if not, he is put to death. Satan sets this up for the pastor and pushes him forward to die in his place.
13. According to Daniel, the reason the hand appeared before King Belshazzar and wrote on the wall is this: as stated at the end of v.23, “you have not honored the God.” It is not that Belshazzar did something unusual, but that he failed to do what he ought to have done.
14. This refers to the fact that Belshazzar drank wine using the vessels from the temple of the LORD. And under the influence of that wine, he praised idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods he could not see, hear, or understand. Why is this such a problem?
15. Verse 22 says, “And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this.” The one who should have humbled himself abandoned his proper place and, emboldened by drink, challenged God. He tested whether it was acceptable to use the temple vessels in this way, as if pretending it was merely a drunken mistake.
16. He was someone who should have known better. As shown in vs.19–21, he was the son of Nebuchadnezzar and a witness to what had happened to him. He knew that it is God who rules over the kingdoms of men. Yet when he became king, he tested whether God truly ruled. He poured wine into a thousand vessels from the temple of the LORD.

17. Think back to the story of Adam. Adam ate the fruit that Eve gave him. What was his intention? He was testing whether his eyes would be opened and he could become like God. To take a bite of the fruit was to declare, “I am a sovereign being with the freedom to act as I will.” Likewise, when Belshazzar drank from the temple vessels, he was acting as if he himself were their owner—as if he were God.
18. As Daniel said, it is God who “rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom He will.” To make this known, God drove out his father, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, made his mind like that of a beast, caused him to live with wild donkeys and eat grass like an ox, and let his body be drenched with the dew of heaven.
19. And what has Belshazzar, who knew all this, now done? He has declared that this is not so. It is a proclamation that he himself is king—not God. It is the arrogance of claiming that he is the owner of these vessels, the rich man, the master of life itself. By drinking wine from the vessels of God’s temple, he has issued this challenge.
20. In Luke 12, we meet a man in v.13 who comes to Jesus and says, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But instead of settling the matter, Jesus refuses the request.
21. “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” (Luke 12:14). This request and response mirror the scene at Belshazzar’s banquet, where no one is willing to interpret the writing. And then Jesus tells the story of a certain rich man.
22. What kind of rich man? One who had a plentiful harvest—just like King Belshazzar. He said to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.” Who can speak like this? Those who plundered the land of Judah and filled their storehouses with the vessels (*mina*) from the temple of the LORD.
23. In Luke 12:19, he says, “Relax, eat, drink, be merry.” Indeed, like King Belshazzar, who held a feast for a thousand and ate, drank, and rejoiced. But this eating, drinking, and rejoicing reveals that he believed it was acceptable to drink from the LORD’s golden vessels—that he was rich, and that he himself was the true king.
24. Such delusion and defiance toward God is what Jesus describes with the words, “Relax, eat, drink, be merry.” And what is God’s response to such a person? “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”
25. Jesus says that this is how it is with the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. Then what does it mean to be rich toward God? Does it mean giving large offerings at church? Storing up merit in heaven? It means not acting like Belshazzar.

26. Even if one is a king, it is to know and acknowledge that all kingdoms, power, and glory belong to God. Even if one were to eat grass like an ox or be drenched with dew in the field, it is to recognize that this too is in God's hand. Even in becoming king, it is to realize that it is by God.
27. To add one more thing, to be rich toward God is not to test Him. It is to acknowledge that He exists, that He freely gives to whom He wills, and to believe that we ourselves are those who are held in His hand.
28. If those vessels are like the elements or instruments used in worship in today's church, then it means not using worship, church events, activities, or even those who prepare them as tools for our own enjoyment or to display our own wealth. When we use them in that way, God gives His warning: "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin."