

The Bible And Alcohol: Moderation Or Abstinence? Part 2

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Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
Professor of Theology, Andrews University

Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The last newsletter (no. 25), which introduced our study of the Biblical teachings on the use of alcoholic beverages, generated many positive responses and few (three to be specific) negative ones. One of the negative criticism is that the newsletter does not provide an opportunity for differing views to be heard. Someone has accused me of being "a preacher rather than a teacher," because I do not allow for readers' response to what I post.

The truth of the matter is that I have been a teacher for the past 30 years and I enjoy listening to the comments of my students. The problem, however, is that often the students want to engage the teacher in a discussion of a subject, even before they have had the chance to hear the lecture or to study the lesson. My experience has been that little learning takes place when a teacher allows the students to use the valuable class time to talk about a subject they know very little about.

This has been my experience on several on-line discussion groups where there is a lot of discussion, but very little learning, simply because very few people know what they are talking about. It was partly the frustration caused by the empty talk going on several internet discussion groups that I decided to start this newsletter where I am attempting to share the highlights of the last 25 years of Biblical research on current issues.

This does not mean that I do not welcome legitimate criticism. Even on this newsletter I will respond to some comments. Rather, my concern is to prevent this newsletter from becoming a forum for endless, and often senseless discussions, leading nowhere. Out of respect for the over 7000 subscriber to this newsletters, I want to continue to provide an in-depth analysis of endtime issues from a BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE. I believe that this is what most of you subscribers expect from this newsletter.

The point I am trying to make is I will take time to address some legitimate questions, but I will do it at the appropriate time, after the relevant information has been presented. In this issue I will briefly respond to some questions without mentioning names, since the questions were addressed to me personally. The space devoted to answering questions will be limited by the very nature of this newsletter, which is designed to be affirmative rather than argumentative.

UPDATE REPORT ON RECENT SABBATH DEVELOPMENTS

The recent Sabbath developments reminds us of the ongoing controversy between good and evil. Throughout the centuries the Sabbath commandment has been the special object of Satan's attack, because this divine institution, as Pope John Paul II himself rightly recognizes in his Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*, "defines our relationship with God" more than any other commandment. By inviting us to consecrate our Sabbath time to the Lord, the Sabbath summons us to consecrate ourselves to God, not only on the Sabbath, but through the Sabbath every day of the week.

The Devil knows very well that by tempting people to ignore God on the Sabbath he succeeds in leading them to ignore Him every day of their lives. The prophet Ezekiel affirms this truth when he laments: "The house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness . . . my sabbaths they greatly profaned" (Ezek 20:13).

Recent attacks against the Sabbath

Some of the messages I received during the past two weeks remind me of the fact that today the Devil is intensifying his efforts to lead people to reject the Sabbath, both theologically and experientially. A retired Adventist medical doctor called me few days ago to ask me to urgently mail him copies of my latest book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE, which refutes with compelling Biblical reasoning the recent attacks against the Sabbath. The reason for the request is that his son, also a medical doctor, has just embraced the so-called "New Covenant theology," which maintains that in the New Covenant the Sabbath is to be observed *spiritually* as a daily experience of salvation rest, rather than *physically* by resting unto the Lord on the seventh day.

The fundamental fallacy of this view is the failure to recognize that the physical rest experience of the Sabbath does not negate, but makes possible the spiritual rest experience of salvation. God has chosen physical elements, like the water in baptism, the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and the physical rest of the Sabbath, to help us conceptualize and experience spiritual realities. This means that by doing away with the physical rest of the Sabbath, the "New Covenant theology" ultimately does away with the very channel God has provided to help us conceptualize and internalize the reality of His presence, peace and rest in our lives. We stop our work on the Sabbath to allow our Saviour to work in us more fully and freely.

The influence of the "New Covenant theology" is increasingly being felt across North America and overseas. This is indicated by the appeals for help I have been receiving during the past few weeks. Yesterday a pastor from Illinois called me and shared with me some of the problems he is facing with members of his church. The previous pastor left the church and is now working on the Sabbath. His teachings have influenced the congregation. In fact two families consisting of about 10 church members with two medical doctors, have been influenced by the "new Covenant theology," and are now considering leaving the church, because they can no longer accept the Sabbath. The pastor asked me to help his church by providing copies of my latest book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE and by presenting my Sabbath Seminar at his church as soon as possible. I have accepted the invitation for the earliest open date in my calendar, January 22, 2000. Anyone with similar problems is welcomed to contact me.

Some positive Sabbath News

Last Sabbath, August 21, several non-SDA attended the Sabbath Enrichment Seminar at the Tacoma Central SDA Church, in Washington. Some drove three to four hours to attend the meetings. I was especially pleased to see Prof. Tom Roberts and his wife, who came from Triune Biblical Seminary, about 90 miles from Tacoma, WA. On Sabbath afternoon I invited him to come to the platform to tell us how he and others Christians in the Northwest are rediscovering the Sabbath. He spoke for about 15 minutes and his remarks were very well received by the congregation. He told us that his interest for the rediscovery of the Sabbath stems from his desire to recover the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

It came as a surprise to hear Prof. Roberts telling us that several professors at his seminary are becoming sabbatarians and about 30 sabbatarian Messianic congregations have recently sprung up in the Tacoma/Seattle area. He expressed deep appreciation for the leadership provided by the Seventh-day Adventist church and encouraged our churches to welcome Sabbatarians and dialogue with them. He invited me to speak at his seminary sometimes in the near future. We need to contact the various Sabbatarian

groups in our communities, visit them, and invite them to share with our congregations how they understand and experience the Sabbath. By exploring our commonalities we can build ties of friendship and make these friends feel accepted in our Adventist churches.

Pastor David Hill's Testimony. Two Sabbaths ago, August 14, we had a memorable Sabbath Enrichment Seminar at the City Tabernacle SDA Church in Manhattan, New York. The church was packed with visitors from as far away as Boston. One church rented two buses to bring their members to the seminar. For my final lecture "The Sabbath Under Crossfire," I featured former Bishop David Hill, who extended his 30 minutes testimony to about one hour. Since his testimony was so gripping, I dared not to cut him short.

What makes Pastor Hill's testimony most inspiring is the fact that he was willing to give up a good salary, a comfortable parish home, a luxurious parish Cadillac, and the appreciation of a 450 members congregation, in order to accept his newly found Adventist faith. The various threats he received from the leaders of his church, did not dampen his spirit. On the contrary, he has been actively involved in witnessing to his former bishops and ministers.

During his testimony, Pastor Hill invited to the platform former Bishop Michael Doorn, who was the President of the New York Conference of the Church of the Living God. Both of them were baptized together into our SDA church on June 26, 1999, at the New Jersey Conference campmeeting. At this time Pastors Hill and Doorn are working together to help 18 ministers and their congregations, to understand and accept the Adventist message. Earlier this week Pastor Hill called me to request another case of my books to share with these ministers friends. He also invited me to go to New York to visit with these ministers and answer their many questions. Rest assured that I responded positively to both requests.

You will be thrilled to hear Pastor Hill's testimony which was professionally recorded in two 90 minutes cassettes. The testimony is part of my two hours lecture on recent Sabbath/Sunday developments. You can order your set of these cassettes directly on-line with your credit card, simply by filling out the order form provided at the end of the newsletter and emailing it back to us.

During the coming months Pastor Hill will participate with me at seminars to be held on Sabbath, October 30, at the Hanson Place SDA Church in Brooklyn, NY, and on Sabbath, December 11, at the Alexandria SDA Church, in Alexandria, Virginia. I will give you further information as the time draws near.

John Wesley's Sermon on the Sabbath. This past week a gracious soul mailed to me a copy of John Wesley's sermon entitled "On the Sabbath." The sermon is part of the Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, in the process of being published by Abingdon Press. This sermon is not found in the 14 volume Thomas Jackson edition. I was made aware of this sermon and other sabbatarian writings by Methodist Bishop Steven Sanchez, who in 1996 founded a sabbatarian Methodist movement known as Wesley Synod.

Bishop Sanchez explained to me that, though his denomination was organized only three years ago and consists at present of 68 congregations, they stand fully in the Wesleyan tradition because at one time John Wesley was a seventh-day Sabbath keeper and believed in keeping the dietary laws. He claims that this information is not found in later biographies of Wesley's life but can be found in earlier books. He promised to mail me some of this documentation.

Wesley's sermon I received this week is part of this documentation. Much of the sermon is a refutation of the so-called "New Covenant theology" embraced today by some Adventist and other sabbatarians. Wesley refutes at some length the various

arguments used to reduce the Sabbath to a Mosaic institution given exclusively to the Jews. He states unequivocally: "We must conclude that the Sabbath was instituted at creation; therefore it was not an institute of Moses, and consequently . . . it cannot be inferred that it was to be repealed at all."

A re-examination of John Wesley's sabbatarian writings deserves our attention, especially since various churches are reconsidering the validity and value of the Sabbath for today.

WEBPAGE UPGRADE AND ON-LINE SERVICES

You will be pleased to learn that the construction of my new webpage is almost completed. By this coming Sabbath, August 28, the webpage should be operational. The expanded webpage will have over 2000 pages of text from my 15 books which will be freely accessible to thousand of readers around the world. To facilitate the access to my new expanded webpage I have registered "BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES" as my own domain name. This means that you can access my webpage simply by entering the following simple address: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>

A nice feature of the new webpage is the opportunity it provides to order my books and cassettes directly on-line. The webpage is equipped with the so-called "shopping cart," which makes it possible for people around the world to order on-line, simply by entering their credit card number in the form provided. Many people, especially overseas, will be very grateful for this service since for many years they have asked me if they could order my books with their credit cards. In some countries it is complicated and expensive to convert the local currency in US dollars. This new service will greatly facilitate the procedure.

The person who has been largely responsible for improving my webpage and setting up all the necessary links for direct on-line service, is Ted Phelps, an Adventist computer expert living in California. I found him to be most kind, economical, and competent. He has established an organization called SeeWorthy.Net which specializes in providing small businesses, church communities and Christian Ministries with World Wide Web solutions for an exceptional price while maintaining an extremely high level of quality. **For any counsel or service, feel free to contact Ted by phone at (209) 365-0692 or by email at <tphelps@seeworthy.com>.** For further information about Ted's Web services, you can view his webpage at <http://www.seeworthy.com/>

A RESPONSE TO READERS' COMMENTS

Some of our subscribers have raised some legitimate questions, that I need to reply. As much as it is possible I will include this feature in future newsletters as well. I For the sake of brevity, I will omit the references of the sources quoted in my responses below, since they are found in my book WINE IN THE BIBLE, which can be accessed in my new web page at: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>

"Wine is Good for the Heart"

Two subscribers wrote to me arguing that the moderate use of wine is justified by the recent medical research which claims that a moderate use of wine is beneficial for the heart, by reducing the risk of strokes. In my view this argument does not take into account that what may be good for the heart, is bad for the brain and liver.

The Liver. The liver is very sensitive to the ill-effects of alcohol. Some studies have shown that "intake of even relatively small amounts of alcohol (1-2 ounces) by nonalcoholics can lead to the accumulation of fat in liver cells."

A vital function of the liver is to maintain a proper level of blood sugar (glucose), which is the main source of energy used by the brain cells. When alcohol is present in the bloodstream, the liver devotes all of its efforts to metabolizing it. To do so, the liver sometimes is unable to supply the brain cells with adequate glucose. When this occurs, hypoglycemia can result. This is a condition in which the sugar level in the blood is below normal and consequently the brain is deprived of its proper nourishment. Symptoms include sweating, headache, tremors, hunger, and nervousness.

The most serious liver disease caused by alcohol consumption is cirrhosis. Approximately 30,000 Americans die of cirrhosis every year. Countries like France and Italy, where it is customary to drink at least a glass of wine in conjunction with meals, are known to have among the highest incidence of cirrhosis. In the past cirrhosis has been generally associated with heavy drinking. However, "a recent French study suggests that men who have as little as three drinks a day, and women who take 1 1/2 drinks a day, may be at increased risk of developing cirrhosis."

The Brain. The brain is the organ most sensitive to the presence of alcohol. The most immediate and dramatic consequence of the ingestion of any amount of alcohol is the impaired efficiency of the brain with its related central nervous system. Such an impairment takes the form of "decreased inhibitions, less efficient vision and hearing, slurring of speech, difficulty in the performance of gross motor skills, deterioration of judgment, increased reaction time, and a general feeling of euphoria."

The degree and extent of mental impairment is related to the blood-alcohol level. Studies indicate that definite impairments begin at about 0.03 percent, which is achieved simply by drinking a 12-ounce can of beer or 5 1/2 ounces of ordinary wine by an average 150 pound person. "At 0.05 percent alcohol [about two drinks of 12 ounces of beer] . . . the peripheral (side) vision drops 18 degrees and depth perception 74 percent."

One drink generally causes 0.03 percent alcohol in the blood of an average 150-pound person. Two drinks double the percentage. Kenney and Leaton report that at a 0.05 blood-alcohol level, "the 'newer' parts of the brain, those controlling judgment, have been affected." This becomes apparent, since a person "may be loud, boisterous, making passes; saying and doing things he might usually censor. These are the effects that mistakenly cause people to think of alcohol as a stimulant." The authors explain that it is not the system which has been hyped up but the inhibitions which have been suspended.

It is important to know that even one drink can adversely affect our brain. William Terhune makes this point very clear: "Every time you take a drink you are putting some of your brain cells temporarily out of commission. Indeed, if alcohol did not have that effect, you would never drink it." Even one drink is sufficient to weaken a person's inhibitions, which function as "moral brake," and to impair the capacity to think critically.

The fact that all the States have gradually reduced to 0.8 or lower the percentage of alcohol permissible in the bloodstream of drivers, provides a compelling evidence that the thinking of legislative bodies in America has been altered by recent medical research on the alleged benefits of the moderate use of wine.

from a Biblical and christian perspective to impair our mental and moral judgment by the use of alcohol means to destroy the very discriminatory sense of right and wrong God has implanted within us. We shall see that this is the fundamental reason the Bible prohibits the use of alcoholic beverages, namely, because they impair our mental judgment.

Wine as Medication

A medical doctor who subscribes to our newsletter, raises this pertinent question: "What is the difference between drinking a glass of wine, for sleep, and taking a sleeping pill? What is the difference between drinking a glass of wine and taking a prescription pain pill? What about the soldiers in the Civil War who drank whiskey, 'anesthetic' before someone field surgeon amputated a limb, to prevent death?"

In response to this perceptive question, I will briefly refer to Proverbs 31:6-7 which mentions the use of wine and strong drinks as pain killers. The text reads: "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more" (Prov 31:6-7).

The immediate context of verse 6 contains a strong admonition to kings and rulers to abstain from wine and strong drink because these would impair their remembrance of the laws and consequently their capacity to be just in their judicial duties. The context makes a value judgment on alcoholic beverages, by prohibiting not their abuse but their actual use. It does not say, "It is not for kings to drink much wine." Rather it says, "It is not for kings to drink wine" (v. 4). In the light of this categorical prohibition of the use of wine in verses 4 and 5, the inspired writer could hardly have recommended a moderate use of alcoholic wine to relieve common pain and to release life's stress and tension.

The initial imperative "Give" (tenu) cannot be regarded as a mandatory command to give alcohol to anyone in distress. Rather it should be viewed as a conditional imperative. The sense would then be, "[If you are going to give strong drink, then] give strong drink to him who is perishing . . ."

The imperative "Give" may also be regarded as a conditional comparison. Kings and rulers are to abstain from alcoholic beverages (vv. 4-5) because these impair the mental clearness and judicial integrity. If not fit for responsible people, for whom are they fit? Verse 6 supplies the answer: "[If you are going to give alcoholic beverages, then] give strong drink to him who is perishing" to relieve him of his misery.

The whole passage may be described as a medal with two sides. On one side is inscribed, "Alcoholic beverages are unfit for responsible, thinking people." On the reverse side it reads, "Alcoholic beverages are only fit for those who are experiencing agonizing pain." The text speaks of those who are "perishing" (*obed*) and in "bitter distress" (*marei naphesh*). Both terms in Hebrew denote a desperate, hopeless situation. In other words, it is not as when a person says, "I am dying of thirst. I must have a beer," or "I cannot sleep. Let me take a sleeping pill." But, rather as when a person cries out in distress, "The pain is killing me. Give me anything that can kill the pain." We are dealing with the case of someone dying of excruciating agony, as by crucifixion.

The Talmud interprets Proverbs 31:6 as a recommendation to give intoxicants to deaden the pain of those being executed. Sanhedrin 43a says: "Rab Ehisda has said, 'To him who went forth to be executed there was given a little frankincense mixed with wine to deprive him of consciousness.'" In his article on "Wine" in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Heinrich Seeseman relates this passage to the "wine mingled with myrrh" (Mark 15:23) given to Christ on the Cross, but which He refused. Seeseman notes that "Jesus' rejection of the drink shows that He accepted the suffering of the Cross to the full." Had He not been our Redeeming Savior, Christ could have taken that drink. The Scripture is not against the use of pain killers. However, the fact that Christ refused intoxicating wine even to relieve the agony of the Cross, provides a most telling testimony of His disapproval of intoxicating beverages. It is noteworthy that afterwards, when Christ was offered vinegar (oxos), a non-intoxicant, He accepted it (John 19:29, 30).

Proverbs 31:6 lend some support to the medical use of alcohol. Note, however, that the passage does not say that those who are experiencing some temporary discomfort should relieve their pain by drinking alcohol. Rather it calls for others to "give"

the sufferer alcohol as a pain reliever. Applied to our times, this suggests that drugs may be given to a patient only on the order of a qualified physician.

Even when a person is under doctor's orders, it is well to be careful in the use of narcotics such as alcohol. There are all kinds of drugs and some of them have harmful side effects. If the ingestion of alcohol should be indicated for medical purposes, its effect is minimized by the fact that the quantity is usually small and the patient is in bed, thus least apt to need to make critical decisions which could place the lives of others at risk.

Summing up, Proverbs 31:6 does not recommend a moderate use of alcoholic beverages for the purpose of pleasure. Rather, it suggests that alcohol can be legitimately used to alleviate excruciating.

Weakening of the Adventist Stance on Abstinence

Several subscribers from different parts of the world, have shared with me their concern over the increasing consumption of alcoholic beverages in the Adventist church. A Union President from overseas emailed me a message lamenting the growing use of alcoholic beverages in our Adventist church. He reminisced the old days when our Adventist church challenged our members to sign the "Temperance Pledge." I recall signing that pledge and even participating several times first at Newbold College and then at Andrews University, in what was then known as "The Temperance Speech Contest." Twice I won the first prize. In those days promoting abstinence from alcohol and drugs was considered to be a Biblical mandate which constituted an important aspect of the mission of the church. In this we followed the example of Ellen White who throughout her life was known as a popular temperance speaker.

Unfortunately things have changed. There has been a weakening of the conviction that total abstinence is a clear Biblical teaching, and consequently we are faced today with a more permissive attitude toward the use of alcoholic beverages. An Australian Conference leader emailed me this message: "You would be shocked to know that here in Australia we have had a couple of recent articles in our Church paper, "THE RECORD," in which the use of wine has been seen as a personal choice, based on looking at the various texts and falling back on moderation or health reasons and one's own personal judgment."

What is happening in Australia is not unusual. In most Western countries Adventists have become more permissive on the use of alcoholic beverages, partly because they do not believe that total abstinence is a Biblical imperative. In my own country of Italy, I found considerable resistance to the circulation of the Italian edition of my book WINE IN THE BIBLE (IL VINO NELLA BIBBIA). I offered 4000 copies of the book as an expression of love to my own Italian fellow believers, but a large portion of the shipment is still gathering dust in the warehouse of the publishing house near Florence. Part of the problem is that some of our Italian pastors, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, believe that the Bible teaches moderation, and not total abstinence.

ENDTIME ISSUES NO. 26: THE BIBLE AND ALCOHOL: MODERATION OR ABSTINENCE? Part 2

For many years I embraced the prevailing view that the Bible sometimes does allow for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. I doubted that my study of the subject would change my mind. In spite of this conviction, I undertook this research partly to appease the many pastors and church members who appealed to me for help to understand problematic Bible texts relating to wine. I felt that, if nothing else, the experience would broaden my understanding of the subject and better equip me for helping those Christians who seek to understand the will of God in this matter.

An Apparent Contradiction. As I began reading what Scripture teaches about the use of wine, it soon became evident that the Bible speaks on this subject in an apparent contradictory way. On the one hand, the Bible unreservedly disapproves of use of wine (Lev 10:8-11; Judg 13:3, 4; Prov 31:4, 5; 23:31; 20:1; Hab 2:5; Eph 5:18; 1 Tim 3:2, 3), while on the other hand it wholeheartedly approves of its use as a divine blessing for people to enjoy (Gen 27:28; 49:10-12; Ps 104:14, 15; Is 55:1; Amos 9:13; John 2:10, 11).

Advocates of moderation attempt to resolve this apparent contradiction by arguing that Scripture condemns the *immoderate use* of alcoholic beverages and commends their *moderate use*. This belief is based on the assumption that the Bible knows only of fermented wine ("one wine theory") which it considers as a divine blessing when used with moderation. Consequently any condemnation of wine in the Bible refers not to the *kind of wine* (alcoholic), but to the *amount* consumed.

A major weakness of this view is that Scripture both condemns and commends wine itself, irrespective of the quantity used. Wine is denounced as "treacherous" (Hab 2:5) and as "a mocker" (Prov 20:1) that "bites like a serpent and stings like an adder" (Prov 23:32). To avoid the shame and suffering caused by drinking fermented wine, Scripture admonishes not moderation but total abstinence: "Do not look at wine" (Prov 23:31). The reason for this absolute prohibition is no doubt the fact that gazing at something attractive is the first step toward partaking it.

Others try to resolve the apparent contradiction between the Biblical approval and disapproval of wine by arguing that the positive references represent a divine concession to human weakness rather than a divine approval. This is basically the position the Adventist Church has adopted during the past twenty years or so. A main problem with this interpretation is that some passages speak of "wine," not as a divine concession but as a divine blessing for the people to enjoy. For example, the Psalmist says that God gives "wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart"(Ps 104:14,15). Here "wine" is joined together with food and oil as a basic divine blessing which enjoys God's approval.

THE MEANING OF "WINE"

The apparent contradiction between the Biblical disapproval and approval of wine is dictated by the assumption that the Hebrew and Greek words for wine (*yayin* and *oinos*) always mean "fermented wine." Is this assumption correct? To find an answer to this question I investigated the Biblical and historical usage of the term "wine," beginning from the English *wine*, and then proceeding backward to the Latin *vinum*, the Greek *oinos* and finally the Hebrew *yayin*. The result of the survey is abundantly clear: these four related words have been used historically to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented.

Only few examples can be cited in this brief newsletter. A full documentation can be found in my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE*. The *New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (1971) defines "must" as "Wine or juice pressed from the grapes but not fermented." In this definition "wine" is clearly used to denote unfermented grape juice. Older English dictionaries cited in the book define "wine" as "the expressed juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented."

The Meaning of the Greek *Oinos*. Examples of the dual usage *oinos* abound in secular Greek. In his book *Metereologica*, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) speaks of unfermented grape juice (*glukus*), saying: "though called *wine* [*oinos*], it has not the effect of wine, for it does not taste like wine and does not intoxicate like ordinary wine." In this text Aristotle explicitly informs us that unfermented grape juice was called "*oinos-wine*," though it did not have the taste or the intoxicating effect of ordinary wine.

In the Septuagint, an intertestamental Greek translation of the Old Testament, "the Hebrew word for grape-juice, *tirosh*," as Ernest Gordon points out, "is translated at least 33 times by the Greek word *oinos*, wine, and the adjective 'new' is not present. *Oinos* without qualification, then, can easily mean unfermented wine in the New Testament."

A possible use of *oinos* in the New Testament to denote unfermented wine, is found in Matthew 9:17 where Jesus says that "new wine is put into fresh wineskins." In view of the fact that no fresh wineskins can resist the pressure caused by fermenting new wine, it is reasonable to assume that the "new wine" spoken of by Jesus was wine fresh from the press which had been strained and possibly boiled, and then placed immediately into fresh wineskins to insure the absence of fermentation-causing substances. Ancient authors attest to this practice.

The Meaning of the Hebrew *Yayin*. Like in Greek so in Hebrew the term for "wine" (*yayin*) was used to refer to either fermented or unfermented wine. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* explains that "Fresh wine before fermenting was called '*yayin mi-gat*' (wine of the vat; Sanh 70a)." The *Halakot Gedalot*, which is the earliest Jewish compendium of the Talmud, says: "One may press out a cluster of grapes and pronounce the *Kiddush* over the juice, *since the juice of the grape is considered wine [yayin] in connection with the laws of the Nazarite.*"

The use of *yayin* in the Old Testament to denote unfermented grape juice is not always self-evident, because it does not come under condemnation like the fermented *yayin*. In several passages, however, the context clearly indicates that the word designates unfermented grape juice (Jer 40:10, 12; Neh 13:15; Lam 2:12; Gen 49:11; Songs 1:2, 4; 4:10).¹⁰ For example, Isaiah 16:10 speaks God's judgment upon Moab, manifested through the removal of the divine blessing from the vineyard and the grape juice: "And joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field; and in the vineyard no songs are sung, no shouts are raised; no treader treads out wine [*yayin*] in the presses; the vintage shout is hushed" (Is 16:10). The "wine" (*yayin*) the treaders tread out in the pressing vat, is obviously unfermented grape juice since fermentation is a time-controlled process.

The above sampling of Biblical and historical testimonies suffice to show that the Bible knows of both fermented wine, which it disapproves, and unfermented grape juice, which it approves. This conclusion becomes clearer when we examine the reasons for the Biblical disapproval of fermented wine and approval of unfermented grape juice.

BIBLICAL APPROVAL AND DISAPPROVAL OF "WINE"

Biblical Approval of Unfermented Wine. The vineyard, with its products of grape and wine, was vital in Biblical economy and theology. A look at a concordance suffices to recognize this fact. The word "wine-*yayin*," occurs 141 times in the Old Testament and *oinos* 30 times in the New Testament.

In several instances the context indicates that the *positive references* to "wine" have to do with unfermented and unintoxicating grape juice. Because of its natural and nourishing properties, grape juice was fittingly used to represent the divine blessing of material prosperity (Gen 27:28; 49:10-11; Deut 33:28), the blessing of the messianic age (Joel 2:18-19; Jer 31:10-12; Amos 9:13, 14), the free offer of God's saving grace (Is 55:1), the wholesome joy God offers to His people (Ps 104:14-15; 4:7), and the acknowledgment of God through the use of grape juice as tithe, offerings and libations (Num 18:12; Deut 14:23; Ex 29:40; Lev 23:13).

"Wine" as unfermented grape juice is approved in the Scripture because it provides us with a wholesome and delightful beverage to gladden our hearts without making us "merry." This thought is expressed in Psalm 104:14-15: "Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food

from the earth, and *wine* [*yayin*] to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart.

In this song of thanksgiving the Psalmist enumerates God's bountiful provisions for the needs of His creatures. He refers to the plants providing us with food and to "wine," the juice of the grape which cheers the heart by its pleasantness. The ideas contrasted here are *sustenance* and *sweetness*. God provides us with sustaining nourishing food, and with a sweet delightful drink, grape juice.

The capacity of grape juice to cheer the heart is attested in Psalm 4:7, which says: "Thou hast put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine [*tirosh*] abound" (cf. Jud 9:13). The word translated "wine" here is *tirosh*, a term which is explicitly used in numerous Old Testament passages to refer to grape juice. What the Psalmist is saying in this passage is that while the ungodly derive their chief joy from the abundance of grain and grape juice, the believer experiences an even greater joy when he is the recipient of the light of God's countenance.

The truth expressed in this text is different from that in Psalm 104:14-15, yet it does show that grain and grape juice were commonly viewed as sources of joy. This gives us reason to believe that the "wine" (*yayin*) mentioned in Psalm 104:15 is the same unfermented "wine" (*tirosh*=grape juice) of Psalm 4:7, since both passages speak of a natural grape beverage which gladdens human hearts.

It is important to remember that many ancient people loved sweet drinks. While today many think of milk and grape juice as babies' beverages and of coffee and wine as adults' drinks, in Bible times milk and grape juice were desirable beverages for both young and old. Pliny tells us that sometimes people added a considerable amount of honey to grape juice to make it even sweeter. The sweeter a beverage, the more desirable it was. It is worth noting on this regard that the land of Canaan is praised as a land flowing with "milk and honey," two products known for their sustenance and sweetness.

Biblical Disapproval of Fermented Wine. The *negative references* to "wine" have to do with fermented and intoxicating wine, which Scripture uses to represent immorality, apostasy and divine wrath (Is 19:14; Rev 14:10; 16:19; 17:2; 18:3). The Biblical condemnation of the use of intoxicating wine is expressed in a variety of ways.

Some texts condemn outright the use of wine (Prov 23:29-35; 20:1; Hab 2:5; Eph 5:18). Solomon, for example, admonishes in a most categorical way to refrain from even looking at wine in order to avoid the shame and suffering caused by it (Prov 23:31). Lest a person be seduced by the attractiveness of fermented wine, Solomon goes on describing its deadly nature by comparing it to the poisonous bite of a serpent and the sting of an adder (Prov 23:32).

Others texts explain the physical and moral consequences of the use of alcoholic beverages. Some of the consequences mentioned are: they distort the perception of reality (Is 28:7; Prov 23:33); they impair the capacity to make responsible decisions (Lev 10:9-11); they weaken moral sensitivities and inhibitions (Gen 9:21; 19:32; Hab 2:15; Is 5:11-12); they cause physical sickness (Prov 23:20-21; Hos 7:5; Is 19:14; Ps 60:3); and they disqualify for both civil and religious service (Prov 31:4-5; Lev 10:9-11; Ezek 44:23; 1 Tim 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8).

One of the clearest Biblical teachings is that drinking disqualifies a person from serving as a civil or religious leader. The wise Solomon clearly states that kings and rulers must abstain from wine: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine [*yayin*], or for rulers to desire strong drink" (Prov 31:4). The reason for this explicit injunction is immediately given, "lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted" (Prov 31:5).

We noted earlier that this text makes a value judgment on alcoholic wine itself, rather than on the quantity drunk. The text does not say, "it is not for kings to drink *much* wine." Rather it says, "It is not for kings to drink *wine*." What is here prohibited, as elsewhere in Scripture, is not, as many claim, the *abuse* but the actual *use* of alcoholic beverages.

Abstinence from intoxicating wine is required in Scripture, not only of civil officials such as kings and rulers, but also of religious leaders, such as priests in the Old Testament and bishops/elders/deacons in the New Testament. In the Old Testament priests were explicitly required to abstain from alcoholic beverages: "Drink no wine [*yayin*] or strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die" (Lev 10:9). The reason given is that alcoholic beverages would impair their capacity to discern and to teach God's holy precepts: "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the clean and unclean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses (Lev 10:10-11; cf. Ezek 44:23). We shall see below that the same requirement of abstinence from alcoholic beverages is applied to church leaders in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8).

The fact that the priests had to abstain from alcoholic beverages in order to preserve sanctuary holiness implies that alcohol is seen in the Scripture as profane and unholy. The reason for this is to be found both in the intrinsic *nature* of alcohol, that is, in its power to intoxicate (Prov 23:29-30; 20:1; Hab 2:5) and in its *effects*, that is, in its capacity to impair the discernment between the holy and the profane, and between right and wrong (Lev 10:11; Ezek 44:23). In view of the fact that we as Christians are "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9) called to "keep sane and sober" (1 Pet 4:7) in a world often insane and intemperate, God's injunction to abstain from alcoholic beverages to preserve our moral discernment is especially relevant for us today.

The foregoing considerations indicate that the Biblical approval or disapproval of "wine" is determined not by the amount of wine consumed but by the nature of the "wine" itself. The positive references to "wine" have to do with unfermented, unintoxicating grape juice. In contrast, all the indictments of "wine" have to do with alcoholic, intoxicating wine. The latter is condemned irrespective of the quantity used.

THE PRESERVATION OF GRAPE JUICE

A major objection against the view that Scripture approves the use of unfermented grape juice is the alleged impossibility in Bible times of preserving grape juice unfermented. To test the validity of this popular assumption I investigated the testimonies of ancient writers regarding the art of preserving fruits and wines in general and grape juice in particular. To my surprise I discovered that the ancients were far more knowledgeable in the art of preserving fruits and wines than is generally believed.

Fermented Wine. Contrary to popular opinion, the problems the ancients encountered in preserving fermented wine were as great as, if not actually greater than, those faced in preserving unfermented grape juice. To prevent fermented wine from becoming acid, moldy, or foul-smelling, vintners used a host of preservatives such as salt, sea-water, liquid or solid pitch, boiled-down must, marble dust, lime, sulphur fumes or crushed iris. When none of these preservatives worked because the grapes were moldy, then the advice given by Columella, a renowned agriculturalist who lived in the first century A. D., was to boil down the grape juice and keep it as unfermented wine.

Unfermented Grape Juice. In comparison to fermented wine, the preservation of grape juice unfermented was a relatively simpler process. Ancient sources inform us that it was accomplished in four main ways: (1) by boiling down the juice to a syrup, (2) by separating the fermentable pulp from the juice of the grape by means of filtration, (3) by

placing the freshly pressed grape juice in sealed jars which were immersed in a pool of cold water, and (4) by fumigating the wine jars with sulphur before sealing them.

Columella discusses at great length the different methods used to preserve grape juice unfermented. In speaking of its preservation by boiling, he writes: "Some people put the must in leaden vessels and by boiling reduce it by a quarter, others by a third." He goes on explaining that "afterwards, when it has cooled, you should pour it into vessels, cover it and seal it up; in this way it will keep longer and no harm will befall it." The custom of preserving grape juice by boiling it down into a syrup has survived through the centuries in the Near East and Mediterranean countries. This beverage is known as *vino cotto* (boiled wine) in Italian, *vin cuit* in French, *nardenk* in Syriac and *dibs* in Arabic.

There are indications that the ancient Jews preserved wine by boiling it. John Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* says: "The Mishna states that the Jews were in the habit of using *boiled wine*. 'They do not boil the wine of the heave-offering, *because it diminishes it*,' and consequently thickens it, thus rendering the mingling of water with it when drunk necessary; but it is immediately added, 'Rabbi Yehudah permits this *because it improves it*' (*Teromoth Perek 100, 11*)."

The reason for the silence of Scripture on the *means* used for preserving grape juice is to be found in the nature of the Bible itself, a book which deals primarily with those aspects of life which are related to salvation history. In the Bible we find no treatise on agriculture, as among classical writers. The reason is not a lack of interest in or of knowledge of farming, but a reluctance to deal with issues unrelated to the religious life of God's people. We have reason to believe that the Jews knew some of the methods of preservation known and used in the ancient world. This conclusion will be confirmed in the next newsletter dealing with the teaching of Jesus and of the apostolic church regarding alcoholic beverages.

Contact Information

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
Professor of Theology and Church History
Andrews University
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Phone (616) 471-2915 Fax (616) 471-4013
E-mail: sbacchiocchi@qtm.net or sbacchiocchi@csi.com
Web site: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>