

“The Bible and Alcohol: Moderation or Total Abstinence?”

Endtime Issues No. 81
12 March 2002

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

This past weekend, March 8-9, 2002, I was privileged to minister to our fellow-believers and friends at the St. Helena SDA Church, located few miles from Pacific Union College. We had a marvelous rally, with visitors coming from different parts of California. While driving along the Napa countryside I saw several road signs, saying “Wine Country.” Immediately I thought of France and Italy, well-known for their wine production. But the signs were advertising the wine production in the Napa valley, not in European countries.

The wine production in the Napa valley surpasses anything that I have seen in my native Italy or in France. The wineries are highly sophisticated, multimillion dollars companies that produce various types of wines which are exported to many foreign countries. In fact America has become one of the leading exporters, not only of cigarettes, but also of wine.

To entice people to purchase and consume their wines, the Napa wineries have organized wine tasting tours and operate even a wine touring train where people can eat and drink their wine while viewing the “Wine Country.”

The subtle, high-tech promotion of wine consumption that I saw this past weekend in the American “Wine Country”, has caused me to ask: How can the Federal Drug Enforcement agencies fight in good conscience the production and distribution of drugs coming from South American countries, when the US government is protecting the production, consumption, and distribution of American alcoholic beverages to foreign countries? Perhaps Federal Drug Agencies ignore that the effect of alcohol on the American society and people everywhere are far more devastating than those of all the other illegal drugs combined.

While researching for my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE*, I was surprised to discover that the use of alcoholic beverages costs over \$117 billion a year and claims at least 100,000 American lives per year, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined.¹ The real human cost of alcohol transcends any statistical estimate of deaths, disabilities or dollar figures. A Gallup Poll indicates that one family out of four is troubled by alcohol.² This means that more than 61 million Americans are affected by some alcohol-related problems such as retarded children, divorces, violence in the home, various forms of crimes, sickness and death.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

Christian churches bear considerable responsibility for the alcohol epidemic raging in America today, because through their beliefs, teachings and preaching they are able to influence the moral values and practices of society more than any other institution. What pastors preach from their pulpits on the subject of drinking determines to a large extent the stand Christians take toward alcoholic beverages. A majority of the 100 million drinkers in America today are churchgoers who have been taught that the Bible sanctions a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. Moderate drinking has led over 18 million Americans to become immoderate drinkers, because alcohol is a habit-forming narcotic weakening one's capacity for self-control.

Since the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 most evangelical churches have gradually abandoned their stand for total abstinence, adopting instead a moderationist position toward alcohol use. A major factor which has contributed to this trend has been a weakening of the conviction that total abstinence is a clear Biblical and moral principle to be respected like other God-given principles. Billy Graham expressed this view when he said: "I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism . . . Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That wasn't grape juice as some of them try to claim."³ No longer having a compelling Biblical and moral conviction to remain or become abstinent, more and more Christians have given in to the social pressure of drinking alcohol.

The extent of the drinking problem has been brought home to me during my lecture tours across North America and overseas. Adventist pastors and church members have frequently asked me to explain certain Bible texts used by members of their congregation to justify their moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages. Confronted with frequent pleas for help, I felt that in good conscience I could no longer ignore the problem. Thus, I decided to devote a leave-of-absence from my teaching at Andrews University to an in-depth study of what the Bible has to say on the use of alcoholic beverages.

The results of this research has been published in *WINE IN THE BIBLE: A BIBLICAL STUDY ON THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES* (300 pages). The book has already been favorably reviewed by over one hundred scholars and church leaders of different denominations. The *NATIONAL WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION* (WCTU) has sponsored an abridged version of this book which they are distributing nationwide.

Incidentally, Ellen White was a member and great supporter of the WCTU. She speaks highly of this organization and encourages Adventists to support their endeavors to promote total abstinence from a Christian perspective. This organization still exists and is supported by various denominations. This past August 7-12, 2001, the WCTU held its 128 Annual Convention at Hope College, in Holland Michigan. Sarah Ward, the President of WCTU, invited me to deliver the keynote address to the 500 delegates coming from across the USA.

Surprisingly, Adventists were noticeable for their absence. I recall the time when the General Conference Temperance Secretary, Dr. Ernest H. J. Steed, was very active in the WCTU and in numerous other temperance organizations. I often wonder what has caused the Adventist Church to lose its passion for practicing and promoting TEMPERANCE, that is, moderation in what is healthful and abstinence from what is harmful.

In this newsletter and the next, I submit a nutshell summary of the highlights of my research on the Biblical teaching on the use of alcoholic beverages. This essay deals specifically with the teachings of the OT regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. The next newsletter (ENDTIME ISSUES 82) examines the teachings of Jesus and of the Apostolic Church regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. It may come as a surprise to some readers to discover that the NT admonitions to total abstinence by Peter and Paul, have been weakened by unscrupulous translators who wanted to save the face of drinking by condemning drunkenness instead. This important point will be examined in the next newsletter.

SPECIAL OFFER ON *WINE IN THE BIBLE!!!*

In conjunction with the forthcoming newsletters on healthful living, I wish to offer my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE* at a special price. The book provides valuable Biblical research for those interested to deepen their understanding of this timely subject. The new and nicer reprint that came off the press few days ago, regularly sell for \$20.00 per copy. I am pleased to offer you a package of both *unabridged* and *abridged* version of *WINE IN THE BIBLE*, together with the TEMPERANCE SEMINAR in two audio cassettes, for ONLY \$30.00, POSTAGE PAID.

If you or your church wishes to order a case of 30 copies of *WINE IN THE BIBLE*, we are glad to mail you a case for only \$200.00, postage paid, that is, less than \$7.00 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. Feel free to call us at (616) 471-2915 to order the special package or a complete case. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of March and April 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometimes during 2002. I still have a few openings for the latter part of 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style is now presented with PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

MARCH 22-23: SOUTH BEND, INDIANA: FIRST SDA CHURCH

Location: 1936 East Altgeld Street, South Bend, IN 46614
For information call Pastor John Riggs at (574) 289-4369 or (574) 234-3044

MARCH 29-30: SOUTH LANCASTER, MA: VILLAGE SDA CHURCH

Location: 75 Sawyer Street, South Lancaster, MA 01561
This rally is sponsored by the Village Church of Atlantic Union College. All the district churches are invited to attend. For information call Pastor Robert Sierra at (978) 368-8420

APRIL 5-6: LOS ANGELES CHINESE SDA CHURCH

Location: 3000 West Ramona Road, Alhambra, CA 91803
This rally is sponsored by the Chinese churches of the Los Angeles area. For information call Pastor Jonathan Foo at (626) 284-3433.

APRIL 12-13: ORLANDO, FL: KRESS MEMORIAL SDA CHURCH

Location: 746 Formosa Avenue, Winter Park, FL 32789
For information call Pastor David Huber at (407) 644-4115 or (407) 260-2236

APRIL 19-20: LONDON, ENGLAND: BRIXTON SDA CHURCH

Location: Santley Street, Clapham, London SW4 7QG
For information call Pastor Hamilton Williams at (020) 8755-1722.

APRIL 24: LONDON, ENGLAND: CROYDON SDA CHURCH

Location: 95-96 Selhurst Road, South Norwood, Croydon, London SE25 6LH For information call Pastor Richard Holder at (020) 8405-2256

APRIL 26-27: LONDON, ENGLAND: STANBOROUGH PARK SDA CHURCH

Location: 609 St. Albans Road, Watford, London WD25 9JL
For information call Pastor Robert Vine at (01923) 678 740

UPDATE ON THE "OPEN LETTER" TO DR. JAMES KENNEDY

Several subscribers have contacted me by email and phone to find out if Dr. James Kennedy has replied to my "Open Letter." The answer is that I have not yet received a personal letter or a call from Dr. Kennedy. I did receive a letter from his office informing me that they have received both the letter and the four books on the Sabbath.

This morning, Tuesday, March 12, 2002, I called Dr. James Kennedy's office and I had a pleasant conversation with his private secretary, MaryAnne. She remembered me from the previous conversation we had about a month ago. At first she thought that Dr. Kennedy had already replied to my "Open Letter." But after looking over the folder containing my letter and books, she told me that Dr. Kennedy did reply to another Doctor who had inquired about his response to my letter.

MaryAnne reassured me that Dr. Kennedy has spent some time reading my "Open Letter" and the four Sabbath books. She also told me that he plans to reply as soon as he can find time. She commented: "Your 'Open Letter' is a lengthy document and it will take sometime for Dr. Kennedy to respond." I suggested the possibility of a brief visit on the weekend of May 4 when I will be in Miami speaking at a rally held at the Northside SDA Church. She thought that this might be possible and she will get back to me definite information.

Personally I am encouraged by the fact that Dr. Kennedy is studying the "Open Letter" and Sabbath books I have mailed him. Most often popular preachers do not even look at the volume of letters and books mailed to them. Would you join with me in praying that the Holy Spirit may lead Dr. Kennedy to a fuller understanding of the Sabbath truth? Your prayers for this special project are greatly appreciated.

THE SPECIAL OFFER ON THE TWO CD-ROMS

Several subscribers have inquired if the special offer on the two CD-ROMS containing all my 16 books, over 100 essays, and my PowerPoint Seminars lectures, is still valid. The answer is "YES." You can still order them at the special price of only \$100.00 for the two CD-ROMS, instead of the regular price of \$140.00 (\$70.00 per each CD).

The first CD-ROM includes not only my books, but also over 100 essays on timely biblical teachings that I have authored during the past 30 years. This CD-ROM offers altogether over 6000 pages of Biblical research on topics relevant to our times. An ACROBAT search engine makes it possible for anyone with a PC or Apple computer, to locate immediately what I wrote on any given topic. By typing in the name of a topic or of a text, you will have at your finger tips the findings of my research.

The second CD-ROM contains my popular PowerPoint lectures on the Sabbath and Second Advent. Each lecture is illustrated with over 100 colorful slides. Each slide comes the text which can be printed separately. This makes it possible for anyone to use and modify my lectures for Bible studies. I have spent over 1000 hours preparing these lectures which are popularly received everywhere. The CD-ROM comes with a free version of the PowerPoint program that you can easily install in your PC or Mac computer, if you do not have the program.

The regular price of the two CD-ROMS is \$70.00 each, but we offer the two CD-ROMS together for only \$100.00, postage paid. You can order the two CD-ROMS by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by mailing your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103.

ADVENTIST YOUTHS OFFENDED BY CHRISTIAN ROCK

Recently I have received numerous messages from Adventist young people who are offended by the kind of "Christian Rock Music" played at some Adventist youth services. The fact that some Adventist young people are distressed by the kind of beat music played at some of their services, shows that there are Adventist youths who wish to worship God in the beauty of holiness.

To encourage young people, many of whom subscribe to this newsletter, I decided to post this brief message I received a couple of days ago. Both the father and the son have granted me permission to use their message.

Dear Brother Sam,

My oldest son just returned from a youth rally last night in Dayton, OH at one of our academies. Dylan is 17-years old. After 2-songs, he gathered his female friend Danielle and they decided to leave--going back to her home. Why? Dylan was deeply offended at the heavy metal rock music, complete with lights and smoke and incredible volume.

Walking out the door, the youth pastor (from Australia) said "Leaving so soon?" Dylan replied that he was offended, and God could not be honored in music of this kind. The pastor hesitated "Well, I know what you mean... but there may be some people who will be reached through this."

Dylan said "When we lower ourselves to this level to 'reach' people we trap them on that level." The pastor said "Hmmm..." He didn't really know what to say

They went home and spent the evening with her parents... (Dylan is pictured briefly in the latest Perspective Digest on pages 29 and 33).

My heart is kind of heavy for the children of the Advent Movement. May the Lord forgive us and guide them.

In His love,
Brother Gerry C. Wagoner
Piqua, OH

ENDTIME ISSUES 81: “THE BIBLE AND ALCOHOL: MODERATION OR TOTAL ABSTINENCE?”

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
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Few issues have proven to be so divisive to American Christianity in particular and so destructive to our society in general as the drinking of alcoholic beverages. During the course of American history, virtually every denomination has debated whether or not a Christian should drink alcoholic beverages.

A significant outcome of these debates was the establishment of several temperance movements such as the American Temperance Society in 1826, the American Temperance Union in 1836, the National Prohibition Party in 1869, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in 1874, and the politically oriented Anti-Saloon League in 1893. These movements, which were enthusiastically supported by several evangelical churches, eventually achieved Prohibition by the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States on January 16, 1919. This Amendment outlawed the “manufacture, sale or transportation” of alcoholic beverages.

With the repeal of Prohibition on December 5, 1933 by the adoption of the Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution, the drinking levels of Americans began to rise again, bringing with them a trail of sickness, poverty, crime and death. Today alcohol use in America has become endemic. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, nearly 18 million adults in the U.S. are problem drinkers and of these more than 10 million are suffering from alcoholism.¹ “Alcohol is a factor in nearly half of America’s murders, suicides and accidental deaths. In all, it claims at least 100,000 lives per year, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined.”²

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

Christian churches bear some responsibility for the alarming drinking problems of our time, because through their beliefs, teachings and preaching they are able to influence the moral values and practices of society, possibly more than any other institution. What pastors preach from their pulpits, and what Sabbath or Sunday school teachers teach in their classes regarding drinking, determines to a large extent the stand church members take toward the use of alcoholic beverages.

Those who teach that moderate drinking is a Christian liberty sanctioned by Scripture fail to realize that moderation is the first step toward immoderation. First, because alcohol is a habit-forming narcotic and second, because even moderate drinking diminishes our capacity for judgment and self-control.

In his book *God is for the Alcoholic*, Jerry Dunn, an authority on dealing with alcoholics, tells the story of a man who often came staggering to his Open Door Mission for alcoholics in Omaha, Nebraska, shaking a finger to his face and saying: “Jerry! It’s all right for me to drink. The Bible says so! I dare you to show me anywhere in the Bible where it says that I can’t drink.”³

The belief that the Bible sanctions the moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages has contributed to reduce alcoholism to a medical issue. In other words, there is a tendency today to move away from viewing the drinking of alcoholic beverages as a “sinful practice.” Instead, the consumption of alcoholic beverages has become more of a medical than a moral problem. This is simply another example of the fact that we are fast becoming a “no fault” society—a society where no one is willing to assume responsibility or blame for anything he does. We have no fault insurance and no fault divorces, so why not also no fault alcoholism.

Ralph Woerner perceptively observes: “Alcoholics are no longer to blame for what they have become. They have caught a disease, like chicken pox, measles or mumps. The poor fellow was thirsty. He went into a bar one day where they served him

a disease-causing drink, which destroyed his brain, wrecked his marriage, and brought untold anguish upon his family. But it was all so innocently done. No one is responsible for what happened.

“We would never allow a company to sell a beverage which causes measles, smallpox or polio, but with alcohol is different. It is different because we really do not believe it contains a disease-causing agent. When it is sold it is merely a beverage to quench one’s thirst and to make his heart merry. When the consumer becomes addicted, he has contracted a disease. This ‘schizophrenic’ reasoning allows the manufacturer to sell his product without responsibility or blame. It allows the user to destroy himself without guilt or shame. He is a ‘victim’ like someone who has been hit by a tornado, an earthquake, or a flood. How can he be held responsible for what he has become? By labeling alcoholism a disease we absolve the alcoholic of all responsibility and guilt. This is essential if we are going to have a ‘no fault’ society.

“When it is brewed the product is ‘as pure as a mountain stream.’ When the user becomes addicted he is a victim of a terrible disease. Thus, the producer and the consumer are both exonerated from all guilt and responsibility for the suffering they have caused.”¹³

THE NEED FOR MORAL CONVICTION

Informing Christians about the harmful effect of alcoholic beverages to their health, self-image, family, and society is urgently needed. But will this provide a compelling motivation to remain or become abstinent? Will the simple knowledge of the harmful effects of alcohol adequately convince and convict Christians to be teetotalers? In my view education alone is not enough. It takes more. It takes not merely *biological ethics* but primarily *Biblical ethics*. *It is only when a Christian recognizes that drinking is not only a bad habit that can harm one’s health, but also a transgression of a God-given principle to ensure our health and holiness, that he or she will feel compelled to abstain from intoxicating substances.*

The massive national education on the danger of cigarette smoking has not so radically reduced the number of smokers. There are still about 40 million Americans who would rather smoke their health away than quit the habit. This shows that biological ethics alone is not enough. Similarly, educating people regarding the physio-social effects of alcohol will not substantially reduce the drinking problem either in the church or in the society as a whole.

The reason for this is the fallen human nature described by Paul with these words: “For I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:15, 24). The long and sad experience of the human race teaches us that for the sake of immediate pleasure, human beings will persist in doing what they know will eventually destroy not only their well-being but also that of society.

The Christian way of freedom is found in seeking to *serve God* rather than to *serve self*, in seeking to know and to do the will of God rather than to gratify and preserve our life style. Our present life is a meaningless and unfulfilling existence until it finds its meaning and fulfillment in God. The good news of Scripture is that God has provided us with a way to find meaning and fulfillment in Him, by accepting His forgiveness for our past sins and His power to live in the present according to the principles of His Word. This was, as Paul explains, the purpose of Christ’s coming into this world “in the likeness of sinful flesh . . . in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3, 4).

All of this means that our Christian position on drinking must be formulated not merely on the basis of *biological ethics*, but primarily on the basis of *Biblical ethics*. Our conviction must be rooted not only in the negative effects of drinking on the physio-social aspects of life, but also in the positive principles and admonitions regarding drinking given

to us by God in His Word. The definition of our Christian position on drinking must begin by listening first to what God has to say about it in His Word, and then to what scientific research tells us regarding the effects of alcohol.

THE BIBLE AND DRINKING: AN APPARENT CONTRADICTION

When 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. 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.⁴

Only few examples can be cited in this brief newsletter. 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.

The Dual Usage of the Greek *Oinos*—Wine. 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.”⁵ 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.⁶

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.”⁷

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 Dual Usage of the Hebrew *Yayin*–Wine. 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-gaf*’ (wine of the vat; Sanh 70a).”⁸ 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 Nazirite.”⁹

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 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.”¹¹

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.¹² 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).¹³

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).

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. In the light of these solemn Biblical warnings, we ought to respect God-given guidance by abstaining from alcoholic beverages and any intoxicating substance.

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.¹⁴ 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.

Marcus Porcius Cato (234-150 B.C.), who is considered the father of both Latin prose and literature on agriculture, refers to the use of some of these preservatives, saying: "If necessary, add to the new wine a fortieth part of must boiled-down from untrod grapes, or a pound and a half of salt to the culleus [a liquid measure]. If you use marble dust, add one pound to the culleus; mix this with must in a vessel and then pour into the jar. If you use resin, pulverize it thoroughly, three pounds to the culleus of must, place it in a basket, and suspend it in the jar of must; shake the basket often so that the resin may dissolve. When you use boiled must or marble dust or resin, stir frequently for twenty days and press down daily."¹⁵

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.¹⁶

Columella, a renowned agriculturalist who lived in the first century A. D., 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."¹⁷ 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."¹⁸ 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, *nardenkin* 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*)."¹⁹

The fact that the Old and New Testaments do not discuss the art of preserving grape juice, does not mean that it was unknown in Bible times. The Jews were not less knowledgeable in the art of preservation than the surrounding nations. Josephus tells us that the Romans were astonished to find in the fortress of Masada, wine, oil, fruits and cereals freshly preserved, though they had been stored for several years.²⁰ Furthermore, rabbinical sources specifically mention the use of boiled wine.²¹

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.

CONCLUSION

In the OT the use of alcoholic beverages is condemned, irrespective of the quantity used. A fundamental reason is they impair the functioning of the mind, which is the most vital organ God has given us to make morally responsible decisions. This conclusion is confirmed by the NT teachings which will be examined in the next newsletter.

It is my fervent hope that this study may help many Christians of all denominations better understand and accept the fact that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically harmful, but also Biblically and morally wrong; it represents the violation of a principle given to us by God for ensuring our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

NOTES

1. This statistical information is provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and is cited in "Coming to Grips with Alcoholism," *U.S. News and World Report* (November 30, 1987): 56.
2. Ibid.
3. "Carter Will Restore Confidence, Graham Says," *Miami Herald* (December 26, 1976), section A, p. 18.
4. See note 1.
5. See note 1.
6. Jerry Dunn, *God is for the Alcoholic* (Chicago, 1896), p. 87.
7. Ralph Woerner, "A No Fault Society," *Church of God Churchlight* (December 1988):1-2.
8. The survey is found in Chapter 2, "The Meaning of 'Wine,'" of *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages*.
9. Aristotle, *Metereologica* 388. b. 9-13. See also *Metereologica* 388. a. 34 which says: "There is more than one kind of liquid called wine [*oinos*] and different kinds behave differently. For new wine contains more earth than old, and so thickens most under the influence of heat, but solidifies less under the influence of cold." The reference to the thickening of new wine under the influence of heat implies that new wine was preserved unfermented by boiling it down.
10. On a similar vein in *Metereologica* 384. a. 4-5, Aristotle says: "For some kinds of wine [*oinos*], for example must [*gleukos*], solidify when boiled."
11. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine. An Exegetical Study* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 14.
12. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906 ed., s. v. "Wine," vol. 12, p. 533.
13. Cited by Louis Ginzberg, "A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies," *American Jewish Year Book* 1923, p. 409.
14. My analysis of these texts is found in *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 67-69.
15. Emphasis supplied.
16. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 11, 85.
17. My analysis of the Biblical teachings on the consequences of drinking intoxicating wine is found in *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 95-101.
18. The testimonies of ancient writers regarding the art of preserving fermented and unfermented wine are cited and analyzed in Chapter 4, "The Preservation of Grape Juice," of *Wine in the Bible*.
19. Marcus Cato, *On Agriculture* 23, trans. William Davis Hooper, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960).
20. For documentation and discussion of each of the four methods of preserving grape juice unfermented, see *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 114-127.
21. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 19,1, trans. E. S. Forster and Edward H. Heffner, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955).
22. Ibid., 12, 26, 1.
23. John Kitto, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 edition, s. v. "Passover," vol 2, p. 477.

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