

ALCOHOL USE IN BIBLICAL TIMES AND NOW

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I have been asked about this subject many times and recently asked to write about it, especially regarding “wine” in the Bible. This topic has been debated for centuries now with conclusions ranging from reasonable consumption to total abstinence from any alcoholic beverage. Those of the latter view claim that though wine did exist in Biblical times, it’s use was always frowned upon and condemned. And, when Jesus turned the water into “wine” at the wedding feast or drank “the fruit of the vine” at the Passover with His disciples, it was unfermented grape juice.

What is the actual truth?

Let me say that the misuse of alcoholic beverages by multitudes has caused irreparable harm to people. And this is nothing new. Thousands of years of human history has testified to untold damage and tragedy due to alcoholic overindulgence.

But this can be said of just about everything people may indulge in.

For example, a rock can be used to build a structure or be a beautiful decorative piece of furniture or art to be admired and enjoyed or used to hit someone and hurt them or ill them. The same with a piece of wood. It can be used to keep us warm in a fireplace, build a house, or made into a spear to kill someone. The wood isn’t evil, and neither is a rock. Or anything else in creation.

In fact, the Bible tells us that when God created the earth and prepared it for our arrival, He said it was all “good.” We know from early on that grapevines were part of His creation and so they must be good also.

But even with all things being created good, people who have set themselves apart from God and put themselves in His place and exercise their will for their own benefit even to the point of dominating others take His good things and use them for bad purposes. You can apply this to a lot of things God made “good.” It is people who are evil because they have pushed God out of their lives.

The scripture makes it crystal clear that people are the source of evil. Not God, not Satan.

Even Jesus said,

“And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, so that his deeds will not be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds will

be revealed as having been performed in God.” John 3:19-21

As one man said, “There is no such thing as darkness. It is only the absence of light. Bring light in and darkness vanishes .”¹

“Darkness” in Acts 26:16-18 is one place where we see that “darkness” is another word (or metaphor) for “lies” while “light” is another word (or metaphor) for “truth.” This is a common comparison.

The debate over alcohol is much like the illustrations of the rock and piece of wood above. The truth itself is what we want to know. But because people have taken something good God provided and turned it into something harmful and ungodly at times, we have this debate.

I understand completely. My father was an alcoholic. He caused much sadness and pain in my family when I was growing up. But was it the alcohol? Or the man?

The same things can be said of misusing food as people die from overeating or not eating at all. Or of too much sugar, or of driving recklessly, or of the use of our mouths, or of writing bad things about others, or the use of our bodies to do ungodly things and the list can get much bigger and all those things we think of can be used for good or evil. People can abuse and misuse any good thing and cause all kinds of harm even in the air and water supply we need to live.²

So, what does the Bible say about “wine” and what should we do about what we learn? The latter is actually more important than understanding the true facts about wine in the Bible. That will be discussed near the end of this article. But, is wine itself evil?

“Wine” is mentioned over 250 times in the Bible, beginning early in Genesis all the way to the end of the Book of Revelation. We can’t look at every verse. So, we will summarize and look at some verses. We will also see clearly that “wine” is differentiated from other alcoholic drinks as well as from “grape juice.”

“Grape juice” is mentioned twice in the Bible (Old Testament) and refers to the first juice from the press that becomes “new wine” rapidly (and it is alcoholic) and then, depending on the process time, various types and strengths of wine. In Numbers 6:1-4 we have the clear differentiation:

1: “Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2: ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When a man or woman makes a special vow, *namely*, the vow of a Nazirite, to live as a Nazirite for the LORD, 3: he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall consume no vinegar, *whether made* from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes. 4: ‘All the days of his consecration he

¹ There are a lot of verses about this illustration. Matthew 4:16, 6:22-23; Luke 11:35; John 8:12, 12:35, 12:46; Acts 26:18 and many more.

² The “Why people do this is summarized at the end of this discussion.”

shall not eat anything that is produced from the grape vine, from *the* seeds even to *the* skin.”

Here we see several types of alcoholic beverages beginning in verse three. “Wine” (Hebrew – “Yayin”); “strong drink” (Hebrew – “shekar”); “vinegar” – (Hebrew – “chomets”); and “grape juice” (Hebrew – “enab mishrah”). These others will be discussed beginning on page 15.

Wine is made from various types of grapes. And God made dozens of types of grapes, most of which you will not see in the grocery store. This is because most types of grapes made into wine are not sold in the grocery store, and the grapes in the grocery stores are good for eating, but do not make very good wine.

In the Bible ripe grapes are picked and put into a “wine press.” In both the Old and New Testament, it is called a “wine press” never a “grape press.” Below are a couple of pictures of ancient wine presses in Israel from Bible times. Some grapes were crushed by using an Ox to roll a stone over the grapes and others used human feet.

There have been hundreds, if not thousands of ancient wine presses found in Israel. Wine was a very important part of daily life among the people there. Still is. More on that in a moment. Once the grapes were crushed, the juice was collected in clay pots and processed to make wine. Grape juice was not a product they ended up with. In fact, grape juice left without an air tight bottle, preservatives or refrigeration would spoil rather quickly. They did not have either of those things.



Now the “fruit of the vine” Jesus speaks of in His words at the Passover, (last supper) will be discussed in a bit. Some teachers use this phrase (only mentioned in three of the gospels

repeating Jesus single time using this phrase) to deny that wine was in use and so we as believers are prohibited from drinking it. This phrase is never seen in the Bible other than this one-time that Jesus said it. We will look at this more closely a bit later. Remember we are seeking the truth.

May I say that we, as 21st century Americans living in the west part of the world with a European heritage are quite different than the Semitic, ancient peoples of the mid-east thousands of years ago and might not understand how they lived and why. Their traditions and life styles in ancient times are quite different from ours and their use of alcohol as well. But, as with all peoples, abuses existed then and still exist there as well. But wine was a staple for the ancient household.

So what does the Bible say about wine? Well, again it isn't the wine that is the problem, but what people do with it and how they use it. So, it's use has both positive and negative things the Bible says about that. Not wine itself, but what people do with it. That, as always, is the problem.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. In that language, "wine" is "yayin." This refers to grape juice processed to an aged wine. The phrase "new-wine" in the Bible that refers to freshly made wine that has not been aged. But it was wine in the alcoholic sense as is obvious by Judges 9:13 in Jotham's allegory that says, "But the vine said to them, 'Shall I give up my new wine, which cheers God and mankind, and go to wave over the trees?'"

The same theme is used in Psalm 104:14-15 where the Psalmist is praising God for the good things of His creation including,

14: "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of mankind, So that they may produce food from the earth, 15: And wine, which makes a human heart cheerful, So that he makes *his* face gleam with oil, And food, which sustains a human heart."

This "pure new-wine" was used as a "first fruit" offering to God in some sacrifices.

"You shall give him the first fruits of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first fleece of your sheep." Deuteronomy 18:4

When Hannah brought the infant Samuel to dedicate him to the Lord, we read,

"Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull, one ephah of flour, and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the

LORD in Shiloh, although the child was young." I Samuel 1:24

Where did she get the jug of wine? Well, from home of course and she and her husband Elkanah were godly people, chosen by the Lord for special reasons.

In Nehemiah 10:37 we read,

“We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new-wine, and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithes of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.” Nehemiah 10:37

Some more positive verses about wine in general are;

“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, And trust in the LORD. Many are saying, “Who will show us *anything* good?” Lift up the light of Your face upon us, LORD! You have put joy in my heart, More than when their grain and new wine are abundant. In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For You alone, LORD, have me dwell in safety.” Psalm 4:5-8

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Just as the new wine is found in the cluster, And one says, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is benefit in it,’ So I will act on behalf of My servants In order not to destroy all of them.’” Isaiah 65:8

And Jesus, speaking of the New Covenant to come (in His blood – represented by the wine at the Passover table) said one day,

“But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do *people* put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.” Matthew 9:16-17

This refers to a freshly made wine not yet fully fermented and so it expands as it ferments. In previously expanded wineskins that can expand no further, they will burst as the new wine expands. But it is wine indeed and often sweeter than fully mature wine. Dessert wines today are like this but are still alcoholic. Sugar is also added. That actually makes the wine making process go quicker.

Now, back in Genesis, Abraham met with Melchizedek who served him. We read in Genesis 14:18, “And Melchizedek the king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.”

When Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob he prayed, “Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, And of the fatness of the earth, And an abundance of grain and new wine;” Genesis 27:28.

So, God gives wine as a blessing? What do you think?

“Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old

without defect as a burnt offering to the LORD. Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths *of an ephah* of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the LORD *for a soothing aroma*, with its drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine.” Leviticus 23:12-13 (A “hin” of wine is just over a gallon.)

There is nothing in the Bible that says “wine” is bad or evil. In fact, it frequently points to wine as a good thing and even a blessing from God. There are a few more passages and then we move on to the problems.

“Wisdom has built her house, She has carved out her seven pillars; She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table.” Proverbs 9:1-2

Wine was a staple at the dinner table in ancient times. Even children drank it. It was also used to offset any contamination in the drinking water at the time as they had no water purification systems. The alcohol killed any bad germs so people would not get sick. So, wine was added to water for this purpose, but mostly drunk straight as a pleasant accompanying beverage to a meal. It would be unheard of to have guests to dinner and not serve wine.

We see this in Paul’s words to Timothy. Wine was also used for medicinal purposes. In I Timothy 5:23, Paul advises Timothy, “Do not go on drinking only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.”

In the parable of the “Good Samaritan” we also read of the medicinal use of wine,

“But a Samaritan who was on a journey came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own animal, and brought him to an inn and took care of him.” Luke 10:33-34

Back to I Timothy again, we saw Paul counseling timothy to drink a little wine for his frequent ailments, but in the same letter, Paul also wrote,

“An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching, not overindulging in wine, not a bully, but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money.” I Timothy 3:2-3

So, you see, it is not the wine, but how it is used...or abused and misused by people.

God asks for wine as a sacred offering. If it is evil, then why? Nothing evil can come into the presence of God. But the Bible does say,

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.” Genesis 6:5

Proverbs 3:9-10, “Honor the LORD from your wealth, And from the first of all your produce; Then your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.”

Can you imagine those who teach that “wine” was unfermented grape juice would feel blessed when their faithfulness in giving to the Lord resulted with “vats” filled with new wine awaiting full fermentation? That’s what “vats” or casks (barrels) were for. And notice, this is a blessing from the Lord.

We have perverted this truth by false and misleading teachings and the misuse and abuse of wine and other alcoholic beverages (also mentioned in the Bible.)

Continuing,

Ecclesiastes 9:7, “Go *then*, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.”

Song of Solomon 5:1, “I have come into my garden, my sister, *my* bride; I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, friends; Drink and drink deeply, lovers.”

Speaking of the future Isaiah 25:6 reads,

“Now the LORD of armies will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, *And* refined, aged wine.”

And so on.

Now, it is true that if you drink wine to the point of drunkenness, one’s personality and character can be changed. Plus, constant consumption of wine and other alcoholic beverages can lead to addiction and very bad behavior and sad consequences. There is always a problem when people abuse and misuse what God has made.

Here are some of those verses.

In the same book of Proverbs where wine can be a blessing we also read,

“Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.” 20:1

Intoxication is the problem, not the wine itself.

“Awake, you heavy drinkers, and weep; And wail, all you wine drinkers, Because of the sweet wine, For it has been eliminated from your mouth.” Joel 1:5 (Note again that “sweet or new wine” can also cause drunkenness)

Then, later Joel prophesizes the restoration of the land with the Lord's blessings including,

“Do not fear, land; shout for joy and rejoice, For the LORD has done great things. Do not fear, animals of the field, For the pastures of the wilderness have turned green, For the tree has produced its fruit, The fig tree and the vine have yielded in full. So shout for joy, you sons of Zion, And rejoice in the LORD your God; For He has given you the early rain for *your* vindication. And He has brought down for you the rain, The early and latter rain as before. The threshing floors will be full of grain, And the vats will overflow with the new wine and oil.” 2:21-24

Still,

“Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord;” Ephesians 5:17-19 (Paul's words)

Notice the Word does not say - not to drink wine, but not to “get drunk with wine.” Paul writes in I Corinthians 5:11,

“But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person.”

Then,

Let's behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and debauchery, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts. Romans 13:13-14

Titus 2:3, “Older women likewise *are to be* reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good...”

Jesus said,

“But be on your guard, so that your hearts will not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that this day will not come on you suddenly, like a trap... Luke 21:34

Speaking of Jesus, let's return to His “fruit of the vine” comment. The occasion where this was said by Jesus was the Passover Feast. This feast was the most important in the Bible for the Jews to celebrate and remember the miraculous deliverance of Israel from the slavery in Egypt. The ceremony was to be held on a certain day every year (on the 14th of Nisan in the Jewish calendar beginning at Sunset) and in a certain manner every time. It is still done this exact same way today.

The Passover Feast comes from the command described in Exodus, chapter 12 and the subsequent events. In the ceremony that came to be, several items on the table were symbolic in order to remember and teach the story of the event. You can read about this on line many sites. One Jewish site is:

https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1751/jewish/What-Is-a-Seder-Passover-Meal.htm

The modern Passover Seder stems from around 500 B.C. after the restoration of the walls and temple of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity.

In it you will find the drinking of four cups of wine, (not grape juice) each with a symbolic meaning.

Though Jesus used the term “fruit of the vine” he did note that it was a “cup.” (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; and Luke 22:17). So we know that they drank from a “cup” during the Passover. Could it have been other than wine? Just “grape juice?” That would be contrary to the centuries old Jewish practice at Passover.

Today, the Jews, even the children partake of wine at Passover. Plus, we have no question from any of the disciples about why wine is not in the cup. Further, the preparation for the Passover was done before they all arrived. There was no direction to change anything regarding the ceremony. Also, the Greek word used there for cup is “poterion.” It most often is associated with a “wine cup” in the New Testament and Jesus compares the contents with His blood, also a common metaphor. This can be seen in other passages like I Corinthians 11:7-21. Note that some of the people were getting drunk. In 11:25-34 Paul condemns the manner in which the Lord’s supper (actually a communal pot-luck) was abused. The “cup” Paul mentions is the same thing the people were using to get drunk. Not grape juice, for sure.

The English also uses the word “bread” at this supper, when it was an unleavened baked product called “matzoh.”

So sometimes our modern English fails to understand or consider ancient use of the language of their times. Jesus’ use of “fruit of the vine” one time compared to the hundreds of verses about wine is no reason to distort the entire meaning of what He did to prove a point the Bible doesn’t even make.

Paul says this,

“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.” I Timothy 4:1-5

But the misuse and abuse of these good things is condemned by God.

So, what about the miracle of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana? Well, I could describe these ancient Jewish wedding feasts and all that transpired over a period of a week or more, but you can look this all up if you wish.

Let's look at the story. John 2:1-10.

1: "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; 2: and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. 3: When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

The word here is "oinos" meaning "wine." Not grape juice. In fact, there is no mention of the term "grape juice" in the New Testament. There are words for "grape" and "juice" in the Greek, but they are never used. Real wine was served at wedding feasts then and is still served today at Jewish wedding feasts. Let's continue.

4: "And Jesus said to her, 'What *business* do you have with Me, woman? My hour has not yet come.' 5: His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He tells you, do it.' 6: Now there were six stone waterpots standing there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing two or three measures each."

The total volume here would approach 200 gallons.

7: "Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' "So they filled them up to the brim." 8: "And He said to them, 'Draw *some* out now and take *it* to the headwaiter.' And they took *it to him*." 9: "Now when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the groom, 10: and said to him, 'Every man serves the good wine first, and when *the guests* are drunk, *then he serves* the poorer wine; *but you have kept* the good wine until now.'

What teachers of the "not a wine but grape juice" doctrine do is ignore the actual text and make up what they want to say by cutting out some of the Word of God so it will support what they want to say. Truth is not a consideration for these people. At all!

Please notice verse 10. "Every man serves the good wine first, and when *the guests* are **drunk**, *then he serves* the poorer wine; *but you have kept* the good wine until now."

Well, it is very hard to get **drunk** on grape juice. The word "wine" is wine, and Jesus had no problem with the custom of celebrating with a very good wine. Had He turned the water into grape juice, the guests would have spit it out. Period. It would not have been called the "good wine."

Are we persuaded yet?? Some will never be even if God Himself corrects their error. They will ignore him and do it their way as they always have and always will.

Now, what do we do about this when we hear an incorrect or misguided teaching about these things?

The Bible has that answer as well. The key teaching in the Scripture is to not engage in any behavior in front of those who are sensitive to things like this so we will not cause them confusion or distress. Paul calls it placing a stumbling block in front of others who are not mature in their understanding about God's Word.

Here are some verses. The best one is the entire 14th chapter of Romans. Please read this. It is important. Very important. Another is I Corinthians 8:4-13. In Corinth, the non-Jewish believers had no problem going to the market place and buying meat a part of which had been offered in sacrifice to idols. The Jews refused to buy or eat this meat. Their traditions kept them from doing this even though there was nothing in the Scripture about this. And, Mark 7:18-20 states,

18: "And He (Jesus) said to them, 'Are you so lacking in understanding as well? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the person from outside cannot defile him, 19: because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?' (Thereby He declared all foods clean.) 20: And He was saying, "That which comes out of the person, that *is what* defiles the person."

There are still those today who "lack understanding." Paul wrote about this,

4: "Therefore, concerning the eating of food sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and that there is no God but one. 5: For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6: yet for us there is *only* one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him. 7: However, not all people have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8: Now food will not bring us close to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. 9: But take care that this freedom of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10: For if someone sees you, the one who has knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will his conscience, if he is weak, not be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11: For through your knowledge the one who is weak is ruined, the brother *or sister* for whose sake Christ died. 12: And so, by sinning against the brothers *and sisters* and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13:

Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to sin."

Of course, Paul was free from these things and in private, or with those who did have understanding he could eat and drink what he wished. He said also, in I Corinthians 9:1-4,

1: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2: If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3: My defense to those who examine me is this: 4: Do we not have a right to eat and drink?"

19-23,

19: "For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may gain more. 20: To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the Law, *I became* as *one* under the Law, though not being under the Law myself, so that I might gain those who are under the Law; 21: to those who are without the Law, *I became* as one without the Law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might gain those who are without the Law. 22: To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak; I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. 23: I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

In other words, the mature and free Christian will not engage in any behavior that might cause someone to be offended even though he/she might have no problem with these things themselves. The opportunity to share the gospel must not be derailed because we feel we can do what we want whether it offends others or not.

For example, when my wife and I go to dinner with those Christian friends (or even non-Christian friends) who don't drink, we do not order anything alcoholic either. When we have gone to Jewish weddings where wine is served, we do not get holier than though and righteous by saying, "Oh we don't drink." That would be a put off. We accept a glass of wine and say, "Thank you!" And so on. We would never serve a pork or ham dinner to Jewish, Seventh Day Adventist or any other group or people opposed to eating this meat. For the same reason Paul states. Yet we enjoy pork products ourselves at home. Bacon and eggs? You bet. I hope that doesn't offend you.

Jesus said, "Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to the person through whom the stumbling block comes!" Matthew 18:7

He also said, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as wary as serpents, and as innocent as doves." Matthew 10:16

Is there more in the Bible about this? Yep, much more, but I hope you get the idea by now. Remember there are 250 verses yet to look at in the Old Testament alone.

What should be taught about this is what I have written above. Many of those who attend churches like this engage in eating and drinking practices against the teachings because they

do have understanding. But they will never tell anyone.

Below is a recent article from *Biblical Archaeology Review*. It adds to the truth of this topic.

Ancient Israel and the History of Beer

New evidence found for early beer consumption

Nathan Steinmeyer January 03, 2022



History of Beer: A Syrian mercenary of the Egyptian royal guard drinking beer with a straw. *Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.*

An article published in the *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* has shed new light on the history of beer in the ancient Near East and, specifically, the southern

Levant. The study examined remains from two sites in Israel dated to the Chalcolithic period (c. 5500–3900 B.C.E.). An analysis of storage and drinking vessels from both sites provided clear indications of the production and consumption of beer in large quantities. The discoveries add a new piece to the puzzle on the origins of beer.

The two sites examined for the study were Tel Tsaf in the northern Jordan Valley of Israel (c. 5200–4700 B.C.E.) and Peqi'in Cave in the Upper Galilee (4500–3900 B.C.E.). In Peqi'in Cave, evidence was found of beer consumption within a funerary context, leading the team to suggest that beer may have been part of prehistoric burial rites or ceremonies. In contrast, at Tel Tsaf, beer was found associated with several large courtyards and storage areas, suggesting it may have been served during large communal feasts or gatherings.



An Iron Age IIA beer jug with strainer from the Philistine site of Tell es-Safi/Gath (c. 9th century B.C.E.). *Credit: Yaniv Berman, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.*

At both sites, the team analyzed microfossil material left behind in strainers from ceramic serving vessels common to the period. The analysis found evidence of starches, yeasts, and fibers, which are a strong indication of fermented grains, especially wheat and barley. The researchers believe the strainers were used to filter the beer as it was poured into serving vessels. This contrasts with later Bronze Age depictions of beer consumption, in which long reed or metal straws were used to drink from large communal vats.

History of Beer in Israel and the Ancient Near East

The earliest archaeological evidence for the production of beer dates back to at least 13,000 years ago, from a cave in northern Israel. However, it was not until

about 4000 B.C.E. that textual and artistic depictions of beer appear in the ancient Near East, with stamp seals in Mesopotamia depicting the drinking of beer from large vats during feasts. By the Early Bronze Age (c. 3300–2300 B.C.E.), beer drinking had become common across much of the ancient Near East. In fact, the oldest brewery in the world was discovered in 2021 in Abydos, Egypt, dating to 5,000 years ago. The ancient Israelites also enjoyed large quantities of beer, and beer is frequently mentioned in the Bible (Proverbs 31:6: "Give strong drink [beer] to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress"). The Israelites were even instructed to pour out beer as a drink offering to God (Numbers 28:7–10).

From recreating Bronze Age brewing techniques to making beer with 5,000-year-old yeast, archaeologists have learned a lot about the history and practice of beer in the ancient Near East. In recent years, modern breweries have even revived 5,000-year-old Sumerian beer styles.

End of article

In addition, not only was wine and beer produced, but also what the Bible translators record as "strong drink" (Mentioned 10 times in the Bible.) I am listing these passages here for you.

Leviticus 10:9, Numbers 6:3 (Look at this one and see the differences); Numbers 28:7; Deuter. 14:26; Deuter. 29:6; Judges 13:4, 7, 14; I Samuel 1:15.

"Strong drink" is an alcoholic beverage made from fermented and distilled grains. This of course, points to a whiskey or whiskey type product.

Why are these things taught when they are not really Biblical and often opposes what the Bible actually teaches? You tell me. A topic for discussion or another time.

Now, why do people abuse, misuse, and distort the good things God has created for us?

I have written about this on my web-site with a paper titled "Self-centeredness, the problem with everything." What is self-centeredness?" And why?

First, why are people so self-centered? This means that "I" am most important. "What I want to do is more important than what you want to do." "In fact what I do is more important than what you do." "I want my own way, even if it means you don't get yours." "My ideas are more important than your ideas." My thoughts are more important than your thoughts." "You are here for my benefit, not me for yours." "I am more important than you are." And so on.

New born babies are 100% this way. As a child grows, this continues. Rebellion and resentment set in if a child isn't given everything they want. I understand this to a degree when a student in high school or college is focused on their studies so they can graduate and get a career. But then when one becomes say, thirty or forty years old shouldn't they think

about someone other than themselves? It is rare if they do.

Even when it comes to marriage and family a young man or woman “wants” a wife or husband, but seldom considers the desire TO BE a husband or wife. They want children, but hardly ever wish to be parents. It is all about what they want for themselves. Self. The biggest problem of all everywhere and in every relationship whether it be political, economic, social or personal.

Jesus said in Matthew 20:25-28,

25: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles domineer over them, and those in high position exercise authority over them. 26: “It is not this way among you, but whoever wants to become prominent among you shall be your servant, 27: and whoever desires to be first among you shall be your slave; 28: just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

In Mathew 16:24-26 (and Mark 8:34-38) we read,

24: “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. 25: “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26: “For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul?”

Paul wrote in II Timothy 3:1-5,

1: “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For people will be **lovers of self**, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3: unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4: treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5: holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power; avoid *such people as these*.”

Why are people so self-centered? Briefly, though they won't admit it, they are driven by fear. Normally it is fear of losing something (even time) or not having something. This is from the basis of the emptiness people are afflicted with and the ensuing fear that life is hopeless and futile.

So, because most people are empty of any hope, purpose in life or a reason to be even living. So, they try to gain all the things they think will fill the emptiness and give them some sort of happiness or fulfilment. They will do this even if it means using others to get what they want, even to killing them. Not only will they deny themselves to follow Christ, they will elevate themselves and seek for themselves at any cost. Note Genesis, chapter three.

Paul wrote of this despair in Ephesians 2:12. "... *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the people of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

Blaise Pascal, 17th century mathematician and philosopher said,

"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made know through Jesus Christ."

I mentioned "fear" as the root cause. Not an opinion. This is proposed by most psychologists. The symptoms of "fear" are: anger, frustration, depression, discouragement, despair, hopelessness, striking out at others, crime, greed, seeking power over others, lying, manipulating, hating, abuse of everything God has made, done or said. And much more.

It is the opposite of faith. John says in I John 4:16-19,

16: "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. 17: By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, we also are in this world. 18: There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 19: We love, because He first loved us."

Just a thought about this as I close for now. In verse 16 it appears that John refers to a process of coming to know that God really loves us in spite of what we do, think or say. I think this is true. In 17 he speaks of gaining confidence in this world in spite of its evil and corruption at times. In 18 he tells us that fear is the problem, but that God's true love for us, when we come to actually believe it will drive out the fear.

That means that everything that the empty people do in this world, that God calls evil, or an abuse, or misuse of what He has made or said will be exchanged for caring about others, serving others rather than self and become more like the Savior as we want to be.

Now do you have an idea about why the things that are taught and distorted about "wine" and much more are taught?