

Beer and Other Alcoholic Beverages in the Bible

by Gary T. Panell

You may be surprised to find that the word beer is used in the Bible. In the New International Version of the Bible the Hebrew word "shakar" is translated as "beer." In the King James versions of the Bible the Hebrew word "shakar" is translated as "strong or intoxicating drink." They made these drinks from dates or other fruits (grapes excepted) or barley millet, etc.

Drinking alcohol today has become common place, and many Christians see nothing wrong with it. They use the Bible to condone their actions-saying, "Didn't Paul tell Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake?" They question, "Didn't Jesus drink wine?" Then they insist that Jesus made alcoholic wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.

These sound like convincing arguments until you understand that the main Hebrew word for "wine" (yayin) or the main Greek word (oinos) can refer to a fermented or unfermented drink. The wine spoken of in the Bible is a generic term. The context in each case indicates whether it was speaking of fermented wine or not.

You might ask, "Could people in Bible times keep their juices from fermenting when there was no refrigeration?" The answer is, "Yes." To preserve their sweet juices in a hot climate, people often boiled the juice down until it was thick like syrup, and later when they were ready to use it they would add water to it. Also they would boil their juices and, then seal the air out. There were other methods to prevent fermentation like filtration or by drawing off the juice from the subsided yeast, and by the use of sulfur. They could, at times keep juice in a cool place such as in a cave, underground or in running water. For more on this subject read, [Bible Wines](#), by William Patton or [Wine In The Bible: A Biblical Study On The Use Of Alcoholic Beverages](#), by Samuele Bacchiocchi).

So to assume that every time the Bible uses the word "wine"-it is speaking about a fermented drink is not looking at the facts! Isaiah 65:8 says, "Thus says the LORD: As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, 'Do not destroy it for a blessing is in it...' Here the grape juice in the cluster is called 'wine' (tirosh). In Isaiah 16:10b says, "...no treaders will tread out wine in their presses." As soon as the juice was pressed out of the grapes it was called wine. But in Genesis 9:21 it is clear that fermented wine is what Noah drank to get drunk on. (It is well to note, however, how it got him and his son Ham into trouble drinking it!) This should be enough to prove that the word 'wine' is a generic term in our Bibles! (See Bible Wines by William Patton)

Now the argument, Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake. Yes, Paul told Timothy, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your often infirmities." (1Timothy 5:23) This text clearly implies that Timothy did not drink any wine before this time. The recommendation by Paul was strictly medicinal, so to quote the advice of

Paul to Timothy to justify drinking is to distort the intent of the passage! Again because the word "wine" is used many people jump to the conclusion it is fermented, when in fact Paul and the rest of Scripture have already warned against the use of fermented wine.

Then you ask, "Was unfermented wine ever used as a medicine?" Yes, Athenaeus states, "Let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, especially that kind called protropos (juice coming from the grapes before they are pressed), as being good for the stomach."(Athenaeus, Banquet 2:24).

The question, "Didn't Jesus drink fermented wine?" comes from what the false religious leaders said about Jesus in Matthew 11:18, 19. "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' "The Son of Man came eating and drinking (Jesus was not fasting like John, and did drink unfermented wine), and they say, "Look, a gluttonous man and a winebibber (wine drinker), a friend of tax collectors and sinners! NKJV

John was a Nazarite and was not to drink grape juice or fermented wine Luke 1:15. Jesus on the other hand had a different type of ministry. Jesus did talk with drinkers who were considered sinners and this made the religious leaders angry. These were the same men who said Jesus was a glutton and had a demon. These leaders were jealous and upset because Jesus was becoming so popular. They were lying about Jesus being a glutton, about Jesus having a demon, and they were also lying when they said Jesus was a winebibber (or alcoholic drinker)!

The Bible says Jesus always did the will of the Father who is in heaven. So He would not disobey God the Father who said by the Holy Spirit, "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper." Proverbs 23:31 and 32 (NKJV)

Now, "Did Jesus make alcohol for the wedding in Cana?" The term used in, John 2:1-11, is "oinos" the generic Greek word for both fermented and unfermented juice. We must determine from the context whether it is a fermented or unfermented drink here.

The person in charge of the wedding party remarked, after he had tasted the wine, "...you have kept the good wine until now." Good wine was fresh grape juice, the fermented grape juice was considered inferior. Also Jesus would know about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (being God as well as man), and would not give alcohol to a wedding party, which probably included several pregnant women. No, Jesus did NOT make a fermented wine at this wedding. What He did do was to give a wedding gift of at least 120 gallons of fresh grape juice.

The Hebrew word (chemah) is translated as "poison" when speaking of fermented wine in Deuteronomy 32:33. Alcohol is a toxic mind-altering drug. Alcohol causes ill effects on the digestive, muscular, skeletal, nervous and circulatory systems. It causes cirrhosis of the liver, jaundice, pancreatitis, and blackouts as well as many other sicknesses.

About sixty percent of all traffic accidents and seventy percent of all murders are alcohol related. Then there is the untold domestic violence it has caused. Proverbs 20:1, warns, "Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink (beer) arouses fighting, whoever is led astray by it is not wise!"

God's Word is consistent; it does not tell us not to drink fermented wine in one part of the Bible and in another part only to drink a little alcohol. Here are three types of New Testament references that people think are saying it is all right to drink a little fermented wine, beer, etc. First, Ephesians 5:18, in some versions the word "excess" is used. The New King James Version more accurately uses the word "dissipation" (meaning intemperance or the opposite of temperance-which is total abstinence from alcoholic liquors).

Second, in other references such as 1 Timothy 3:2,3 and Titus 1:7, we have the phrase, "not given to wine" this is taken by some to mean, "not to be addicted" to alcohol. But in reality the Greek word used here is, "mee-paroinon," literally, not at, by near, or with wine (alcohol). According to Paul, total abstinence is an indispensable qualification for a pastor. (See [Bible Wines](#) William Patton)

The third type of reference that has caused confusion to some, are the ones like 1 Timothy 3:8 and Titus 2:3."not given to much wine." In order to understand these verses we will need to understand a popular vice of that time. That was to drink a lot of unfermented wine. They used various methods to promote thirst. These drinkers might continue drinking all night at their feasts. Excessive drinking, even of non-alcoholic drinks corresponded to gluttony-the excessive use of food. Paul is simply guarding the deacons against a vice of the day. It would be similar in our day to "bulimia" (eating or drinking to the point of being gorged and then vomiting). This is unbecoming behavior for a Christian in any age!

The New International Version in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 say here, "not given to drunkenness." This translation does not make sense in light of Proverbs 23:31 and 32 and the rest of the injunctions against any drinking of alcohol. Paul even goes so far as to warn that a person would not be saved if they are drunkards. "...nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:10) So be very careful which versions of the Bible you study!

In Revelation 1:6, we are called kings and priests, according to Scripture kings or princes were not to drink fermented wine or intoxicating drink. In Proverbs 31:4, 5 we are also told that priests were not to drink any wine or intoxicating drink when they went into the tabernacle (or temple), Leviticus 10:9 and 10. Then 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

For more study on this subject read also: 1 Samuel 1:13-16, Proverbs 4:14-17, 23:29-35, Isaiah 5:22, 28:7, 8 Jeremiah 35:1-6, 18, 19; Daniel 1:8-16, Amos 2:12 Habakkuk 2:5, 15-16; Mathew 24:46-51; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; 1 Peter 1:13.

For more information: bible-christian.org