

A STUDY OF "WINE" & ALCOHOL IN THE BIBLE¹

INTRODUCTION: Today there is a strong effort to justify the use of alcoholic beverages by Christians. Those who advocate such a position make statements such as, "Jesus made wine, so it's ok to drink alcoholic beverages", "The Lord made booze, so there's nothing wrong with enjoying it in moderation," "Jesus drank alcohol and in fact he spent a lot of time in bars," & "Paul told Timothy to drink wine, so I'm sure it's ok for Christians to drink beer, wine or spirits if they wish!" Believers opposed to the drinking of alcoholic beverages have often struggled to answer such statements. My desire in this paper is to present facts from both the Bible & ancient history—some little known—that I trust will provide believers opposed to the use of alcoholic beverages with solid & biblical explanations & answers.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE TERM "WINE" IN SCRIPTURE.

WINE IS SOMETIMES CLEARLY PRaised IN THE BIBLE & CONSIDERED A BLESSING FROM GOD:

- **Num. 18:11-12** - "This also is yours...All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the fresh wine (Heb. tirosh) and of the grain, the first fruits of those which they give to the LORD, I give them to you."
- **Judges 9:13** - "But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine (Heb. tirosh), which cheers God and men...?'"
- **Ps. 104:14-15** - "He (God) causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine (Heb. yayin) which makes man's heart glad..."
- **Joel 3:18** - "And it will come about in that day that the mountains will drip with sweet wine (Heb. aciyc)..."
- **Isa. 55:1** - "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine (Heb. yayin) and milk without money and without cost."
- **Other similar verses:** Gen. 27:28 (*tirosh*); Dt. 7:13-14 (*tirosh*); Neh. 10:37; 13:5,13 (*tirosh*); Ps. 4:7 (*tirosh*); Prov. 3:9-10 (*tirosh*); 9:2 (*yaynah*); Song of Sol. 5:1 (*yayin*); Isa. 65:8 (*tirosh*); Zech. 4:7 (*tirosh*);

WINE IS SOMETIMES CLEARLY CONDEMNED IN THE BIBLE & CALLED A CURSE TO MAN:

- **Dt. 32:33** - "Their wine (Heb. yayin) is the venom of serpents, and the deadly poison of cobras."
- **Ps. 75:7-8** - "But God is the Judge...a cup is in the hand of the LORD, and the wine (Heb. yayin) foams...Surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs."
- **Prov. 20:1** - "Wine (Heb. yayin) is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise."
- **Prov. 23:29-31** - "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions?...Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long over wine (Heb. yayin), Those who go to taste mixed wine. Do not look on the wine (yayin) when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things."
- **Isa. 28:7** - "And these also reel with wine (Heb. yayin) and stagger from strong drink...they are confused by wine (yayin) they stagger from strong drink..."
- **Other similar verses:** Ps. 60:3 (*yayin*); Prov. 4:17 (*yayin*); Isa. 5:22 (*yayin*); 51:17; 56:12 (*yayin*); Jer. 25:15 (*yayin*); Hos. 7:5 (Heb. *khamath*); Hab. 2:5 (*yayin*); 2:15. "Notice the character given to this wine: gall, poison, poison of serpents, adders' poison, poison of dragons, poison which drinketh up the spirits, maddening wine."²

¹ Compiled by Rev. Mike Edwards. Originally written 1992-1993, Pt. Moresby, Papua New Guinea (revised & enlarged May, 2005, Greenville, SC and March 2008 & February, 2013, St. Vincent, West Indies). Explanatory note: words appearing in parentheses () appear as such in the original sources, while words in brackets [], in almost all cases have been added by this author as well as all bolding & underlining -mwe

² William Patton, *Bible Wines or the Laws of Fermentation* (The Challenge Press: Little Rock, Arkansas, n.d.), reprint.

IS THERE AN EXPLANATION FOR THIS SEEMING DILEMMA OR CONTRADICTION? I BELIEVE THERE IS.

One individual explained it thusly:

*"In all the passages where good wine is named, there is no lisp of warning, no intimations of danger, no hint of disapprobation (disapproval), but always of decided approval. How bold and strongly marked the contrast: 'The one the cause of intoxication, of violence & of woes. The other the occasion of comfort and of peace. The one the cause of irreligion and of self destruction. The other the devout offering of piety on the altar of God. The one the symbol of divine wrath. The other the symbol of spiritual blessings. The one the emblem of eternal damnation. The other the emblem of eternal salvation.' The distinction in quality between the good and the bad wine is as clear a that between good and bad men, or good and bad wives, or good and bad spirits; for one is the constant subject of warning, designated poison literally, analogically, and figuratively, while the other is commended as refreshing and innocent, which no alcoholic wine is."*³

KEY FACT: THE TERM "WINE" IN THE BIBLE IS A GENERAL TERM THAT REFERS TO SEVERAL DIFFERENT THINGS!

The term "wine" in the Bible does *not* refer to alcoholic wine alone! A study of *Scripture* will demonstrate that the Hebrew & Greek words for wine (i.e. *Yayin, Tirosh, Acicyc, Oinos*, etc.) refer to several different things, including:

- a) **Fresh grape juice,**
- b) **Preserved non-fermented grape juice,**
- c) **Grapes still growing on the vine &**
- d) **Alcoholic wine.**

The term "wine" is similar to the term "*CIDER*" which can also refer to a variety of things:

- a) **The fresh-pressed juice of apples, (e.g. the cider from Rock Creek, Ohio)**
- b) **Preserved, filtered apple juice, (e.g. the kind you buy at the grocery store)**
- c) **An alcoholic drink often called *hard* cider (e.g. "*Boone's Farm Apple Wine*")**

Consequently, it would be unwise—to the point of absurdity—for one to presume that every time one reads the word *cider* that it refers to an alcoholic drink. The exact opposite would often be true. So it is too, in regard to the term *wine*. In regard to such general terms John Stuart Mill wisely observed in his *System of Logic*, "*A generic term is always liable to become limited to a single species if people have occasion to think and speak of that species oftener than of anything else contained in the genus. The tide of custom first drifts the word on the shore of a particular meaning, then retires and leaves it there.*"⁴

David Wilkerson, most well-known from the book and movie titled "*The Cross & the Switchblade*" which tells the story of his work in the worst neighborhoods among the toughest gangs in New York City agrees: "As far as I am concerned, *Scripture and historical facts* prove there were two kinds of wine. One was intoxicating, the other was not. The making of intoxicating wine was never the chief object for which grapes were cultivated by the Jewish society of Christ's time. **Sixteen uses of the grape are listed in that time period, wine making being the least important.** The unfermented juice of the grape was **boiled** to preserve sweetness. Jerusalem had a hot climate, and **harvested grapes turned sour in heat.** Alcohol is not a natural product. In fact, alcohol is nowhere to be found in any product of nature. Nature never forms liquor. Grapes rot on the branch and turn sour unless artificially processed by man. **God does not create alcohol, and the art of distillation was not even known until the ninth century. God, by His direct act, does not make alcohol.** The laws of nature, if left to themselves, do not produce it. By these laws, the grapes ripen; if not eaten, they rot and are decomposed. The manufacture of alcohol is wholly man's device."⁵

Patton similarly observes: "*I soon found that the concession so generally made, even by ministers, that the Bible sanctions the use of intoxicating drinks, was the most impregnable citadel into which all drinkers, all apologists for drinking, and all vendors (sellers) of (alcohol) fled. This compelled me... to study the Bible patiently and carefully, to know for myself its exact teachings. I collated every passage, and found that they would range under three heads: 1) Where wine was mentioned with nothing to denote its character; 2) Where it was spoken of as the cause of misery, and as the emblem of punishment and of eternal wrath; 3) Where it was mentioned as a blessing, with corn and bread and oil - as the emblem of spiritual mercies and of eternal happiness. These results deeply impressed me, and forced upon me the question, 'Must there not have been two kinds*

³ Ibid, p. 63

⁴ Ibid, p. 53

⁵ David Wilkerson, "*Sipping Saints*" (Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1978), pp. 30-31.

of wine?'

He then adds: "So novel to my mind was this thought, and finding no confirmation of it in the commentaries to which I had access...I held it therefore in abeyance [i.e. in suspended judgment]...More than thirty-five years since, when revising the study of Hebrew with Professor Seixas, an eminent Hebrew teacher, I submitted to him the collation of texts which I had made, with the request that he would give me his deliberate opinion. He took the manuscript, and a few days after, returned it with the statement, 'Your discriminations are just; they denote that there were two kinds of wine, and the Hebrew Scriptures justify this view.'"⁶

IS ETYMOLOGY (the origin, development, meaning & history of a word) THE ULTIMATE FACTOR IN

ATTEMPTING TO DETERMINE THE MEANING OF A WORD IN SCRIPTURE? Answer: *Not necessarily.*

Etymology is certainly important in determining the meaning of a biblical word such as "wine." **However, what a word means, stands for or represents is also discovered &/or made clear by studying it in the various contexts in which it appears, the totality of which is referred to as a word's "semantical set"**⁷ One begins by examining the word in question in its context in every place where it occurs. This plays a crucial role in discovering the correct meaning of a word and what it represents. That being the case, **the context wherever the word *wine* appears in the Bible must always be carefully examined when seeking to determine whether alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine is in view!**

An example of erring due to building an argument solely on a word's etymology can be illustrated in regard to *tirosh*, which is one of the main Hebrew words translated wine. In more than one reference work, *tirosh* has been dogmatically claimed to stand for and represent alcoholic wine exclusively. In fact just a short time ago a teaching colleague of mine gave me a five page list of quotes from several Bible dictionaries, etc., maintaining that very position. One of the quotes said the following: "*Tirosh, properly 'must,' translated 'wine' (Deut 28:51)... This Hebrew word has been traced to a root meaning 'to take possession of' and hence it is supposed that tirosh is so designated because in intoxicating it takes possession of the brain.*" [sic]⁸

However, upon consulting one of the most highly-respected etymological reference works available today (i.e. "*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*") the author of the article on the Hebrew word *tirosh* adamantly maintains that the word *tirosh*, with perhaps only one exception, **virtually never refers to alcoholic wine!**

"The KJV usually has 'wine,' ... NASB has 'new' or 'fresh' wine (once 'grapes')... NIV has 'new wine' (once 'juice,' once 'grapes') except for 'wine' in Jud 9:13. BDB defines *tirosh* as 'must, fresh, or new wine.' The word is used thirty-eight times, twenty of these in conjunction with grain and/or oil as the fresh produce of the field. It is said to be 'in the cluster' (Isa. 65:8); the vats or presses overflow with it (Prov. 3:10; Joel 2:24). In Mic 6:15 *yayin* 'wine' (q.v.) is said to be produced from *tirosh*. **The word is never associated with drunkenness except perhaps in Hos 4:11 where *yayin* is also mentioned.** It is natural to suppose that this word for a product often associated with fruitfulness, productivity and blessing is to be distinguished from the *yayin* and *shekar* (q.v.) which definitely are intoxicating and are often mentioned together... Albright says that because it was the name of a deity *Tirshu* the etymological argument for it being unfermented wine does not hold. But as shown above, the view depends on Hebrew usage rather than etymology. The Hittite *tuwarsa* means 'vine' according to Gordon. He translates the word *trt* as 'wine' in his Glossary (UT 19: no. 2613) but as 'must' in his Ugaritic Literature..."⁹

Other sources confirm that there is anything but total agreement regarding the meaning of at least some of the Old Testament Hebrew words translated "wine." Consequently, for anyone to dogmatically state that the Hebrew words translated "wine" always stand for alcoholic wine, are extremely suspect, if not outright wrong.

Let me emphasize once again that I am not denying the fact that the term "wine" in Scripture sometimes refers to alcoholic wine. In fact, the majority of the time it may possibly refer to an alcoholic liquid. As one has well observed, "...the easiest way to deal with this issue would be to deny the alcoholic content of wine in the Bible. Perhaps it was only fresh grape juice [in every instance]. Unfortunately, the Bible will not support that conclusion. The usual words for wine in the Bible occur in some contexts that demand an alcoholic content. For instance, without the presence of alcohol to fight bacteria, there would be no benefit in pouring wine on open wounds (Luke 10:34) or in treating stomach disorders (I Tim. 5:23) [see later in this paper-

⁶ Patton, *Ibid*, p.11

⁷ I am indebted to Dr. Terry Rude and his graduate course in Old Testament Theology for teaching me this important principle.

⁸ M.G. Easton, "*Easton's Bible Dictionary*" (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1996), cited by a teaching colleague (A.H.), in untitled study notes given to me in St. Vincent, West Indies, January, 2013

⁹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., & Bruce K. Waltke, "*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*" article on *tirosh* (wine) by Harris (Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1980), vol. II, p. 969

mwe]. Furthermore, there would be no possibility of intoxication (Gen. 9:21; Prov. 23:29-353; Eph. 5:18).”¹⁰

On the other hand, it is equally indefensible to maintain that every time one reads the word “wine” in Scripture, that it refers exclusively to alcoholic wine. **That is patently false.** Later in this paper I will present a list of Bible verses wherein fresh grape juice, grapes still growing on the vine, etc., are called “wine!” **Secular historical sources & documentation also establish the fact that the word “wine” was used in ancient times to refer to preserved non-alcoholic grape juice!** For instance the Jewish historian Josephus refers to preserved grapes under the term wine, along with calling fresh-squeezed juice “wine” while relating the story of Joseph in his “*Antiquities of the Jews.*” (see below)

AN IMPORTANT BUT LITTLE KNOWN FACT: THE PEOPLE OF BIBLE TIMES HAD SEVERAL METHODS OF PRESERVING FRESH GRAPE JUICE SO THAT IT WOULD NOT FERMENT: [Note:

This fact has been challenged and even denied by various individuals, including biblical scholars. However even a colleague who does not agree with me in regard to the subject of wine in Scripture, in an unpublished paper he wrote on the subject of wine, stated: “*Stein indicates that in the ancient world water could be made safe in one of several ways. It could be boiled, but this was tedious and costly. (?) Or it could be filtered, but this was not a safe method. Or some wine could be put in the water to kill the germs...*”¹¹ Are we to believe then that the ancients knew all about boiling and filtering water, yet knew nothing about boiling or filtering wine? Such a view taxes one’s credulity and is inconsistent, to say the least!. **Obviously if the people of Bible times knew how to boil & filter water, they knew how to boil & filter grape juice!** [and other liquids as well-*mwe*]

1. Boiling - "Herman Boerhave, born 1668...says, 'By boiling, the juice of the richest grapes loses all its aptitude for fermentation, and may afterwards be preserved for years without undergoing any further change.' ...Says Liebig, 'The property of organic substances to pass into a state of decay is annihilated in all cases by heating to the boiling point.' **The grape-juice boils at 212'; but alcohol evaporates at 170', which is 42' below the boiling point.** So then, if any possible portion of alcohol was in the juice, this process would expel it. The obvious object of boiling the juice was to preserve it sweet and fit for use during the year. “Archbishop Potter, born A.D. 1674, in his *Grecian Antiquities* ...says, vol. ii. p.360, 'The Lacedaemonians used to boil their wines upon the fire till the fifth part was consumed; then after four years were expired began to drink them.' He refers to Democritus, a celebrated philosopher ...who died 361 B.C., also to Palladius, a Greek physician, as making a similar statement. **These ancient authorities called the boiled juice of the grape wine...**"¹²

Masters adds: “**It is...important to recognize that the ‘wine’ words of both Old and new Testaments may also extend to a non-alcoholic beverage derived from fermented wine.** Across the ancient world a cordial was often made by the process of boiling wine (the alcohol quickly evaporating away) and then diluting the resulting sticky syrup with water. As long as it was drunk immediately, this would be free from alcohol. Such a drink is referred to in Egyptian, Roman and Jewish literature. The Jews referred to it as *ayin mebusshal.*”¹³

“Leiber, who visited Crete in 1817, said, ‘When the Venetians were masters of the island, great quantities of wine were produced at Rettimo and Candia, and it was made by boiling in large coppers, as I myself observed’ (Nott) ...Mr. Robert Alsop, a minister among the Society of Friends, in a letter to Dr. F.R. Lees in 1861, said, ‘The syrup of grape juice is an article of domestic manufacture in most every house in the vine districts of the south of France. It is simply the juice of the grape boiled down to the consistency of treacle.’ (Bible Commentary, p. 34).”¹⁴

2. Filtering - "By filtration, the gluten or yeast is separated from the juice of the grape. Whilst the juice will pass through the filtering implements, the gluten will not, and, being thus separated, the necessary conditions of fermentation are destroyed ...Plutarch, born A.D. 60, in his Symposium, says: 'Wine is rendered old or feeble in strength when it is frequently filtered. The strength or spirit being thus excluded, the wine neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink.'...Pliny, liber xxiii. cap. 24, says: 'Utilissimum (vinum) omnibus sacco viribus fractis. The most useful wine has all its force or strength broken by the filter.'"¹⁵

3. Subsidence (normally accompanied by cold temperatures). "Chemical science teaches that the gluten may be so effectually

10 Reimers, “Does the Bible Condone Alcoholic Beverages?” (reprint of an article that originally appeared in Frontline magazine [see reference in a subsequent footnote]), p. 1.

11 “A Study of Wine in the Bible”, private paper, p. 5 [author’s name withheld]

¹² Patton, pp. 23-24

13 Peter Masters, “Should Christians Drink?” (The Wakeman Trust: London, England, 1992, 2001), p. 25.

14 Wilkerson, op cit., p. 30.

¹⁵Patton, pp. 29-30 cf. Wilkerson, op cit., pp. 24-25.

separated from the juice by subsidence (settling) as to prevent fermentation. The gluten, being heavier than the juice, will settle to the bottom by its own weight if the mass can be kept from fermentation for a limited period. Chemistry tells us that, if the juice is kept at a temperature below 45 degrees (6 celsius) it will not ferment. The juice being kept cool, the gluten will settle to the bottom, and the juice, thus deprived of the gluten, cannot ferment. Dr. Ure says: 'By lowering the temperature to 45' (6 c) the fermenting mass becomes clear at this temperature and being drawn off from the subsided yeast, it will not ferment again, though it should be heated to the proper pitch'. ...Pliny, liber xiv. c. 9, when speaking of a wine called Aigleuces, that is, always sweet, says...*'They plunge the casks, immediately after they are filled from the vat, into water, until winter has passed away and wine has acquired the habit of being cold.'*-Kitto, ii. 955...Columella...mentions a recipe: *'That your must may always be as sweet as when it is new, thus proceed: Before you apply the press to the fruit, take the newest must from the lake, put into a new amphora, bung it up, and cover it very carefully with pitch, lest any water should enter; then immerse it in a cistern or pond of pure cold water, and allow no part of the amphora to remain above the surface. After forty days, take it out, and it will remain sweet for a year.'*¹⁶

4. Fumigation &/or Exclusion of Air - "...fermentation may be stopped by the application or admixture of substances containing sulphur; that the operation consists partly in absorbing oxygen, whereby the elimination of the yeasty particles is prevented. Adams in his Roman Antiquities, on the authority of Pliny and others, says 'that the Romans fumigated their wines with the fumes of sulphur; that they also mixed with the mustum, newly pressed juice, yolks of eggs, and other articles containing sulphur...Miller's Gardener's Dictionary, article Wine, says: 'The way to preserve new wine, in the state of must, is to put it up in very strong but small casks, firmly closed on all sides, by which means it will be kept from fermenting. But if it should happen to fall into fermentation, the only way to stop it is by the fumes of sulphur...Here we notice two important facts. The first is, that the exclusion of the air from the fresh juice will prevent fermentation. The second is, that, when fermentation has commenced, the fumes of sulphur will arrest it...'"¹⁷

Probably one of the most ironic attempts to "play down" the fact that the people of Bible times had methods of preserving non-alcoholic wines and often did so, are the following comments by a Dr. Laurie, "who holds that 'it is the nature of wine to be fermented,' and 'that fermentation is essential to its becoming wine,' (yet) still admits that there are 'traces of unfermented wine in classical authors,' and that it 'is known in history'; which he thus strangely qualifies -known in history 'only as one of the unnatural and rare luxuries of the most corrupt period of the Roman Empire.' [Patton comments] **Queer logic this, that unintoxicating wine should indicate the most corrupt period of the Roman Empire!**"¹⁸

THE PEOPLE OF BIBLE TIMES CALLED GRAPE JUICE (& other juices too!) "WINE."

The famous Jewish historian Josephus lends further credence to the assertion that "wine" in Scripture could—and did—refer to non-alcoholic grape juice. In his famous "Antiquities of the Jews" he recounts the story of Joseph interpreting the dreams of the butler and baker while in prison in Egypt. In doing so Josephus clearly refers to fresh-pressed grape juice as "wine":

"The king's cupbearer...upon his observing that Joseph had a better understanding than the rest [in prison] had, he told him of a dream he had, and desired he would interpret its meaning...He therefore said, that in his sleep he saw three clusters of grapes hanging upon three branches of a vine, large already, and ripe for gathering, and that he squeezed them into a cup which the king held in his hand; and when had strained the wine, he gave it to the king to drink...This, he said, was what he saw; and he desired Joseph, that if he had any portion of understanding in such matters, he would tell him what this vision foretold...he let him know that God bestows the fruit of the vine upon men for good; which wine is poured out to him, and is the pledge of fidelity and mutual confidence among men; and puts an end to their quarrels, takes away passion and grief out of the minds of them that use it, and makes them cheerful. 'Thou sayest that thou didst squeeze this wine from three clusters of grapes with thine hands, and that the king received it: know, therefore, that this vision is for thy good, and foretells a released from thy present distress..."

Jewish/Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim makes clear that there were drinks, both alcoholic & non-alcoholic were meant and referred to under the term wine:

"To begin with: the wine was mixed with water, and indeed, some thought that the benediction should not be

¹⁶ Patton, pp. 31-32

¹⁷ Patton, p. 34

¹⁸ Patton, p. 40

pronounced till the water had been added to the wine (Ber. 7.5). According to one statement, two parts (Nidd. 2.7), according to another, three parts of water were to be added to the wine (Pes. 108b). Various vintages are mentioned: among them a red wine of Saron, and a black wine. Spiced wine was made with honey and pepper. Another mixture, chiefly used for invalids, consisted of old wine, water, and balsam; yet another was 'wine of myrrh;' we also read of wine in which capers had been soaked. To these we should add wine spiced, either with pepper, or that had not repined, or the lees. Besides these, palm-wine was also in use. Of foreign drinks, we read of wine from Ammon, and from the province Asia, the latter a kind of 'must' boiled down. Wine in ice came from Lebanon; a certain kind of vinegar from Idumaea; beer from Media and Babylon; a barley-wine (sythos) from Egypt. Finally, we ought to mention Palestinian apple-cider [!] (Terum 11.2), and the juice of other fruits. If we adopt the rendering of some, even liqueurs were known and used."

In using the term "liqueurs" Edersheim was not referring to what today we call "liquor" i.e. "a distilled or spirituous beverage, as brandy or whiskey, as distinguished from a fermented beverage." Such alcoholic drinks were unknown in Bible times, and in fact not even possible to be produced, since distillation (which is what enables individuals to produce vastly stronger alcoholic drinks), was not invented until nearly a thousand years later! Instead, Edersheim's use of the similarly spelled word liqueur means "a solution of a substance, esp. a concentrated one..." i.e. juice that is boiled down into a thick syrup or jam-like consistency!

1.

Genesis 43:11 in fact contains a reference to this very practice: "And their father Israel said unto them...take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down [to] the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, myrrh, nuts and almonds..." Charles Ryrie explains in an accompanying note: "The present consisted of things not produced in Egypt (see 37:25). The honey was not bees' honey but a thick syrup boiled down from fresh grape juice." This is what Edersheim is referring to in the above quote-mwe]

"**Pliny** (A.D. 23-79 ["the Elder"] or A.D. 62?-c.113 ["the Younger"]) says '*some Roman wines were as thick as honey, also that the 'Albanian wine was very sweet or luscious, and that it took the third rank among all the wines.'* He also tells of a Spanish wine in his day, called '*Inerticulum*'-that is, would not intoxicate- from '*iners*,' inert, without force or spirit, more properly termed '*justicus sobriani*,' sober wine, which would not inebriate (make drunk).

"According to **Plautus**, (c. 254-c. 184 B.C.), *even mustum signified both wine and sweet wine.*

"**Nicander** says: '*And Aeneas, having squeezed the juice into hollow cups, called it wine (oinon)... The Greeks as well as the Hebrews called the fresh juice wine.'*

"**Columella** says the Greeks called this unintoxicating wine '*Amethyston*,' from Alpha, negative, and methusis, intoxicate- that is, a wine which would not intoxicate. He adds that it was a good wine, harmless...but at the same time was not deficient in flavor.

"**Aristotle** (384-322 B.C.) says of sweet wine, *glukus*, that it would not intoxicate. And that the wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was contained, and dissolve the scrapings in water.

"**Homer** (8th century, B.C.) (Odyssey, book ix.) tells us that Ulysses took in his boat 'a goat-skin of sweet black wine, a divine drink, which Marion, the priest of Apollo, had given him- it was sweet as honey- it was imperishable, or would keep for ever; that when it was drunk, it was diluted with twenty parts water, and that from it a sweet divine odor exhaled.'

"**Horace** (65-8 B.C.) liber i. ode xviii. line 21, thus wrote: '*Hic innocentis pocula Lesbii Duces sub umbra.*' Professor Christopher Smart, of Pembroke College, Cambridge, England, more than a hundred years since, when there was no controversy about fermented or unfermented wines, thus translated this passage: '*Here shall you quaff, under a shade, cups of unintoxicating wine.*' [In another place]... Horace, liber. iii. ode viii. line 9 (He speaks of a "...wine- it was fumigated- the amphora was corked and fastened with pitch, and that an hundred glasses might be drunk without clamor or passion. The Delphin Notes to Horace state, '*The ancients filtered their wines repeatedly, before they could have fermented.*'

"**Atheneaus** says: '*The sweet wine (glukus), which among the Sicilians is called Pollian, may be the same as the Biblinos oinos.*' '*Sweet kinds of wines (oinos) do not make the head heavy,*' as Hippocrates says."¹⁹

¹⁹ Patton, pp. 35-37

Josephus' (A.D. 37?-c. 100) description of Herod's fortress at Masada seems to refer to preserved grapes under the term wine: "...for here was laid up corn in large quantities, and such as would subsist men for a long time; here was also wine and oil in abundance, with all kinds of pulse and dates heaped up together; all which Eleazar found there, when he and his Sicarii got possession of the fortress by treachery. These fruits were also fresh and full ripe, and no way inferior to such fruits newly laid in, although they were little short of a hundred years* from the laying in these provisions [by Herod], till the place was taken by the Romans; nay, indeed when the Romans got possession of those fruits that were left, they found them not corrupted all that while; nor should we be mistaken, if we supposed that the air was here the cause of their enduring so long; this fortress being so high, and so free from the mixture of all terrene (sic) and muddy particles of matter."²⁰

a. SUMMARY:

- i. "...unfermented beverages existed, and were a common drink among the ancients.**
- ii. "...to preserve their very sweet juices, in their hot climate, they resorted to boiling and other methods which destroyed the power and activity of the gluten, or effectually separated it from the juice of the grape.**
- iii. "...these were called wines, were used, and were highly esteemed."**
- iv. "That they (the people of Bible times) had drinks that would intoxicate cannot be denied. All that we have aimed to show is that intoxicating wines were not the only wines in use... Common honesty demands that we interpret the Scriptures with the eye, the taste, and the usages of the ancients, and not with the eye, the taste, and the usages of the moderns."²¹**

EXAMPLES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT WHERE THE THREE MAIN HEBREW WORDS TRANSLATED "WINE" DEFINITELY DO NOT REFER TO AN ALCOHOLIC DRINK

There are 11 Hebrew words altogether which are translated "wine," as well two in Greek. Eight of the eleven Hebrew words, with hardly an exception refer unquestionably to non-alcoholic juice, syrup, etc. Further, the lexical comments from Strong's concordance are quoted here in full, though I do not agree with several of them. The verses that follow each word will clearly demonstrate why I seriously question some of Strong's definitions & assertions-*mwe*):

- b. YAYIN ("wine") - [Strong's #: 3196 "yayin. yah'-yin; from an unused root meaning to effervesce; wine (as fermented); by impl. intoxication:- banqueting, wine, wine (bibber)."]**
 - i. Num. 6:4 - Here the vine is called wine (Heb. yayin). "...All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine (Heb. yayin), from the seeds even to the skin."**
 - ii. Jer. 40:12 - Here the fresh grape juice or grapes still on the vine, are called wine (Heb. yayin). "...the Jews... came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and gathered in wine and summer fruit in great abundance."**
 - iii. Gen. 43:11 - As noted earlier in this paper, the people of Bible times had a variety of ways of preserving grape juice in an unfermented condition. One common method noted was for them to boil down the juice into a thick "honey-like" consistency which then would keep for long periods of time without fermenting or going sour. The verse reads, "...take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds." Note Ryrie's comment: "The present consisted of things not produced in Egypt (see 37:25). The honey was not bee's honey but a thick syrup boiled down from fresh grape juice."²²**

²⁰ *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, Translated by William Whiston, A.M. (The John C. Winston Company: Philadelphia, PA, n.d.), "Wars of the Jews" Book VII, Chapter viii, # 4, p. 849. -NOTE: The asterisk in the text is as follows: "*Pliny and others confirm this strange paradox, that provisions laid up against sieges will continue good for a hundred years, as Spanheim notes upon this place."

²¹ Patton, *Ibid*, p. 44

²² Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible-NASV* (Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1976), p.77

- iv. **Isa. 16:10** - "...No treader treads out wine (Heb. *yayin*) in the presses, for I have made the shouting to cease." "*Yayin is assumed by many people to be always an alcoholic drink. This is a mistake which has led to much confusion and to much intoxication which might easily have been avoided. Isaiah 16:10... obviously means that no treader shall tread out grape juice in the presses, because fermentation is a time consuming process. Therefore alcohol is excluded from the word yayin in this passage.*"²³
- v. "In **Rabbinical Literature** also yayin did not necessarily contain this drug. **Sanhedrin 70a of the Talmud** says: '*Newly pressed wine, prior to fermentation, was known as yayin mi-gat' (wine from the press).*'"²⁴
- c. **TIROSH** (*wine*) - [Strong's #: 8492 "tiyrowah, tee-roshe"; or tiyrosch, tee roshe'; from 34232 in the sense of exulsion; must or fresh grape juice (as just squeezed out; by impl. (rarely) fermented wine:-(new, sweet) wine."]
- i. **Isa. 65:8** - Here grapes still growing on the vine are called wine (Heb. *tirosh*). "Thus says the LORD, '*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...*'"
- ii. **Neh. 13:5, 12, 15** - In all three instances here, wine (Heb. *tirosh*) is classed with grain, oil, grapes, figs, etc., all the other items being fresh, or at the very least, unfermented produce, brought to God's house.
- iii. **Hag. 1:11** - Again, it would appear that growing grapes are called "wine" (Heb. *tirosh*), along with other produce of the earth. "*And I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.*"
- iv. **Prov. 3:10** - Here is mentioned "new wine," which clearly could not be alcoholic, since it was fresh. "*So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.*" (Note Strong's etymological comments under II above, "*Tirosh.*")
- v. **Joel 1:10** - This verse states that because of "natural" disasters, the grain, new wine & oil are ruined, dry up and fail. Once again, it seems to clearly imply that these things were still growing on the vines, trees and ground. "*The field is ruined, the land mourns, for the grain is ruined, the new wine dries up, fresh oil fails...Be ashamed, O farmers, wail, o vinedressers ...Because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine dries up, and the fig tree fails; the pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree; All the trees of the field dry up.*"
- d. **ACICYC** (*wine*) - [Strong's #: 6071 "aciyc, aw-sees"; from 6072; must or fresh grape-juice (as just trodden out);-juice, new (seet) wine."] This word is also translated "wine" in the Old Testament, and again, we can find an example that demonstrates that it clearly does not always mean an alcoholic drink:
- i. **Song of Sol. 8:2** - "...*I would give you spiced wine (Heb. yayin) to drink from the juice (wine-Heb. acicyc) of my pomegranates.*" Here two different words often translated wine are used in one verse. Literally it reads: "...*I would give you spiced wine to drink from the wine of my pomegranates.*" **Translators have rightly translated the second "wine" (Heb. acicyc) as juice, since that is what it was.**
- ii. **Joel 3:18** - A description of the millenium: "*And it will come about in that day that the mountains will drip with sweet wine (Heb. acicyc), and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water...*" Obviously some of this is poetic & symbolic (e.g. "*hills will flow with milk*"), and as such may easily refer to fresh grape juice or even still growing grapes on the tablelands.

²³ Stephen M. Reynolds, Ph.D, "*Alcohol and the Bible*" (The Challenge Press: Little Rock, AR, 1983), p. 20

²⁴ Ibid.

Regardless of the precise meaning, a normal reading of this passage seems to clearly imply that these items are fresh and unfermented.

- iii. **Amos 9:13** - "Behold, *days are coming*,' declares the LORD, 'When the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; When the mountains will drip sweet wine...'"
- e. **SHAKAR & SHEKAR** (*strong drink*) - [Strong's #: 7937 & 7941 "Shakar, shaw-kar'; a prim root; to become tipsy; in a qualified sense, to satiate with a stimulating drink or (fig.) influence:- (be filled with) drink (abundantly), (be, make) drunk (-en), be merry. "Shekar, shay-kawr'; from 7937; an intoxicant. i.e. intensely alcoholic liquor:-strong drink, + drunkard, strong wine. NOTE: This lexical interpretation will also be challenged below!]

"*Mixed wine*' (Prov. 23:30) was wine flavored with herbs, and '*strong drink*' (Deut. 14:26; Luke 1:15) was the fermented juice of other fruits (strong refers to the flavor, not the alcoholic content). In every case, the wine was diluted with water. It is the use of undiluted wine, with its deep red color, that Scripture condemns as dangerous (Prov. 23:31)."²⁵

"*Shakar*, 'the second, is of the like tenor,' says Professor Stuart... but applies wholly to a different liquor. The Hebrew name is *shakar*, which is usually translated strong drink in the Old Testament and in the New. **The mere English reader, of course, invariably gets from this translation a wrong idea of the real meaning of the original Hebrew. He attaches to it the idea which the English phrase now conveys among us, viz., that of a strong, intoxicating drink, like our distilled liquors. As to distillation, by which alcoholic liquors are now principally obtained, it was utterly unknown to the Hebrews, and indeed to all the world in ancient times.** 'The true original idea of *shakar* is a liquor obtained from dates or other fruits (grapes excepted), or barley, millet, etc., which were dried, or scorched, and a decoction of them was mixed with honey, aromatics, etc.'...**Both words are generic. The first means vinous liquor of any and every kind; the second means a corresponding liquor from dates and other fruits, or from several grains.** Both of the liquors have in them the saccharine principle; and therefore they may become alcoholic. But both may be kept and used in an unfermented state; when of course, no quantity that a man could drink of them would intoxicate him in any perceptible degree.... *Shakar*...signifies 'sweet drink' expressed from fruits other than the grape, and drunk in an unfermented or fermented state. It occurs in the O.T. twenty-three times."²⁶

- f. **OINOS** (The NT Greek word translated "wine" in every instance except one [Acts 2:13]). This N.T. term is also general, and represents more than just alcoholic wine.

Masters: "...it must be said that we cannot be totally sure that Paul was advocating fermented wine [in I Tim. 5] anyway, because the Greek word *oinos* (the most usual NT word for wine) can sometimes mean unfermented grape juice. While in many places in the NT it undoubtedly means fermented wine, it must not be taken for granted that it *always* means this. **The word is very plainly used in the Septuagint to cover both fermented and unfermented produce of the vine. It is a broad term, and care is therefore necessary.**"²⁷

Some specific examples from the Septuagint (LXX): fresh-pressed juice (Isa. 16:10) is translated *oinos* i.e. *wine*, so too in Proverbs 3:10 in the LXX. There is a second Greek word *gleukos* [which] "*denotes sweet 'new wine,' or must, Acts 2:13...*" (Vine, vol. IV, pp. 219-220). This word also can indicate alcoholic, as well as non-alcoholic wine: "Acts 2:13 where the accusation shows that it was intoxicant and must have been undergoing fermentation some time." (Vine, p. 220).

²⁵ Reimers, op cit, p. 11

²⁶ Patton, op cit., pp. 47-48

²⁷ Masters, op cit., p. 67, italics in the original.

RELEVANT MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS & BIBLE REFERENCES:

- **Neh. 2:1** - Nehemiah was the king's *cupbearer*, i.e. one who prepared and brought the food and drink to the king. Here we are told by Nehemiah "...and I took up the wine (Heb. yayin) and gave it to the king." Normal practice would be for cupbearers to prepare i.e. squeeze the juice that the king would drink. **cf. Gen. 40:11 where the cupbearer to Pharaoh told Joseph: "Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand."** In this situation, obviously, the drink could not have been alcoholic since it was freshly squeezed juice of whatever fruit was being used. (It is highly significant that Josephus in his "Antiquities of the Jews" when relating the story of Joseph & the butler, calls the juice squeezed into Pharaoh's cup "wine" and completely supports the idea that the fresh grape juice of that story was called "wine"!28
- **Zech. 9:15 cf. v. 17** - It should be kept in mind that a person's preconceptions when they hear a term can and often do color their view of what is being talked about. For instance, what comes to your mind when I say the words "*drink*" & "*drinking*?" For instance, in v. 15 it says: "*The LORD of hosts will defend them. And they will devour, and trample on the sling stones; and they will drink, and be boisterous as with wine; and they will be filled like a sacrificial basin, drenched like the corners of the altar.*" A cursory reading of that passage may make us think that this is a description of a bunch of rowdy, drunken guys. But verse 17 goes on to say: "*For what comeliness and beauty will be theirs! Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins.*" Two observations:
 - i. Notice it is new wine, which would not normally be alcoholic,
 - ii. The word "*Grain*" is given as a parallel to "*wine*" in the verse. There is nothing questionable about grain! Nor does it intoxicate—unless one wishes to maintain that the grain spoken of here refers to grain-based alcoholic beverages—an incredible exegetical stretch that taxes all credulity! So why should the wine be assumed to be alcoholic, since the grain that makes the young men "*flourish*" is certainly not intoxicating [at least I know of no one who holds such a ridiculous position!-mwe]

THE STRENGTH OF WINE IN BIBLE TIMES. Most people assume that alcoholic wine in Bible times was as strong as wine today. However that is definitely not true. **There are two reasons that fermented wine then was much weaker:**

A) DISTILLATION WAS NOT DEVELOPED UNTIL HUNDREDS OF YEARS LATER.

Distillation is the process of greatly strengthening alcoholic beverages by boiling (vaporizing) and then condensing them. "As alcohol is a toxin, fermentation is self-limiting. Once alcohol concentration reaches about 14% (7-12% is possibly more accurate-mwe), or the sugar runs out, the multiplying yeasts die and fermentation ends. A stronger drink requires distillation. The origins of distillation are obscure. The Arabs get credit not so much for the process, but for the word. *Al-hohl* is Arabic for finely ground antimony [a whitish powder] used as eye liner, and it came to mean any exotic essence... So far as is documented, alcohol was first distilled in the Middle Ages, at a medical school in Salerno, Italy. Considered an important medicine, wine was boiled and the vapors then cooled and condensed to produce a more powerfully concentrated drug.... Distilled alcohol evolved in Russia as *vodka*, in Holland as juniper-flavored *jenever* (the French called it *genie'vere*, which the British blunted to *gin*), and passed through charred barrels, peat smoke, and across the Irish Gaelic tongue as *uisce beatha*, or *whiskey*."²⁹

So naturally fermented wine can only achieve an alcohol concentration of approximately 7-14%. By contrast, distilled drinks have an alcohol content of between 30-50%! Obviously then, alcoholic wine in Bible times was much weaker than most wines today. "**While the goal in the ancient world was to reduce the alcohol content of beverages, the modern world has sought ways to increase it.** Standard table wines have as much as 14 percent alcohol due to the addition of extra yeast and the control of the heat generated by the fermentation process.

28 "The Life and Works of Falvius Josephus" translated by William Whiston (The John C. Winston Company: Philadelphia, PA, n.d. [1954?]), in "Antiquities of the Jews," Book 2, Chapter 5, #'s 2-4, pp. 64-65

²⁹ Gibbons, op cit., p. 7

Then keep in mind that people do not dilute wine today, as they did in ancient times (see below). **“So...modern wine has more than five times as much alcohol as the diluted (alcoholic) wine of the ancient world.** Furthermore, fortified wines such as *port* or *sherry* have alcohol added, resulting in an alcoholic content of 18 to 24 percent. Hard liquor produced by distillation, such as vodka or gin, has as much as 40 percent alcohol. Even *beer*, produced by fermentation of cereal grains, contains 4 to 7 percent alcohol. **While this amount approximates the amount in naturally fermented wine, it is of course never diluted.** In fact, each of these modern categories of alcoholic beverages, when consumed in their standard serving sizes, contains about the same amount of alcohol. That is, an average drink=5 ounces of wine=12 ounces of beer=1 & ½ ounces of whiskey=0.6 ounces of pure alcohol. **That would be about three times the alcohol contained in an 8 ounce cup of diluted wine in Bible times. Clearly (alcoholic) wine today is not the same as (alcoholic) wine in the Bible.”³⁰**

B) PEOPLE OF BIBLE TIMES DILUTED FERMENTED "WINE" WITH WATER.

*"There is abundance of evidence that the ancients mixed their wines with water; not because they were so strong, with alcohol, as to require dilution, but because, being rich syrups, they needed water to prepare them for drinking. The quantity of water was regulated by the richness of the wine and the time of year. Wine in early history was often vinegary and drunk diluted with water."*³¹

"Those ancient authors who treat upon domestic manners abound with allusions to this usage. Hot water, tepid water, or cold water was used for the dilution of wine according to the season.' Hesiod (8th century B.C.) prescribed, during the summer months, three parts of water to one of wine.' Nichocharos considers two parts of wine to five of water as the proper proportion." According to Homer, Pramnian and Meronian wines required twenty parts of water to one of wine. Hippocrates considered twenty parts of water to one of the Thracian wine to be the proper beverage.

*"Captain Treat says, 'The unfermented wine is esteemed the most in the south of Italy, and wine is drunk mixed with water.'... 'In Italy the habit (mixing wine with water) was so universal that there was an establishment at Rome for the public use. It was called THERMOPOLIUM, and, from the accounts left of it, was upon a large scale. The remains of several have been discovered among the ruins of Pompeii. Cold, warm, and tepid water was procurable (obtainable) at these establishments, as well as wine, and the inhabitants resorted there for the purpose of drinking, and also sent their servants for hot water.'... Nothing can more clearly exhibit the contrast between the ancient wines and those of modern Europe than the widely different mode of treating them. The hot water was often necessary, says Sir Edward Barry, to dissolve their more inspissated (thickened by boiling) and old wines... Nor was it peculiar to pagans to mingle water with wine for beverage and at feasts; nor to profane writers to record the fact. It is written of Wisdom, she mingled her wine- Prov. ix.2 ... This mixed wine must be different from that named in Ps. lxxv, 8. 'full of mixture,' which we have seen is the symbol of the divine vengeance, the cup prepared for his enemies. But in Prov. ix. 2, it is a blessing to which friends are invited. If in this passage the mixture is or aromatic spices, in addition to the water necessary to dilute the syrup, it was not to fire the blood with alcohol, but to gratify the taste with delicate flavors."*³² (Similar to flavored teas?)

*"According to secular authorities, people in Bible times would dilute this wine, usually with two parts water, reducing the alcohol to less than 2&1/2 percent (see Encyclopedia Americana, 1989, Vol. 29, pp. 44, 45. The reason for this mixture of alcoholic wine was very practical: pure drinking water was scarce... People in the ancient world discovered that the alcohol in (alcoholic) wine killed enough of the harmful bacteria to make the water acceptable. **The resulting mixture, however was more like water than wine. At this alcohol level the average person would have to consume nearly a gallon (4 litres) of the mixture to become intoxicated.**"³³ Thus for anyone to make such absurd statements as "Jesus drank alcohol" completely misrepresents Christ and is doing false & despicable disrespect to his divine person and character!. It would be similar to claiming that someone who has ever taken cough syrup (e.g. Vick's Formula 44, NyQuil, etc, which contain a very small percentage of alcohol for medicinal purposes) drinks alcohol. The statement is ridiculous and completely false, not to mention deliberately misleading. When someone states that an individual "drank alcohol" the clear meaning understood by virtually anyone hearing that, would be to conclude that the person drank something that has at least 13-25% alcohol—or far more than that! Obviously that is completely false and ludicrous.*

³⁰ Reimers, p. 2.

³¹ Boyd Gibbons, "Alcohol, the Legal Drug" (National Geographic magazine; Washington, D.C., February, 1992), p. 9.

³² Patton, Ibid, pp. 42-44.

³³ Gary Reimers, "Does the Bible Condone Alcoholic Beverages?" Frontline magazine, Fall, 1993, p. 11).

Since all fermented wine in Bible times was diluted at a rate of anywhere from 2 to 1 or 3 to 1, up to 6 to 1, 10 to 1 *BEFORE* it was distributed to be consumed (see Alfred Edersheim, “Jesus the Messiah” p. 619); Lawrence O. Richards “Illustrated Bible Handbook, p. 723; _____ or more Water was often mixed with wine at rates of from 3 to 1, to even 10 to 1 or 20 to 1. By “watering them down,” the alcohol content was greatly reduced. Dr. Robert Bell³⁴ has said that it would have taken 22 glasses of such diluted wine in biblical times to produce the equivalent of 2 martinis today. Reimers adds: According to secular authorities, people in Bible times would dilute [alcoholic] wine with at least two parts water (sometimes as much as twenty parts water), reducing the alcohol to less than 2 & ½ percent.”³⁵ He then quotes a couple of authoritative sources: “In all these countries (Syria, Palestine, Egypt), wine was always diluted with water, a long-standing custom in Mediterranean regions, where pure potable water is not very common...” & “The wine of classical antiquity, however, was very different from modern wine. They...always diluted it with water before consumption...Only barbarians drank undiluted wine”³⁶ “The Greeks regarded anyone who drank undiluted wine as a barbarian! And in the terminology of the Western Mediterranean the very word for wine indicated a watered-down serving. A neat [undiluted] drink had to be especially described as being ‘unmixed.’

Did the Jews also water down their wine? There is powerful evidence that they followed the same practice as others in this respect. Certainly by Roman times the Rabbinical writings of the Jews mention the mixing of water with wine for the observing of Jewish feasts. The Jewish *Mishna* says that four cups of wine were poured out for the Passover, water being mixed with it because it was considered too strong to be drunk alone. The Jewish literature refers to two or even three parts of water to one of wine. The term for this diluted wine was *mazug*. Are there indications of this in the Bible? Yes indeed, for in Song of Solomon 5:1 we read of the wine being mixed with milk, perhaps a special luxury by way of an alternative to water. The same luxury may be the sense of Isaiah 55:1 ‘*Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.* Proverbs 9:2 & 5 may describe the practice of mixing the wine with water or milk: ‘*She hath mingled her wine... Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.*’...While it is possible that this was a mingling of wine and spices, this is unlikely in view of the fact that there is a special Hebrew term to describe *spiced* wine (which is used in Song of Solomon 8:2). The language of Proverbs 9 perfectly suits the practice (described by the Greeks) of mingling the wine in a large bowl immediately before serving. (The Greeks called this bowl a *krater*.)”³⁷

WHY WAS WINE DILUTED? “The reason for this mixture of wine was very practical: pure drinking water was scarce. Even today travelers to the Holy Land must be careful about drinking the water. In the ancient world they discovered that the alcohol in wine killed enough of the harmful bacteria to make the water acceptable. The resulting mixture, however, was more like water than wine. At this alcohol level the average person would have to consume nearly a gallon of the mixture to become intoxicated! The same is true for other varieties of wine in the Bible.”³⁸ Geisler: “...in ancient times not many beverages were safe to drink. Stein indicates that in the ancient world water could be made safe in one of several ways. It could be boiled, but this was tedious and costly. Or it could be filtered, but this was not a safe method. Or some wine could be put in the water to kill the germs—one part wine with three or four parts water. Wine today has a much higher level of alcohol than wine in the New Testament. In fact in New Testament times, one would need to drink twenty-two glasses of wine in order to consume the large amount of alcohol in two martinis today. Stein humorously notes, ‘In other words, it is possible to become intoxicated from wine mixed with three parts water, but one’s drinking would probably affect the bladder long before the mind.’”³⁹

BIBLICAL REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS SHOULD AVOID DRINKING ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES.

- g. **THE ALCOHOLISM RATE FOR THOSE WHO DECIDE TO “TRY” ALCOHOLIC DRINKS. It is a well-documented fact that approximately 10% of those who first try an alcoholic drink eventually become alcoholics.** For instance, in the United States approximately 10 million individuals are alcoholics, with another 10 million classified as “problem drinkers.” With that fact in mind, why would a Christian try it, when it has 1 chance in 10 of ultimately destroying his or her life? Even if all wine in the Bible was alcoholic (which it is not!), to voluntarily choose to drink an alcoholic beverage knowing the above statistic, is to

³⁴ Dr. Bell is professor of O.T. & Hebrew at Bob Jones University. Statement made during a class at Hampton Park Baptist Church, Greenville, SC, July 1994.

³⁵ Reimers, “*Does the Bible condone Alcoholic Beverages?*” (reprint), p. 1.

³⁶ The former quote: R.J. Forbes, Professor of the History of Pure and Applied Sciences in Antiquity, University of Amsterdam, in *Encyclopedia Americana*, 29:44-45, 1989; & the latter: Maynard A. Amerine, *Colliers Encyclopedia*, 1994, vol. 23, p. 518, cited in Reimers, p. 1.

³⁷ Masters, *op cit.*, pp. 23-24, italics in the original.

³⁸ Reimers, p. 2.

³⁹ Norman Geisler, “*A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking*” (*Bibliotheca Sacra*: Dallas Theological Seminary, Jan-Mar 1982, p. 51. Geisler takes the interior citation from Robert H. Stein, “*Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times*,” (*Christianity Today*, June 20, 1975, pp. 9-11.

violate some very important biblical principles (e.g. Rom. 13:14; I Cor. 6:12; 9:24-27; 10:23; I Thess. 5:21; etc.). Instead of giving alcohol a try, we should be using all of our power and influence to discourage anyone from trying alcoholic drinks, since the number of people in society whose lives have been destroyed through addiction to alcohol is directly proportional to the number who "give it a go." Here are a few statistics to document the danger of eventual alcohol abuse by those who decide to just "try it":

*"Currently (1993) there are an estimated 10 million alcoholics in the United States and another 10 million are categorized as problem drinkers. National surveys reveal that alcohol is involved in as many as 65 percent of the murders committed in the United States, 50 percent of the assaults, 35 percent of the rapes, 55 percent of domestic violence, 60 percent of child abuse cases and 60 percent of all traffic fatalities...The annual consumption of alcoholic beverages in the United States has reached 2.7 gallons of pure alcohol for every person 14 years of age or older, the equivalent of 591 beers each, a substantial expenditure"*⁴⁰

*"Germans, world champion per capita beer drinkers, down 11 billion liters a year... (During their Oktoberfest) Some five million liters are served during the 16-day festival..."*⁴¹

*"Aside from addiction, official statistics show that alcohol is also the main factor in the deaths of 1,000 children every year in the UK, and of half the drivers who are killed under 25 years-of-age. It is heavily implicated in half of all recorded crimes, including half of all murders, half of all child-abuse cases, and half of all wife batterings. Such statistics as these give but a glimpse of the horrifying cruelties in which alcohol is involved..."*⁴²

An interesting fact: Alcoholics Anonymous (the international organization dedicated to helping people overcome addiction to alcoholism) surveyed their members (alcoholics) and found that there is a connection between a religious group and alcoholism. Those denominations which allow alcoholic drinking and/or use real wine in communion, have the largest per capita number of alcoholics, while those denominations which preach against alcoholic drinking and/or use grape juice in communion have the lowest percentage of alcoholics! According to the Hebrew Professor who made that statement, on the top of the list is the Roman Catholic Church, followed by the Lutherans. At the bottom of the list: The Southern Baptist Convention.⁴³

- h. **THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVE FOR OTHERS & NOT BECOMING A STUMBLING BLOCK - Rom. 14:19-21** Even if a Christian is able to drink alcoholic beverages and not abuse them or become addicted to them, his example may cause others to try alcoholic drinks, and they, in turn, may become alcoholics. The apostle Paul is very clear that such individuals are guilty of putting a stumbling block in another Christian's way. With that principle in mind, even the use of alcoholic wine in communion could be a serious stumbling block to some members, since some believers are former alcoholics, and the drinking of alcoholic wine at the Lord's Supper has started many back to drinking and drunkenness again. *"So love would tell us that if 1 in 10-15 become alcoholics, then it would be a manifestation of love to avoid it, for the sake of others."*⁴⁴
- i. **THE PROHIBITION OF KINGS & PRIESTS TO DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES.** "...there are three classes of people **for whom no amount of alcohol is allowed.** The *priests* serving in the tabernacle [were not to] use alcohol lest it hinder their ability to communicate the truth of God's Word to others (Lev. 10:9-11). *Kings* should not use alcohol lest it distort their ability to discern what is right (Prov. 31:4-5) And *Nazarites* [were not] to use alcohol lest it deter their dedication to the Lord (Num. 6:3). Those are not outdated Old Testament categories. God has designated believers today as 'kings and priests (Rev. 1:5-6) and calls on us to dedicate ourselves to serve Him (Luke 9:23). God's standards for His kings, priests and

⁴⁰ Reimers, op cit., p. 11-12.

⁴¹ Gibbons, op cit., p. 11

⁴² Masters, op cit., p. 17, italics in the original.

⁴³ Bell, op cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

dedicated servants are at least as high today as they were then. The only question is, are we willing to submit to His will and His Word.”⁴⁵ Masters elaborates further: “The argument runs thus: In Leviticus 10:8-11 the Lord absolutely prohibited the drinking of alcohol by the priests while engaged in tabernacle (later Temple) duties, or while teaching the statutes of the Lord. (There is a reminder of this law in Ezekiel 44:21 ‘*Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court*’). The passage about kings and princes not drinking appears in the words taught to King Lemuel by his mother (Proverbs 31:4-6). *Lemuel* means *belonging to God*, and is generally thought to be a symbolic name for Solomon. If this is correct, then the divine standard had obviously been revealed to David, the first *godly* king. The ongoing significance of the alcohol prohibition for on-duty priests and Levites, as well as for kings and princes, should be obvious. We who are Christian believers have been made *kings and priests unto God* in this Gospel dispensation (Rev. 1:6 & 5:10). Our role and our witness is to serve as priests in God’s temple (which is the church) and to offer up sacrifices of a spiritual nature, namely, our witness to the world.”⁴⁶

- j. **THE EXAMPLE OF THE RECHABITES** - Jer. 35:1-19. This was a group of Israelites who had been commanded not to drink wine by Jonadab, and who faithfully obeyed that command, even when “*tested*” by Jeremiah. (Note: The testing was deliberate-Jeremiah using the Rechabites faithfulness & obedience to commands as a human object lesson and stark contrast to Judah's breaking of God's commands).
- k. **THE STRONG BIBLICAL WARNINGS TO AVOID DRUNKENNESS-WHICH WILL LEAD A PERSON TO HELL!** “There is more Scripture concerning drinking than can be found on the subjects of lying, adultery, swearing, stealing, Sabbath breaking, cheating, hypocrisy, pride, or even blasphemy...In all, there are 627 references to drink and drinking in the Bible.”⁴⁷
- **I Cor. 6:9-11.** We are told here that “*neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God!*” “Total abstinence from all these is a necessity. So long as more moderation in them is concern, there is no hope of reformation...The moderate use of intoxicating drinks is unsafe; for strong men, in all stations of life, have fallen and died drunkards, and many are following on. Total abstinence is the scriptural doctrine for all, and from all the practices which expose men to the sins which shut them out of heaven.”⁴⁸ Surely these verses aren't teaching that it's ok to drink, as long as you don't get drunk. **That kind of bizarre logic would then mean it's alright to engage in moderate immorality, moderate homosexual behaviour, moderate stealing, moderate coveting, etc.** Such a position is absurd on the face of it.
 - **I Peter 4:1-5.** This passage no more teaches *moderate* drinking is ok, than it teaches that *moderate* revelling, *moderate* banqueting, & *moderate* idolatry is ok. “*It is clear that the Christians named in this passage were abstainers from their former usages, and that on this account they were spoken evil of, very much as are the total abstainers of the present day.*”⁴⁹
 - **Eph. 5:18.** “The Greek word *asotia*, in Eph. v. 18, is rendered excess, and is connected with wine; and means, literally, unsavableness, utter depravity, and dissoluteness. In the text, and Tit. 1:6, it is connected with riot, which means overflow, outpouring of dissoluteness, thus denoting the same moral character. As the two phrases occur in the text, it teaches that excess of wine and excess of riot re related to each other as cause and effect; but excess of wine no more justifies moderate drinking than excess of riot justifies moderate rioting.”⁵⁰
- “But what about the verse where Paul said, ‘Let your moderation [not abstention] be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand.’” – Phil. 4:5.** Wilkerson comments: “This matter of drinking

⁴⁵ Reimers, op cit., p. 3.

⁴⁶ Masters, op cit., pp. 59-60, italics in the original.

⁴⁷ Wilkerson, op cit., pp. 46-47.

⁴⁸ Patton, pp. 85-86

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 101

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 102

among Christians hinges on one misunderstood word—moderation. God’s Word commands that we be moderate in all things. Moderation does not interpret, ‘You can have a little bit of everything—just don’t overdo it!’ Sipping saints draw the moderation line just above wine tasting. To them, moderate fornication, moderate adultery, and moderate drug taking are obviously sinful. Yet, if we use their logic, we should be moderate in all these things. If we are to fulfill the command, a little bit of all these things is permitted—in keeping with their concept of moderation.

Who is the referee in this moderation game Christians play? You may be offended by adultery. By the same measure, I am offended by drinking Christians. Which one of us has the greater right to be offended? Who is the judge? Our nation has thousands of youth who get high ‘only on weekends.’ They smoke ‘only one or two joints a day’...to hear them tell it, they are models of moderation...But the biblical admonition to moderation has nothing at all to do with indulging within reasonable limits. It has nothing to do with excess or limits. It is much more than that. The Bible warns of ‘excess of rioting’ (I Pet. 4:4). Does this imply that rioting is permitted within reasonable limits? Never! Read again this Bible reference to moderation: ‘Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand’ (Phil. 4:5). How incongruous to say to drinkers ‘Drink within limits, because the Lord is at hand!’ Would men preparing for the returning of the Lord be encouraged to drink a beverage such as alcohol?

“The truth is, these Christians at Philippi had been suffering terrible persecutions. They were being exhorted to be patient, gentle, and mild, because Christ was soon to come. There is not the remotest reference to drinking. They were being admonished to react to all their persecution with mildness. They were being told to practice self-restraint and not grow bitter. Temperance had to do with their tempers. I see Paul’s call for moderation as an appeal for mastery over the passions.”⁵¹

1. **THE SYMBOLISM & TYPOLOGY OF THE PASSOVER MEAL AS A PICTURE OF CHRIST - I Cor. 5:7**

- i. **UNLEAVENED BREAD IS DEMANDED ...SO WHY NOT UNLEAVENED WINE?** This verse says "*Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.*" It's interesting to note that the Jews have always eaten unleavened bread at the Passover meal. The bread was unleavened first of all, because the Scripture says they had to leave "in haste" from Egypt. Leaven is usually [not always] a picture of sinfulness in Scripture. Since this verse teaches us that the Passover meal was a picture (*Type*) of Christ, the elements were to be unleavened, to symbolize the sinlessness of Christ. This is the reason why in most Christian churches, the bread used at Communion is unleavened. **The relevant question that needs to be asked is,** "Why then do some churches drink leavened [i.e. fermented] grape juice [i.e. alcoholic wine], since the fermentation process is a result of leaven in the grape juice?" It would clearly seem to be more accurate to the typology pictured, to use only grape juice, rather than alcoholic wine, in light of this New Testament passage.
- ii. **WHAT KIND OF WINE DID JEWS DRINK AT PASSOVER & OTHER FEASTS?** It is entirely possible that the wine Jesus used at the Passover feast was not alcoholic at all. "*The Passover was celebrated with wine mixed with water. According to Lightfoot, each person - man, woman, and child - drank four cups. Christ and his disciples have celebrated the Passover, he took of the bread and the wine that remained, and instituted the Lord's Supper. The wine was, as we believe, the rich syrup diluted with water. This kind of wine met all the requirement of the law concerning leaven - the true rendering of Matsah, according to Dr. F.R. Lees, being unfermented things.*"⁵²

"*The Mishna*⁵³ states that the Jews were in the habit of using boiled wine.' Kitto, vol. ii. p.477"⁵⁴

⁵¹ Wilkerson, op cit., pp. 77-78.

⁵² Patton, op cit., p. 44

⁵³ The *Mishna* is "the section of the Jewish Talmud consisting of the collection of (Jewish) oral laws edited by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (A.D. c.135-c.210). [Heb. mesh na', Mishnayoth, **from the Heb: teaching by oral tradition**]. The *Talmud* is "the collection of Jewish law and tradition consisting of the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara*." [Heb. tal'mood, from the Heb: **original instruction**]. The *Gemara* is "the section of the Talmud consisting essentially of commentary on the *Mishnah*" [Heb: ge ma ra']. (Definitions from The Random House College Dictionary, Urdang & Flexner, 1972), pp. 854, 1341 & 549.

This is a strong indication that while Jews today drink fermented wine in their ceremonies, originally the Jews drank non-alcoholic (unleavened) wine, and that was the original pattern.

"Dr. S.M. Isaacs, [at the time] an eminent Jewish rabbi... says: 'In the Holy Land they do not commonly use fermented wines. The best wines are preserved sweet and unfermented.' In reference to their customs at their religious festivals, he repeatedly and emphatically said: 'The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, including the marriage feast, ever use any kind of fermented drinks. In their oblations and libations, both private and public, they employ the fruit of the vine - that is, fresh grapes - unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction. Fermentation is to them always a symbol of corruption, as in nature and science it is itself decay, rottenness.' ... Gesenius, the eminent Hebraist, says that 'leaven applied to the wine as really as to the bread.' - Thayer, p.71."⁵⁵

"The Rev. A.P. Peabody, D.D., in his essay on the Lord's Supper, says: 'The writer has satisfied himself, by careful research, that in our Saviour's time the Jews, at least the high ritualists among them, extended the prohibition of leaven to the principle of fermentation in every form; and that it was customary, at the Passover festival, for the master of the household to press the contents of 'the cup' from clusters of grapes preserved for this special purpose.' - Monthly Review, Jan., 1870, p. 41. 'It was predicted as a peculiarity of the Messiah, Ps. xvi. 10, 'Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption' - that is, decomposition or putrefaction. This prediction the apostle recognized, Acts ii. 31, as fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, 'Neither his flesh did see corruption.' Contrasted with David, Acts xiii. 35-37, who 'was laid with his fathers and saw corruption,' it is written, 'But he whom God raised saw no corruption.' All admit that the bread was unleavened - i.e. had not passed (into) putrefaction or fermentation - and was, therefore, the proper emblem of the body of Christ, which 'saw no corruption.' For the same reason, there was a necessity that the wine should be unfermented, that it might be the fit emblem of the great Sacrifice which 'saw no corruption.'

"Leaven, because it was corruption, was forbidden as an offering to God. Ex. xxxiv. 25: 'Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven.' But salt, because it prevents corruption and preserves, is required. Lev. ii. 13: 'With all thing offerings thou shalt offer salt.' If leaven was not allowed with sacrifices, which were the types of the atoning blood of Christ, how much more would it be a violation of the commandment to allow leaven, or that which was fermented, to be the symbol of the blood of atonement? We cannot imagine that our Lord, in disregard of so positive a command, would admit leaven into the element which was to perpetuate the memory of the sacrifice of Himself, of which all the other sacrifices were but types."⁵⁶

In regard to the above statements, it is highly instructive and worthy of note that **Jesus, in instituting the Lord's Supper, never called the Passover drink "wine." Instead he referred to it as "the cup" and "the fruit of the vine."** (Mt. 26:26-28; Mk. 14:22-24). Perhaps in His sovereign wisdom Christ knew the misuse and misunderstanding to which the term "wine" would later fall into, and so avoided the term altogether? Clearly "the fruit of the vine" can very easily connote fresh or preserved grape juice. Consider the following statement: "The Saviour does not use *oinos*, the usual word for wine, but adopts the phrase '*genneematos tees ampelou*,' 'this fruit of the vine.' Was it because *oinos* was a generic word including the juice of the grape in all its stages, that he chose a more specific phrase? Was it because he had previously selected the vine as the illustration of himself as the true vine, and his disciples as the fruit-bearing branches, and the juice as 'the pure blood of the grape'? (Deut. xxxii. 14.)...

"It will not be questioned that unfermented wine is as really 'the fruit of the vine' as fermented. If fermented wine is 'the fruit of the vine,' then the wine vineyard is also. But neither of them is properly the 'fruit of the vine,' as both vinous and acetous fermentations are the result of chemical agencies outside and independent of the vine. In each there is decomposition of the original juice...

⁵⁴ Patton, op cit., p.25

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 70

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 70-71.

The fact that the Passover was six months later than the vintage is not an invincible objection, since, as we have seen in the preceding pages, on the authority of Josephus, of travellers Niebuhr and Swinburne, and of Pippini, the wine-merchant of Florence, and others, that grapes are preserved fresh through the year, and that wine may be made from them at any period."⁵⁷

The apostle Paul also referred to the drink at the Lord's Supper as "*the cup*" & "*the cup of blessing*" (I Cor. 10:16; 11:23-28). "Clement, of Alexandria, A.D. 180, designates the liquid used by Christ as '*the blood of the vine*.'-Kitto, ii. 801.

(Even) "Thomas Aquinas (said), 'Grape-juice has the specific quality of wine, and therefore, this sacrament may be celebrated with grape-juice.'-Nott, London Ed., p. 94, note."⁵⁸

Even if the wine used at Jewish Passover feasts in the time of Christ could be proven to have been alcoholic [not forgetting it would be much weaker than wine today due to it being diluted], Masters raises an extremely interesting point in that regard:

"We can, however, make suggestions about the nature of the wine at the Lord's Supper by considering the new significance of wine as a symbol. Matthew, Mark and Luke give an almost identical record of the precise words which the Lord Jesus used, and these have immense significance. First Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying, '*Take, eat: this is my body.*' After this He took the cup, gave thanks, and distributed it to them. Then the Lord said these words: '*This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many*' (Mark 14:24)...

"It is particularly important to note the use of the word *new*. The blood of Christ is the efficacy, sign and seal of a *new* testament. The word *new* in the Greek is *kainos*, which means new in *character* (i.e. different). The new testament was new in the sense that it was entirely new in character, and different from the old testament. (The Greek has another word—*neos*—to describe things that are new only in the sense of being young.) What kind of wine would be a fitting symbol of a new and different testament? The argument used by many Christian abstainers is this—it would be a *different* wine. The old Passover feast, symbolizing the *old* testament, was usually kept with diluted, fermented wine [**a very debatable point, as noted above-mwe*], but in the new feast—the Lord's Supper—the wine has a new and a different symbolic role. It would in future stand for the blood of the *new* (different) testament. Therefore it would be a *new* (different) wine. It would not be like the traditional cup of the old Passover ceremony. (Nor would it be like the wine by which a godless world would be increasingly dominated.) A *new* testament and a *new* feast in a *new* church calls for a *new* (a different) cup."⁵⁹

Wilkerson adds: "**Not all wine is alcoholic, any more than all cider is hard** [fermented]. It is inconceivable to me that our blessed Lord would ever produce an intoxicant, or that He used fermented wine at Passover as the symbol of His own shed blood. Fermented wine is decayed wine. Can that be the symbol of the new life in the Spirit? His holy flesh never saw decay or corruption. The cup of the Lord and the cup of the devil are two entirely different things. Jesus also miraculously created bread to feed the five thousand, but it was not moldy bread. Nor did He create rotten fish. Christ is the Creator of life, not death!"⁶⁰

m. **THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO NEED TO USE ALCOHOLIC WINE IN COMMUNION SERVICES TODAY.**

- i. **In Bible times it was often safer to drink juices than to drink water-which was often unsanitary and disease ridden** (see under II. c. iv & IV. c. iii, above). Thus the recommendation by Paul to Timothy, "...to use a little 'wine' for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 72.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Masters, op cit., pp. 86-87, italics in the original.

⁶⁰ Wilkerson, op cit., p. 21.

Such problems with sanitation are not the case in the vast majority of countries today.

- ii. In some lands in the past it was a custom to drink alcoholic wine, whereas it no longer is today. ***Even in those countries where it still is a cultural custom:***

1. **When customs clash with Scripture, the Word of God trumps culture & customs!**

2. **Many of those customs have long ago passed away, so there is no need to follow long forgotten customs.**

3. **Even if it is a strong tradition or cultural custom in a particular country to drink alcoholic wine, it would be very bad practice to follow it. *A bogus argument:*** The country of France is famous for its production of wine, and the extremely common use of alcoholic wine in homes throughout the country-*even by young children*. Some have even implied that by "*normalizing*" the use of alcoholic wine and making it "*no big deal*" the French have lowered the rate of alcohol abuse. Such statements betray a total ignorance of the facts! In an impartial statistical survey conducted over a ten year period of time, which examined the number of cases of cirrhosis of the liver (a common disease of alcoholics) in all the countries of the world, it was found that the French had *twice* the per capita rate of cases of cirrhosis of the liver⁶¹ that the United States has-a country which any honest person must acknowledge has a massive problem with alcoholism & alcohol-related diseases, criminal activities, car accidents, etc! Italy's rate of cirrhosis of the liver was even higher: 2 & ½ times as many cases, per capita. Germany's rate 1 & ½ times greater, Puerto Rico's 2 & ½ times greater, etc. So let us be done, once and for all, with the argument that in countries where alcoholic wine, rum, etc. is partaken of from very early ages, those people "know how to handle it." **They know nothing of the sort**-and the statistics prove it! Year after year more people-*by far*-die from alcohol related diseases, alcohol related vehicle accidents, etc., in such countries, as opposed to countries where alcohol is less accessible &/or less promoted!⁶² Masters, writing from the UK supplies additional statistics supporting our conclusion: "In ABC of Alcohol, a collection of articles by leading UK specialists in alcoholism (published by the British Medical Journal), Doctors A. Paton and J.F. Porter point out that the age at which drinking begins has fallen to between 12 and 14 years. Furthermore, a survey of young men between 18 and 24 showed that 18% were already heavy drinkers (i.e. drinking more than 80gm of alcohol per day, or ten glasses of wine, or five pints of beer)."⁶³

- iii. **In regard to the Lord's Supper, the important concept in using the fruit of the vine is that it is red, which is symbolic of the blood of Christ that was shed for sinners. Grape juice has that symbolism without the inherent dangers of alcoholic wine.** Regarding the danger of using fermented wine at the Lord's Supper. Wilkerson asks, "What about fermented wine at the Passover celebration? At communion? Jesus passed the cup to His disciples and said, 'Drink—to remember' (Matt. 26:27). How could He have served them a drink that causes men to forget? Ask any alcoholic why he drinks, and he is quick to answer, 'I'm trying to forget!' Wine is a memory sedative. One small sip will not put the memory to sleep, but it does symbolize the taking of an element with properties to do so. Alcoholic wine is a sacrilege on the sacrament. It turns the chalice into a kind of hypodermic needle squirt...The communion cup is not a vessel in which a death force is used to celebrate a life force. That cup is not some kind of rum ration. It is a celebration of unleavened, unfermented life...If there is one place that should be safe for an alcoholic, it is the church. But how can he be safe at a communion service where wine with alcoholic content is served? One sip of wine is all that is often needed to throw him off the wagon [i.e. lead him back to drinking again]. Even the smell of it can entice him...The Nazarites of John the Baptist's time could not partake of

⁶¹ A very common liver disease among alcoholics.

⁶² Statistics on alcohol & alcohol-related consequences taken from materials compiled by the "Addiction Research Foundation", Statistical Research Program, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, based on statistics compiled by the "World Health Organization" (WHO) of the United Nations. Information taken from statistical surveys covering the period from 1970-1985, hard copy of all surveys on file-mwe.

⁶³ Masters, op cit., p. 81.

communion in [many] modern churches. They took a vow never to touch fermented wine...Jesus Christ was God's High Priest. That which is fermented could not be a suitable symbol of the sacred, incorruptible body and blood of the Lamb of God, which saw no corruption in life or death or even in the tomb...In 1 Corinthians 11:25, the term cup is used, and in the Gospel accounts, Christ refers to the communion juice as 'the fruit of the vine' (Mark 14:25). He does not use the word *wine*. Obviously, the vine does not bear intoxicating fruit!"⁶⁴

- n. **THE ONE CLEAR SCRIPTURAL PROHIBITION AGAINST DRINKING ALCOHOLIC WINE: USING IT AS A SOCIAL DRINK!** i.e. drinking for drinking's sake. Dr. Charles W. Smith once stated⁶⁵ that social drinking is the one kind of drinking that is clearly condemned in Scripture: "[Today an] *important difference is the purpose for using alcoholic beverages. In Bible times the purpose was to purify drinking water. In our world good drinking water is usually available. Instead, most people who drink alcoholic beverages today do so either because they like the effect of the alcohol, or because they want to be accepted by others. Alcohol today is not so much a beverage as it is a planned intoxicant-exactly the use prohibited in the Bible!*"⁶⁶ Reimers likewise comments: "[An]...important difference is the purpose for using alcoholic beverages. In the ancient world the purpose was to purify their drinking water. In our world good drinking water is usually available. Instead most people who drink alcoholic beverages today do so either because they like the effect of the alcohol or because they want to be accepted by others. Alcohol today is not so much a beverage, as it is a planned intoxicant, exactly the use prohibited in the Bible. And with the higher levels of alcohol, intoxication and even alcohol dependence can be difficult to avoid."⁶⁷

Masters adds: "Short of killing someone while drunk at the wheel of a car, heavy drinking is no longer an offence to society. Far from being discouraged, it is urged and stimulated by a colossal advertising budget of more than two hundred million pounds [British Sterling] every year in the UK alone. So successful is this unrelenting campaign that the national expenditure on alcoholic drinks adds up to more than half the total spending on food. Can anyone deny that there is a gigantic difference between the attitude of the biblical Jews towards alcohol, and the attitude of our present society?"⁶⁸

"WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S ADVICE TO TIMOTHY TO DRINK WINE?" -- I Timothy 5:23. That question is always asked. However it is a debatable point whether Paul was even recommending alcoholic wine at all! [see below] Even if he were, please keep in mind that even the fermented wine of that day was far weaker than today's standard table wine and when diluted 3 to 1 or more, would have, at best, simply killed bacteria in impure water. Masters makes some helpful observations regarding this verse: "[another] argument for the view that Christian abstinence began in the early church is based on the fact that Timothy was an abstainer. In I Timothy 5:23 the words, '*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities*'" obviously indicates that Timothy totally avoided alcohol. The NASB reads: '*No longer drink water exclusively.*' The NIV reads: '*Stop drinking only water.*' Paul was clearly very aware of Timothy's practice. The significance of this is far greater than is generally appreciated. Timothy, after all, was a most careful imitator of the apostle Paul, and as others have pointed out, it is almost inconceivable that Timothy followed any 'principle' which was not derived from Paul's personal example. After all, it was to Timothy that Paul wrote: '*But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life...*' (2 Tim. 3:10-11). The Greek term here translated fully known, literally means—followed closely, or conformed to...The NASB says: '*But you followed my teaching, conduct...*' ...the fact that Timothy had closely conformed to all that he saw in Paul is borne out a few sentences later when Paul says: '*But as for you, CONTINUE in what you have learned...*' (2 Tim. 3:14 NIV)...Paul himself frequently appealed to God's people to be imitators of him: in three texts the Greek has *mimics* or close imitators—I Cor. 4:16; 11:1; and Phil. 3:17. He asks that his example be called to mind in all things (I Cor. 11:2). He asks that the conduct of other teachers be judged according to the *ensample* which he and his immediate helpers, such as Timothy, provided (Phil. 3:17). The Greek word translated *ensample* in the AV means a *die*, or a model or pattern. Paul's ways and lifestyle (reflected in Timothy, Luke, and others) were to be very precisely regarded and followed...(cf. 2 Thess. 3:9). In the light of these texts, the fact of Timothy's abstention from alcohol is a most powerful indication of

⁶⁴ Wilkerson, op cit., pp. 33-35, italics in the original.

⁶⁵ Statement given by Dr. Charles W. Smith during a lecture he gave in his "*Johannine Writings*," course at Bob Jones University, Greenville, SC attended by the author on 30 Sept. 1974 and taken directly from his class notes.

⁶⁶ Reimers, op cit., p. 11

⁶⁷ Reimers, p. 2

⁶⁸ Masters, op cit., p. 29

Paul's own practice...

Paul provides just one reason why Timothy should take wine, and only a little at that. That reason is Timothy's susceptibility to stomach troubles and other ailments, presumably aggravated by water or food-borne infection... (Masters, in a footnote adds: At this point it must be said that we cannot be totally sure that Paul was advocating fermented wine anyway, because the Greek word *oinos*...can sometimes mean unfermented grape juice...The fact that Timothy, Paul's close imitator, was an abstainer is certain. What he was to add to his water is not so certain, though for sake of argument we allow that it may have been fermented wine [of the much weaker variety of Bible times-*mwe*])...**The results of modern medical research suggest that if Paul was advocating fermented wine for this purpose, it would ideally have needed to be very weak.** In the early 1970s Canadian medical researchers sought to determine the comparative potency of several different beverages against organisms which cause gastroenteritis. Their results showed fresh orange juice to be most effective, with unfermented grape juice a close second, and fermented wine trailing behind. It was established that grapes contain a substance which is highly effective against stomach organisms, but that this substance is diminished and eventually destroyed by fermentation. **In other words, the kind of wine which is marketed today would not have done Timothy's stomach much good at all, but a weaker brew (and the weaker the better) would have given considerable benefit.**"⁶⁹

Wilkerson adds: "I hear it everywhere I go: 'Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake.' But under no stretch of the imagination could that have been fermented wine Paul was recommending. How could it be, when Paul knew that the Holy Word commanded, '*Be not among winebibbers...*' (Prov. 23:20) ...Furthermore, it is a proven fact that fermented wine is not good for the stomach [see above]; that it destroys the liver and perverts judgment...Paul warned in Titus against being '*given to wine*' (Titus 1:7). This man of God spoke often about mastery, about abstinence, about self-control...The sweet, unfermented wine so common in Jerusalem during Paul's lifetime was healthful and beneficial. Yes, alcoholic wines were also prominent at that time. People did get drunk and act like fools. But Paul warned never to be associated with drinking and all it represents in the ways of drunkenness, stupidity, and self-gratification. So quit using Paul as a crutch!"⁷⁰

"BUT JESUS MADE WINE, SO IT'S OK TO DRINK IT!" – John 2:1-11. This is probably the most popular refrain parroted by the advocates of drinking alcohol, including Christians. But, as Peter Masters prudently states, **"The writers of books which advocate the consumption of alcohol in moderation by Christians should be extremely careful before asserting (as they invariably do) that Jesus drank [or made-*mwe*] wine...** He may very well have drunk the fresh fruit of the vine, or the boiled and diluted variety of fermented wine (also called wine) in which the intoxicating properties had been destroyed. But we have no right to say dogmatically that our perfect, law-abiding and great High Priest drank [or made-*mwe*] intoxicating wine Himself...[The Old Testament regulations forbidding priests and kings from drinking fermented wine] bore upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Would He have been liable to observe them? He was, after all, '*a FAITHFUL high priest in things pertaining to God*' (Hebrews 2:17). As High Priest, He was (and is) '*a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man*' (Hebrews 8:2). Not only was the Lord Jesus Christ the great High Priest over the true tabernacle, but to crown the symbolism, He was the true tabernacle. In John 2:19-21 it is recorded that He said to the Jews, '*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...But he spake of the temple of his body.*' Is it conceivable that '*such an high priest...who is holy, harmless, undefiled*' (Heb. 7:26) would have broken His own divine law while officiating on earth as the bodily fulfillment of the earthly Temple? ***Is it conceivable that the Lord, Who perfectly kept every jot and tittle of the ancient law to fulfill all righteousness, would have done the very thing which He (as the Everlasting Word) had forbidden the earthly priests from doing? Is it conceivable that the King of the Jews and the King of kings would, when He walked on earth, have broken His own law for the lesser kings of Old Testament Israel?***"⁷¹

"The Lord did indeed say that He came '*eating and drinking*' (Luke 7:34). He was contrasting Himself with John the Baptist, whose life of extreme austerity evidently excluded the usual foods and vine-drinks of the people. The Lord's words do not actually indicate that He drank wine in an intoxicating form, however weak. The Pharisees and lawyers certainly said, '*Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners,*' but that does not prove that the Lord drank alcohol either. **The jibe of the Pharisees was as false on the matter of alcohol as it was on the matter of *gluttony*. Let us take great care and show all due reverence before we**

69 Masters, op cit., pp. 65-68, italics in the original, bolding added.

70 Wilkerson, op cit., pp. 45-46.

71 Masters, ibid, pp. 62-63, italics in the original.

make confident remarks about the Lord Jesus drinking [or making-mwe] wine. Let us never forget that He fulfilled all righteousness in procuring our salvation.”⁷²

David Wilkerson, the founder of “*Teen Challenge*,” who has spent a lifetime working in New York City and other locations, preaching the gospel to some of the toughest, most violent gangs and individuals on earth, boldly responds to those who claim that Jesus made alcohol, so we can buy and drink it too:

“Alcohol is known as a *teratogen*, which literally means ‘monster producing.’ According to Dr. Sophie Pierog, Director of Pediatrics at the Jersey City Medical Center: ‘Alcohol has an effect on the early embryo in terms of the organization of brain cells. A smaller number of neuronal cells are formed, and there is a disorganization of these cells within the brain as the embryo develops under the influence of alcohol.’ Babies of drinking mothers suffer growth and development retardation, along with disfiguring abnormalities. Such babies are often considerably smaller in length and weight, and have smaller hands. They develop a characteristic appearance, which includes ‘fish mouth, small eyes, low nasal bridge, and hair on the forehead and face.’ [i.e. *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome*]”... Wilkerson then states: “Tell me, please, how could Jesus not know this? How could He, knowing that even two ounces of alcohol (two glasses of wine per day) could risk the lives of unborn children, turn water into fermented wine and serve it to an expectant mother, had she been in attendance at the wedding of Cana? No! A thousand times no! Drinking of any alcoholic beverage is absolutely contrary to the character and teaching of Jesus. It is not in keeping with His sinless, perfect life. It is not a standard He would set for true followers. In no way dare we identify Him with it, merely so we can justify our indulgence. The law stated emphatically, ‘*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise*’ (Proverbs 20:1). How could Jesus, the Fountain of all wisdom and truth, not know and fulfill that law? Would Jesus mock those celebrants at the wedding feast? Would He produce a raging drink just to satisfy fleshly appetites?

“...Would Mary, His holy and righteous mother, have taken her divine Son to a drunken bash? ...Can you not picture Solomon and the prophets coming down from eternity to watch Jesus turn water into wine, just as Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount? Suppose the wine was alcoholic. Solomon would have had to tap our Lord on the shoulder and whisper, ‘Master, don’t You know wine is a mocker? Have You not read that it is raging? The law declares that those deceived by it are not wise...The Prophet Habakkuk would have had to remind Him, ‘*Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink...*’ (Hab. 2:15) **How, in any conceivable way, could Jesus give His neighbors fermented wine without setting the New Testament against the Old?** ...Without mocking the Lord’s own prayer that pleads, ‘...*lead us not into temptation...*’ (Luke 11:4)...

“I am convinced that those wedding guests were not drinking fermented wine in the first place. There is no evidence as to the type of wine Jesus made, only that it was better.”⁷³ This wine was as nonalcoholic as our coffee and tea. Often, the unfermented wine of Bible times was more highly desirable than the fermented [see earlier in this paper-*mwe*]. It was called ‘nectar’ or ‘ambrosia,’ food of the gods. That is why guests at the wedding of Cana said, ‘*The best was saved for the last*’ (John 2:10). It was ‘ambrosia’—the pure fruit of the vine...

“The word *juice* does not appear in the New Testament and appears only once in the Old. All fruit of the vine was called wine, whether it was fermented or not. There are thirteen different words used in the Bible which are interpreted as wine, nine in Hebrew and Chaldee, and four in Greek. The common word in Greek was *oinos*. These Greek words correspond to *yayin* or *yain* in Hebrew, *vinum* in Latin, and *wine* in English. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures of Jesus’ time, the Hebrew word for grape juice is translated thirty-three times as the Greek word *oinos*. It is also used to denote other kinds of drinks, such as lotus fruit and dates...

“The grape syrup was stored in **new wineskins** to prevent fermentation. It was referred to as ‘new wine.’ **Old wineskins induced fermentation**, just as improper canning procedures today can cause

⁷² Masters, p. 64, italics in the original, bolding added.

⁷³ “Moses Stuart, that prince of philologists, said, ‘*Facts show that the ancients not only preserved their wines unfermented, but regarded it as of a higher flavor and finer quality than fermented wine.*’ There is no ancient custom with a better amount of character of proof than this.” (Outer quote by Dr. Herrick Johnson, quoted in Wilkerson, “*Sipping Saints*” p. 53).

decay. **This thick syrup was similar to our grape jellies and could be squeezed out of the skin bottles onto bread or dissolved in water, to be reconstituted as a very desirable grape drink.**

This process is described in the Hebrew Bible by Solomon and among Roman writers by Pliny.”⁷⁴

- o. **A RELATED QUESTION: “SHOULD A CHRISTIAN WHO DOESN'T DRINK NEVERTHELESS BE INVOLVED IN THE PRODUCTION OR SELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES TO OTHERS?” - Hab. 2:15:** *"Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, who mix in your venom even to make them drunk so as to look on their nakedness!"* This text would seem to instruct us that *"Not only does God want us to be total abstainers from alcoholic beverages but also instructs us to refrain from selling or giving alcoholic beverages to other people, either professionally or socially."*⁷⁵

Dr. Peter Masters relates a moving example of the attitude any honest, thinking Christian involved in the alcohol industry should have in regard to this question of whether or not work for such companies:

“It was the burden of involvement with alcoholic misery which in 1867 moved twenty-year-old Fred Charrington, just converted, to renounce his huge private income and millionaire future as heir to a brewery fortune. He was on his way one evening to teach a class of illiterate boys in a London East End slum. Passing a public house called ‘The Rising Sun’ he saw a poor, raggedly-clothed woman with two little children clutching on to her skirt, crying with hunger. The woman went to the pub door and called out for her husband. Suddenly, the man rushed out and battered the pathetic trio to the ground. As he looked on, appalled, Charrington’s eyes caught sight of his own family name emblazoned across the door of the pub. His mind responded immediately. *‘You have knocked your wife down,’* he said to himself, *‘and with the same blow you have knocked me out of the brewery business.’* For the remaining sixty-eight years of his life, Fred Charrington was probably the best-known temperance campaigner of the period, **his youthful decision representing the only possible heart-response to the commands of the New Testament.**”⁷⁶

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

David Wilkerson forthrightly observes:

“To me, the real tragedy is that so many who call themselves Christians have started drinking. I call them *‘sipping saints.’* They see themselves as a new breed of liberated believer who seeks a freer life-style. A recent poll revealed that 81 percent of all Catholics and 64 percent of all Protestants drink. These shocking figures grow higher each year. **The permissive attitude toward social drinking is fast creeping into the most conservative, evangelical church circles.**”⁷⁷

Masters:

“Alcohol is an essential part of a pleasure-worshipping society. **It is Satan’s fermented river of false hope, false consolation, false happiness, and false courage.** It’s his way of binding millions to this world; and it is one of the chief symbols of this world’s apostate culture.”⁷⁸ We should seriously weigh the Apostle Paul’s sober exhortation:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.” (Rom. 13:12-14)

It is this very passage of Scripture that Augustine of Hippo (i.e. “*St. Augustine*”) opened to and read at the lowest, most despairing moment of his life. And he who until then had lived a profligate, vile, debauched life, rose transformed, to wholeheartedly follow Christ for a lifetime. God can do the same for anyone whose heart desires to do His will!

⁷⁴ David Wilkerson, “*Sipping Saints*” Spire Books (Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1978), pp. 22-26, italics in the original.

⁷⁵ Dr. Robert L. Hughes, at the time, Dean of Liberty Baptist Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia, in the magazine “*Faith Aflame*,” Jan-Feb, 1977, p. 4

⁷⁶ Masters, op cit., pp. 47-48.

⁷⁷ Wilkerson, op cit., pp. 13-14.

⁷⁸ Masters, op cit., pp. 49-50.