

ALCOHOL

What does the Old Testament Say? #2

Old Testament Facts

In the Old Testament, there are:

- About 113 neutral references to alcohol.
 - Some of these are “non-references” such as winepresses or wineskins
- 71 negative references
- 31 positive.

In the Old Testament there are several Hebrew words that are all translated as “wine.” Here are just some:

- **Tiyrowsh** (sometimes spelled **tiyros**h or **tiros**h):
 - This word is often seen as “new wine” and simply means fresh grape juice, often associated with a harvest.
- **Yayin**:
 - This is a generic word that can mean either fermented or unfermented, but often fermented by implication.
 - In Scripture this word is used more than 140 times in both positive and negative ways.
- **Shekar** (sometimes spelled **shaker**):
 - This word is often seen as “strong drink,” meaning intensely alcoholic.
 - When this word is used in Scripture, it is usually in the context of it being looked down upon or condemned.
 - But it was also used in liquid offerings to the Lord.

Some Positive References:

Gen. 14:18-19

*“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and **wine**; now he was a priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;”*

- The Hebrew word here is “Yayin.”
- Could mean alcoholic or non-alcoholic.
- **It was part of a blessing.**

Gen. 35:14-15

*“Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a **drink offering** on it; he also poured oil on it. ¹⁵ So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.”*

- A “**drink offering**” (*Nesek*) **was a strongly fermented drink** and, in this case, used as an offering to the Lord.
 - “*Drink offerings*”, (which are spoken of all throughout the early Old Testament), were to be composed of “strong wine,” or “strong drink,” and it was to be pure, not watered down.
 - **Num. 28:7** *“Then the **drink offering** with it shall be a fourth of a hin (a hin is approximately 1.5 gallons) for each lamb, in the holy place you shall pour out a **drink offering of strong drink** to the LORD.”*
 - Commentaries often note the drink offering is a symbol of joy and rest to God and man.
 - **Judges 9:13** *“But the vine said to them, ‘Shall I leave my **new wine**, which **cheers God and men**, and go to wave over the trees?’*
 - **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 which makes man’s heart glad**, So that he may make his face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man’s heart.”*

Some Negative References:

Genesis 9:20-21

*“Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard. 21 He drank of the **wine and became drunk**, and uncovered himself inside his tent.”*

- Wine = Yayin.
 - The first mention of alcohol in the Bible deals with the shaming of Noah, and the subsequent mockery by his son Ham.
 - This use of alcoholic wine resulted in Noah’s son being cursed, and a family division between the brothers that led to the generational Israel-Philistia conflicts.

Lev. 10:9-10

*“Do not drink **wine or strong drink**, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die — it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations — ¹⁰ and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean,”*

- This is recorded right after Nadab and Abihu were struck dead for offering “unauthorized fire”.
 - Could it be that Nadab and Abihu had been drinking, and that caused them to screw up their worship?
 - The scripture doesn’t make that clear, but it is an interesting consideration.
- Vs. 10 The reason for prohibiting the priests to drink was because they had to be able to distinguish between the holy and the common.
 - It is interesting to note that the amount of wine is not specified.
 - **This is a prohibition of alcoholic drinking.**

Proverbs talks about alcohol a lot.

Proverbs 20:1

*“**Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.**”*

- Wine = Yayin. Strong Drink (Beer) = Shekar.
- “Intoxicated” is the Hebrew word “**shagah**”, which means “to go astray.”
- **Wine and strong drink pull people off course!**

Proverbs 21:17

*“He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves **wine** and oil will not become rich.”*

- Wine = Yayin.
- The imagery here is of one who lives to please himself.
 - This man is contrasted with the man in Prov 21:15 who seeks to act fairly and finds joy as a result.

Proverbs 23:20-21

“Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat; ²¹ For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe one with rags.”

- Wine = Yayin.
- **Again, wine and self-satisfaction pull people off course.**
 - Here the command is to avoid people who let wine pull them off course.

Proverbs 23:29-35

*“Who has **woe**? Who has **sorrow**? Who has **contentions**? Who has **complaining**? Who has **wounds without cause**? Who has **redness of eyes**?³⁰ Those who **linger long over wine**, Those who go to taste **mixed wine**.³¹ Do not **look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup**, When it goes down smoothly;³² At the last **it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper**.³³ Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things.³⁴ And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.³⁵ “They struck me, but I did not become ill; They beat me, but I did not know it. **When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.**”*

- “Wine” = Yayin. “Mixed wine” = Mamsak (wine mixed with spices or water.)
- Look at the lifestyle of those who drink (vs. 29).
 - Wine is a trap.
 - It is the source of these problems and yet the drinker wants more.
 - It sets your life on “crazy cycle”.

Proverbs 31:4-7

*“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, **It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink**,⁵ For they will **drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted**.⁶ Give **strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to him whose life is bitter**.⁷ Let him drink and forget his poverty And remember his trouble no more.”*

- Wine = Yayin. Beer = Shekar (strong alcohol)
- Kings are not drinkers because it will impair their judgment.
 - **2Tim 2:12** *“If we endure, we will also reign with Him;”*
 - **Rev. 20:6** *“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but **they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.**”*
 - It seems that as Christians, we have some King-like responsibilities.
 - **Could this mean that we should not be drinking?**
- There is a positive use for drinking here.
 - Terminally ill; and those who are in anguish.
 - Does that describe those who are in Christ?

THE OLD TESTAMENT PICTURE

The positive references were mostly in relation to worship; although David did mention it as a result of God blessing man’s labor in growing crops to feed themselves and their cattle ([Ps 104:15](#)).

Most of the references were negative.

- These references present an overall message that alcohol is not:
 - Wise
 - Beneficial
 - Complimentary to a godly life.

It must be remembered that these references are presented against the backdrop of where alcohol was as much a part of their culture as eating.