

WINE AND THE BIBLE:  
CHRISTIANITY'S SCANLON ERROR

Message 4

Scripture: Deut. 14:22-29

INTRO: Where are we in our series? Well, I have said that I view Christianity's view of wine in the Bible as a Scanlon error. A Scanlon error I have defined as giving a medal to the guilty party and convicting the innocent party. Fermented wine has been given divine approval, when in fact, as I see it, fermented wine is condemned in the Bible and the wine approved by God is unfermented grape juice. And so I have made two propositions: One, unfermented grape juice was called wine in ancient times and this is also true in the Bible. Two, fermented grape juice is also called wine in the Bible and it is bad wine. It is condemned by God.

The next task before us is to look at the words that have been translated 'wine' in the Bible. This will be hard work. For the next two messages, you will need to think very carefully with me. I believe that the translation of certain words has been part of the cause of creating Christianity's Scanlon error. There are three major words we must consider. I believe they are the key to everything else. I have not sought to be exhaustive in this series, regarding words on wine, because I think you might become exhausted. I am seeking to cover the major points of importance.

The three major words we will be considering are the Hebrew words tirosh, yayin and shakar. I have said before that this matter of wine in the Bible, I think, can be settled in the Torah alone, the first five books of the Bible. You see, the Psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes Lord, that I may see wonderful things in Your law." The word 'law' is Torah. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in the Torah.

Well, it is to the Torah we want to once more go. In Deuteronomy 14 we find all three of these major words used. So let us turn to this chapter (read 22-29). We note the word 'wine' first in verse 23. The NKJV translates it as 'new wine'. So we begin by taking a closer look at this word. The original word is tirosh (spell).

## II. WORDS USED FOR WINE IN THE BIBLE

### A. Tirosh

Let us go to Deuteronomy 14 to take a look at this word (read vs. 22-23). The word 'new wine' in this verse in the NKJV is tirosh. This word occurs 38 times and in the KJV is translated 'wine' all 38 times.

In defining this word 'tirosh', commentators say it means either 'to get possession of' or it refers to something as being a possession. From this basic root meaning many feel it speaks of fermented wine because it gets possession of one's mind. I see no evidence of such a connection at all. Many also connect this word to the vine or wine, which has, as far as I can yet find, no basis whatsoever. I think this comes from a biased view.

It is my conclusion that this word tirosh NEVER means wine. Never! That is a tremendously bold statement, I know that. I believe it is correct and believe it cannot be disproved. The Hebrew word for 'wine' is yayin, not tirosh. Why then do the translations translate tirosh as wine? I think the error was created in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT over 2000 years ago. It translates tirosh as wine.

Now look at verse 23. Here you have the word tirosh translated 'wine' in the KJV and 'new wine' in the NKJV. Then look at verse 26. Here we have another word, yayin, translated wine. Now the NKJV is inconsistent in its translation of tirosh. The KJV always translates tirosh as wine and it almost always translates yayin as wine. Now I insist that you cannot have two words that mean exactly the same thing in the same language. I have debated this concept regarding many words with many students in Bible class. Never have I seen this proposition shown to be wrong.

So tirosh and yayin cannot both mean wine. Yayin, without question means wine. So the question now is, if tirosh does not mean wine, what does it mean then?

You may write this down as another proposition: **The word 'tirosh' means fruit.** I mean by fruit, fruit proper. You see, in English our word *fruit* is a broad word. You can speak of the fruit of the land, the fruit of the ground, the fruit of the garden, the fruit of the womb ect... It means generally the increase or produce of something. The common Hebrew word for that is peree.

My dad used to go to the Okanogan valley to buy fruit. Now when we said he went to pick up fruit in the Okanogan valley, we meant *fruit*. We did not mean the produce or increase of the land. That could have meant hay or grain or potatoes etc... But we meant fruit, proper. The Funk and Wagnall's College dictionary gives several definitions for fruit. Then it says this: In popular usage, fruit is usually applied only to the fleshy, juicy, and more or less sweet products of plants and trees, including many that are seedless, but not to the other fleshy and juicy products, as the cucumber and tomato, which are technically fruits but are called vegetables." I believe it is this kind of fruit that 'tirosh' speaks of.

Now there are about a dozen other Hebrew words translated 'fruit' in the OT. None of these words refers to fruit as I have just defined it. I believe that tirosh is the Hebrew word that speaks of these sweet fruits generally.

So, is there evidence that this word means fruit? Let me read from McClintock and Strong, "As to the exclusively liquid character of the substance denoted, both yayin and tirosh are occasionally connected with expressions that would properly apply to a fruit..." There we have an admission that at least occasionally, tirosh may mean fruit.

William Patton quotes a commentary called the "Bible Commentary" like this: "Tirosh is not wine at all, but the fruit of the vineyard in its natural condition." So this commentary agrees that tirosh means fruit, but it connects it specifically to grapes. I find no evidence for that. Rather it speaks of fruit in general.

I give you one more quote from Patton, "A learned Biblical scholar, in a volume on the wine question, published in London, 1841, holds that tirosh is not wine, but fruit." So there we have some evidence from others that my proposition may be valid. Personally I have no question in my mind that tirosh means fruit.

Now let me take you to the very first occurrence of the word tirosh in the Torah, Genesis 27. You know the story of how Isaac and his mother tricked Jacob into blessing Isaac instead of Esau. And in Genesis 27:27-29, we have an account of that blessing (read 27:27-29). In verse 28 Jacob says, "Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine." And there you have a translation that is partly guilty in creating Christianity's Scanlon error.

So, lets look at it a little more closely. The KJV says, "...and plenty of corn and wine." Now this phrase 'corn and wine' occurs 10 times in the OT; from the Torah to the minor prophets. And the same Hebrew words are used all ten times.

Now the word 'corn' KJV or 'grain' NKJV is a broad term referring to cereal grains. The Hebrew word here is dagan, which means 'grain.' You will remember the god of the Philistines who was called Dagon. He was the god of grain. The word for 'wine' in each of these 10 passages is 'tirosh'. Now the word *dagan* is a broad term, referring to various kinds of grains. If that is so, how then do we have a narrow term in the same phrase referring to only wine? The answer is we don't. They are both broad terms. Israel was the land of grain and fruit, not corn and wine. You see how translation has led to the Scanlon error. Here are at least 38 occurances of the word 'wine' in the Bible that should simply read 'fruit'.

Now Patton's admission when he says, "...this doubtless may be its meaning in some passages..." is an encouraging admission, allowing some credibility to this view. But, contrary to Patton's conclusion, I think one could and should consistently translate this word 'tirosh' as 'fruit' in every passage. I believe that the word tirosh means fruit. It may refer either to fruit in general or the fresh juice

made from such fruit.

But let us consider Patton's objection to this view. He writes, "This doubtless may be its meaning in some passages (that it refers to fruit), but in others it can only mean wine, as for example, Prov. iii. 10: 'Thy presses shall burst out with new wine' (tirosh); Isa. lxii. 8: 'The sons of the stranger shall not drink thy new wine' (tirosh)" (pg. 42-43). But, contrary to Patton's conclusion, I think one could consistently translate this word 'tirosh' as 'fruit' in every passage. I believe that the word tirosh always means fruit. It may refer either to sweet fruits in general or the fresh juice made from such fruit.

So Patton believes in Proverbs 3:10, it could not mean fruit. But what is wrong with this translation: "So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with fruit?" We will see later that they made far more juice than just grape juice in vats. And what is wrong with this translation in Isaiah 62:8: "Surely I will no longer give your grain to be food for your enemies; and the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your fruit?" The Hebrews made drinks from more fruits than just grapes as we will see later. And so in both instances, both terms are broad terms. This is far more consistent than translating it as wine, as I see it.

Now let me point out a Scanlon error on this word. The NISBE volume III page 1069 says, "The AV and RSV render Heb. tiros simply 'wine' or by 'new wine'... Both yayin and tiros are fermented grape juice with alcoholic content; hence both are able to create intoxication (cf. Hos. 4:11)." Now that is a classic example of a Scanlon error and numerous commentators fall into it. They give Hosea 4:11 as the proof for what they have said. The facts are Hosea 4:11 is the ONLY reference in all the Bible to a possible negative reading for tirosh. All other references using this word have no negative connotations.

Easton's Bible Dictionary too falls into this error when it says of this word that it is properly 'must'. Must is fresh grape juice that is not fermented. Then he says, "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 intoxication it takes possession of the brain. Among the blessings promised to Esau, Ge 27:28 mention is made of 'plenty of corn and tirosh.' Palestine is called a land of corn and tirosh'." Then he too uses the only references where tirosh may be negative as evidence.

But let us say for a moment that tirosh means that which takes possession of the brain by intoxication. And in our passage Isaac has said to Jacob, "May God bless you with plenty of that stuff." Now we have a problem. But the word tirosh does not necessarily mean 'to take possession.' Some say it means 'a possession'. That makes a huge difference. McClintock and Strong say that neither explanation is fully satisfying. The facts are we really do not know the exact original meaning.

It is worth noting that this word is ALWAYS used in a good sense except for one possible reference, which is Hosea 4:11 (read)fs. In that passage it speaks of those things that take away the heart. William Patton thinks that in this reference tirosh may refer to luxury, and the danger of too much luxury is that takes away the heart. If this is correct, and all the other occurrences would argue that it is, then tirosh, like money is fine, but when it takes away our hearts, then it is no longer fine.

So let me give you the definition I have come to on this word: Tirosh refers to fruit in general. It may refer to the fruit itself or freshly expressed juice from the fruit. In my view it is a general word or a broad term, not a specific and narrow term. I want us to go to an example passage, Deuteronomy 11:14 (read 13-14). God promises Israel that if they will walk with Him in obedience, then He will in turn bless them and they will gather in their grain, their new wine and their oil. I would translate this verse as grain; fruit and oil. That basically covers all the foods that require rain and all the basic foods used in that day. I believe the word translated 'corn' dagan, means grain and is so translated in the NKJV. It is a broad term covering that which we call corn, and wheat and barley. The word translated 'wine' is

the word 'tirosh.' It is not the usual word for wine. I believe it is a general word which should be translated 'fruit' in this passage. The third item mentioned is 'oil' and that is a general term although most oils in that day were made of olives. These were the three main food products and that is why they are mentioned here.

#### B. Yayin

The second word we must look at is yayin, which is usually translated wine. (Read Deuteronomy 14:22-26.) So the Hebrews were to lay up a tithe of that which the Lord blessed them with year by year. And they were to take this tithe to the place God would choose, which we learn later is none other than Jerusalem. So they would take the tithe of their first-fruits to Jerusalem and eat and drink from it there.

Then in verse 24 we read that if it was too far to take this tithe to Jerusalem, they were to sell it and buy whatever they wished and they were to eat it there and rejoice before the Lord. Now in verse 26 we find that one of the things they might buy is wine. The word is yayin. This word occurs 140 times and the KJV has translated it 'wine' 137 times; vine once, banquetings once and winebibbers once.

So what is yayin? Here is my simple definition: Yayin is the juice which comes from grapes, whether fresh, preserved or fermented. If it is unfermented, it is yayin, grape juice. If it is fermented, it is still yayin, grape juice. This is the word for 'wine' not tirosh. In and of itself, the word yayin does not indicate whether that juice is fermented or not. Its use must be determined from the context in which it is used.

So let us go to the first use of this word in the Bible, Genesis 9:21 (read). Now one can tell from the context of the words around this word yayin, that in this case yayin was fermented wine. Now there are a number of the uses of yayin in which the context tells us that it speaks of fermented wine.

Turn with me now to Genesis 40. You will remember the

story of how Joseph is put in prison for supposedly having an affair with Potiphar's wife. And a butler and baker were also put in prison and both dreamed dreams. And they were both sad, because they had both had significant dreams but they did not know what the dreams meant. And at Joseph's invitation they told him what they had dreamed. And the butler began (read 40:9-11).

Now just what was a butler? Well, he was what was called more properly the cup bearer. You will remember that Nehemiah was a cup bearer. And I understand that it was the cup bearer's task to see to it that the one he served was served well and that no one could ever put poison in his cup and so get rid of him. Many commentaries feel that the butler and baker had been accused of trying to poison Pharaoh, and that they are in prison for this reason.

But I want you to notice in verse 11, how the cupbearer served grape juice (read). In this way, no doubt, Pharaoh was certain that the juice was not poisoned. Now what this text does not do is call the grape juice wine. But there is much evidence that fresh grape juice was called wine. Let me read to you from the writings of Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote at the time of Jesus: "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 he had strained the **wine**, he gave it to the king to drink, and that he received it from him with a pleasant countenance" (48).

Josephus later writes what Joseph said to the cup bearer: "...for he (Joseph) 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." Josephus then says this, "Thou sayest that thou didst squeeze this **wine** from three clusters of grapes with thine hands, and that the king received it... (48).

Now there are some very noteworthy insights to be gleaned from what Josephus writes and we will look at more of that later. Let us note here particularly that in the cup bearers dreams he saw three clusters of grapes hanging, and ripe and ready to be picked. So he picked them and squeezed them into Pharoah's cup, and Josephus says of this grape juice, "...when he had strained the **wine**, he gave it to the king to drink..."

Beyond all question, Josephus, without any hesitation calls the fresh grape juice wine. Then he writes that Joseph said, "Thou sayest that thou didst squeeze this wine from three clusters of grapes..." So, beyond any question, fresh grape juice was yayin, just as well as fermented grape juice.

Adam Clarke's commentary on Genesis 49:11 says, "From this we find that wine anciently was the mere expressed juice of the grape, without fermentation. The saky, or cup-bearer, took the bunch, pressed the juice into the cup, and instantly delivered it into the hands of his master. This was anciently the yain of the Hebrews, the oinov, of the Greeks, and the mustum of the ancient Latins."

Now let me come back to a statement I made when we spoke of the various views of alcohol. I gave this quote from McClintock and Strong: "We propose here to treat it in the light of Scripture, history, and morals, unbiased by the disputes into which learned and good men have allowed themselves to fall upon the subject... In most of the passages in the Bible where yàyin is used (83 out of 138), it certainly means fermented grape-juice, and in the remainder it may fairly be presumed to do so. In four only (Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 11:1012 [Jer. is an erroneous ref.]; Lamentations 2:12) is it really doubtful. In no passage can it be positively shown to have any other meaning."

I printed out a list of every occurrence of the Hebrew word 'yayin'. I went through all the references where this word is used, in by far the vast majority of references the text does not indicate one way or another whether it is fermented or not. The facts are that the quote which claimed to

be unbiased is full of bias.

So, in conclusion to this point: what is yayin, or wine in the OT? It is the fruit of the vine, whether fresh or fermented. What the meaning of the word is in any given context must be determined from the context, and when that is not possible, then from the general view gained from the rest of the Bible.

CONCL: So, let us bring this message to a close. In Deuteronomy 14:23, the instruction to the Jews is that they are to give a tithe of their grain (broad term); and of their fruit (broad term), and of their oil (broad term), herds (broad term for cattle and oxen) and flocks (broad term for sheep and goats).

In the Deuteronomy passage we have two entirely different words, and both have been translated wine. I say this is a very clear error. I agree that many words have areas of the same meaning. We call these words synonyms. But synonyms must have dissimilarity in them as well, otherwise they are duplicates and this does not happen in one language unless words from another language are adopted.

The first word translated wine we looked at was tirosh. Tirosh is, in my view, a broad term for all kinds of fruits such as plums pomegranates, grapes, apples etc.. The second word was yayin. Yayin is grape juice. It is clearly linked to the vine and means wine, whether fermented or otherwise.

This brings us to the most crucial word of these three, shaykar and shawkar. These are verb and noun of the same root. We will look at these two words in the next message, and they will sum up our view of the most important words in our subject.