

WINE AND THE BIBLE:  
CHRISTIANITY'S SCANLON ERROR  
Scripture: Deut. 14:22-29  
Message 5

INTRO: In our series thus far I have first sought to give you a picture of how difficult our subject is and have described it as Christianity's Scanlon error. We set the criminal free and imprisoned the innocent. I have proposed to you that the Bible deals with two kinds of wine; good wine, grape juice; and bad wine; fermented wine. Then we have looked at two words that have been translated as wine and those are tirosh and yayin. I have proposed to you that tirosh is not wine at all, but that it is a broad term for more or less sweet fruits. This morning we want to look at the most crucial word, sheykawr spelled shekar. Sheykawr is a noun, and we will look at its very close relative, the verb shawkawr. It is not the purpose of these messages to cover all the minor words that have to do with our topic. My aim is to cover those words most crucial to our study.

So we will begin with the noun. We have been considering these words from Deuteronomy 14 so let us now read 14:22-26. Now we meet our word in verse 26 (read). Note that it says that they could buy whatever their heart desired. And with regard to drink, it says that they could buy 'wine and strong drink' KJV, or 'wine and similar drink' NKJV. It is the word translated 'strong drink' or 'similar drink' that we want to consider.

C. Shaykawr - spelled shaykawr

1. The noun [Translated as strong drink]

Wine, or yayin is the juice expressed from fruit 'tirosh', but a special kind of fruit; the grape. We now come in verse 26 to another word, the word shaykawr. This word occurs 23 times in the OT and the KJV translates it strong drink 21 of those 23 times. Once it is translated strong wine and once drunkard.

The words yayin and sheykawr often occur together and they are translated in the KJV as wine and strong drink. Now if sheykawr is a strong drink, what is wine then? Is it not strong? From what I can gather, there was no stronger drink than

fermented wine in Bible times. Listen to the TWOT on this. It says of this word, "Most likely not 'liquor' for there is no evidence of distilled liquor in ancient times" (II:927). So it could not be stronger than wine.

The KJV usually translates this word as strong drink. That is, I think, a most unfortunate translation. Fermented wine is as strong a drink as was available. Listen to TWOT on the word yayin: "Wine was the most intoxicating drink known in ancient times. All the wine was a light wine, i.e. not fortified with extra alcohol. Concentrated alcohol was only known in the Middle Ages when the Arabs invented distillation ('alcohol' is an Arabic word) so what is now called liquor or strong drink (i.e. whiskey, gin, etc.) and the twenty per cent fortified wines were unknown in Bible times. Beer was brewed by various methods, but its alcoholic content was light. The strength of natural wines is limited by two factors. The percentage of alcohol will be half of the percentage of the sugar in the juice. And if the alcoholic content is much above 10-11 percent the yeast cells are killed and fermentation ceases. Probably ancient wines were 7-10 per cent" (I:376).

Thus distilled liquors such as we have today were not known in Bible times. So fermented wine was as strong a drink as there was. It would then not make sense to say, "drink neither wine nor strong drink", or, "you may buy wine or strong drink." Wine, if fermented, was strong drink. And if we use this translation, then we must conclude that this wine was unfermented, otherwise it could simply just leave out the word 'wine' and call it strong drink.

Yet it seems that almost all commentators follow the idea that shaykawr was a strong drink. Strongs concordance says on Luke 1:15, where the Greek word for strong drink occurs says, "...strong drink, an intoxicating beverage, different from wine; it was an artificial product, made of a mixture of sweet ingredients, whether derived from grain and vegetables, or from the juice of

fruits (dates), or a decoction of honey.”

Charles Ryrie says on a note to Leviticus 10:9 that priests were warned against using wine and intoxicating drink. He calls shaykawr an intoxicating drink. Well, tell me then, what does wine mean in such contexts? Then he says that this word comes from a word meaning to inebriate. I find no evidence for that. Like the Scanlon case I mentioned at the outset, it seems to me that this is just a natural conclusion but it has no valid basis.

James Patrick Holden, from an article on internet entitled “A Little Whine” says that the root word of shaykawr means ‘to be tipsy and is associated with strong alcoholic drink’” (page 1). Now, little doubt but that he has taken that definition from Strong’s concordance, and yet I find no evidence for that. Again, there is simply no basis I can find to support that view. It seems to me to be another Scanlon error.

So, what then is shaykawr? Here is my own definition of this word in conclusion to my own studies: Shaykawr refers to the juice from any fruit other than grapes, whether fresh, preserved or fermented. The NKJV is quite inconsistent in its translation of this word but it is quite interesting in how it translates it in numerous cases. In cases where yayin and shaykawr occur together it translates it sometimes as ‘wine and similar drink.’ That I find accurate. It was similar drink in that it was fruit juice, just as grape juice is. But it was different in that it did not come from grapes. So what is the difference between yayin and shaykawr? Yayin is juice made from grapes and shaykawr is juice made from any other fruit.

Now the TWOT admits that strong drink is not a good translation. It says of this word, “Most likely not ‘liquor’ for there is no evidence of distilled liquor in ancient times” (II:927). So that gives some evidence that shaykawr does not mean strong drink.

The NKJV translates it as 'similar drink.' And what do they mean by similar drink? Well, wine is the juice from grapes. Shaykawr is the juice from any other fruit than grapes. Is there evidence for this definition? Well, listen to the TWOT again: "It denotes not just barley beer but any alcoholic beverage prepared from either grain or fruit. In all but two of its twenty three uses in the OT (Num 28:7; Ps 69:12) it appears in connection with yayin, 'wine' usually following it, once preceding it (Prov 31:6)" (II:927).

William Patton agrees with this when he says, "yayin is the juice of grapes; fermented or otherwise. Shaykawr is the juice made from anything other than grapes. It could be made of dates or grain or any other fruit."

Some time ago we were in Grande Prairie. One of the stores we went into had a shelf of books and one book was called, "The Everything Wine Book." I glanced through it and bought it for my research on the topic. In the introduction it says, "Dear Reader: There was a time when we didn't know the difference between Sangria and Sangiovese (except that one had fruit in it)." There we have a modern example of giving a drink a different name, depending on whether it is from grapes or grapes mixed with other fruit.

So, just what is shaykawr? It is the juice made from anything but grapes. Yayin is made from grapes. Shaykawr is made from any other fruit. Now some of these definitions included drink made from grain. I have as yet found no evidence for that, though it may be.

So, in Deuteronomy 14:22-26, God's people were instructed to lay up a tithe of all their grains, fruits (tirosh) and oils. These they were to take to Jerusalem and enjoy them in that place. But if they lived too far from Jerusalem, then they were to sell this tithe and then purchase these goods at Jerusalem and then partake of those things they had purchased.

And now note very carefully what they were to

purchase (14:26). Instead of saying they were to purchase tirosh (translated wine or new wine in verse 23, but better translated fruit) they were to purchase yayin or shaykawr. Why not tirosh as in verse 23? Well, it was too far to carry fruit, and at Jerusalem they would purchase the drinks made from that fruit. If it were made of grapes it would be yayin. If it were made of other fruits it would be shaykawr.

Conclusion? Tirosh is fruit or the fresh juice of any fruit. If the fruit was grapes, and the juice was fermented or preserved, it would be yayin. If it were preserved or fermented fruit juice other than grapes, then it would be shaykawr. (Flow chart here.) The translation of shaykawr as 'strong drink', as far as I can find, is very misleading and contributes significantly to the Scanlon error.

And how does one determine if yayin or shaykawr is fermented in any given passage? Only the context can determine that. In many contexts it cannot be determined. In others it is quite clear as we have seen before and will see again later.

## 2. The verb - shawkawr - spelled shakar

Now we must consider the verb that is closely related to shaykawr. It is the word shawkawr. This word occurs 19 times in the OT and 14 of those 19 times it has been translated 'to be drunk'. I think it may well be that the word shaykawr is translated as strong drink or fermented drink is because it is believed that the word shawkawr means 'to be drunk'. This is, I believe, another error that has contributed to Christianity's Scanlon error.

James Patrick Holden, from the article on internet entitled "A Little Whine" says that the root word of shaykawr means 'to be tipsy and is associated with strong alcoholic drink' (page 1). From all my research, I find absolutely no evidence for what he says. Gesenius, one of the very finest of Hebrew scholars says the root of shawkawr means **to drink to the full**. Easton's

Bible Dictionary says it means to **drink to the full or to be drunk.**

So just what does shawkawr mean? I think it does not mean to be drunk! It means to be full. Strong's concordance says that shawkawr is the superlative of shawkaw (Strong's 7937) which, it says, means to quaff. Now what does 'to quaff' mean? Funk and Wagnall's College dictionary says it means to drink, especially copiously. If then shawkawr is the superlative of shawkaw, it means to drink to the fullest.

Now let me say something about the connotation and denotation of words. The denotation of a word is that which the word means. The connotation of a word is that which it may suggest or imply. Let me give you an example from our word. Turn to Genesis 9:20-21 (read). Now the verse would literally read, "Then he drank of the wine and drank to the fullest, and became uncovered in his tent." So if Noah filled himself right up with wine and became uncovered, the clearest implication is that he became drunk! But if he had drank himself full of water, the same word would be used, but you could no longer translate it as drunk.

So I have little doubt that the meaning 'to be drunk' is a secondary meaning derived from being full. When one is full of fermented wine, of course one is drunk. From the information I have at present, I conclude that Shawkawr as a verb, means to drink to the full. We will meet the Greek counterpart to this word in the NT and there my point will be, I believe, well made. That Scripture will be none other than John 2, where Jesus made wine.

So one can easily see that if this word means to drink to the full, that it came to be used for drunkenness. Drunkenness happens from drinking fermented drinks to the full. But one may drink non-intoxicated drinks to the full and not be drunk, and this word is used for that as well.

But this word does not always carry the idea of

drunkenness. Consider in this light Genesis 43:34 (read). Here Joseph's brothers have come to him in Egypt and he has given them to eat and to drink and he ate and drank with them. In the Hebrew it says they drank and were shaykawr with him. The TWOT says that this verse could well be translated, "they drank and became drunk with him."

If that is the correct translation, then this is the only reference in all the Bible to a sin committed by Joseph. But this passage simply means they drank and drank to the full with him. That is they were filled with food and drink. Young's literal translation of the Bible says, "and he lifteth up gifts from before him unto them, and the gift of Benjamin is five hands more than the gifts of all of them; and they drink, yea, they drink abundantly with him."

Now here is the question: Did Joseph get drunk with his brothers? I believe he did not. They were simply filled with drink with him, as is the usual case after a big meal and a celebration. William Patton, quoting someone else says, "Plutarch affirms that before the time of Psammetichus, who lived six hundred years before Christ, the Egyptians neither drank fermented wine nor offered it in sacrifice". If that is so, that would be ample proof for my statement. However, others contest that statement.

How did they drink wine in Egypt? Well, Genesis 40:11 gives us an indication of this. The butler, who is in prison with Joseph, is actually what is called a cup bearer. Now what was a cup bearer? Well, he would bring drink to the Pharaoh or king. The NBD says they were often called 'pure of hands' (pg. 255). How so? Well, here is how Pharaoh drank his wine. The cup bearer would bring the bunch of grapes and squeeze the juice into a cup. Now why did they do that? People who wanted to get rid of a king or pharaoh sometimes poisoned their drinks. In this way he could not be poisoned. Later, when drinks were brought in a cup, the cupbearer would drink of the cup first, and then the king or pharaoh.

So why were cup bearers called clean of hands? If you were a king and had someone squeeze the juice out of grapes right in front of you, what would you demand first of all? Clean hands, of course!

Let me quote Patton again, "In remote antiquity, grapes were brought to the table, and the juice there expressed for immediate use." From the same quote he writes, "Josephus' version of the bulter's speech is as follows: He said 'that by the king's permission he pressed the grapes into a goblet, and, having strained the sweet wine, he gave it to the king to drink and that he received it graciously'" (57-58).

So when Joseph drank with his brothers, did he get drunk? Unthinkable! Nor does the word shawkawr, which is used in this text demand that this be the case.

Turn with me to another use of this word (Haggai 1:6 read). "...you drink but you are not shawkar..." What does he mean? Does he mean, "...you drink but you are not drunk?" Well I don't think so. He says you eat but you don't have enough. You drink but you are not filled. So this word, though used for drunkenness, does so by implication. The actual meaning of the word is to drink to the full. Drunkenness is only its connotation, not its denotation.

Turn with me to one more reference (SofS 5:1 read) "I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!" Now if in this verse we insist that shawkawr means drunkenness, then it must read like this: "Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, get drunk, O beloved ones!" Now that is simply blasphemous, and that cannot be the meaning of this word here. And it is rightly translated, "drink deeply" or "drink to the full".

D. Oinos



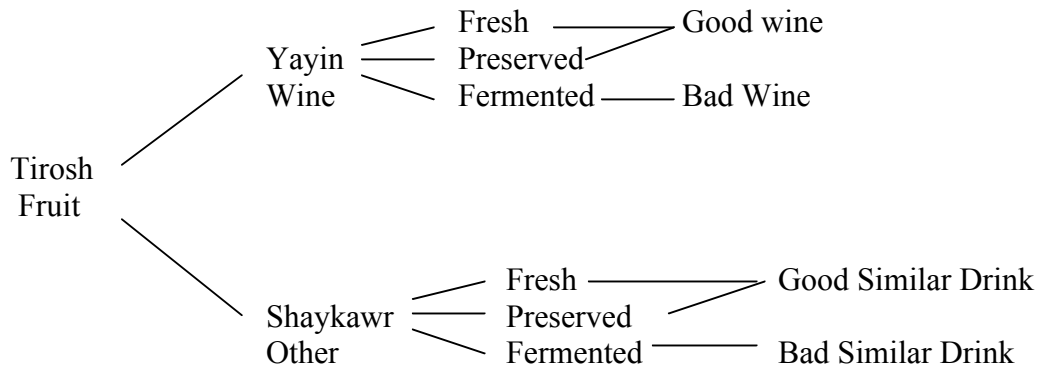
In the NT we will find that the word for wine is 'oinos'. This is the word used to translate the Hebrew yayin. In John chapter 2, when Jesus made wine, it was oinos.

E. Gluekos

Turn with me to Acts 2 (read 13). The word translated 'new wine' is the word 'gluekos'. We will look at this word in Acts 2 when we get to that passage.

CONCL: So what is the conclusion of all of this? Well, let me show you in chart form. As I see it, tirosh means 'fruit'. One kind of fruit is grapes, and the juice of grapes is yayin, wine. If it is fresh or preserved sweet, it is what I call good wine. If it is fermented and turned poisonous, then it is bad wine.

On the other hand, juice made from any other fruit is shaykawr. If it is fresh or preserved sweet, it is good similar drink. If it is allowed to ferment and turns poisonous, then it is bad similar drink. I think it is most unfortunate that it has ever been called 'strong drink' or 'intoxicating drink'.



The word shaykawr means to drink to the full. One may drink unfermented grape juice or unfermented fruit juice to the full and not be drunk. But when one drinks fermented drinks to the full, the connotation is that such a person is drunk.