

WINE AND THE BIBLE:
CHRISTIANTY'S SCANLON ERROR

Message 6

Bible Reading: Is. 5:1-7

INTRO: Now before we go on, let me bring out a few thoughts here with regard to the basic needs of our bodies. There are three kinds of matter that our body constantly must take in, in order to be able to do what God prepared them for. Our bodies were created so that in them, we would glorify God. That is a large topic in itself and we cover it in the first question in the "Basic Bible Doctrine" class. These three major needs of our bodies are air; food and drink. Now these three cover the three basic stages of matter; solids, liquids and gases. Each of these must have the right proportion of many things in order for us to live a lengthy, healthy life.

In these messages we are zeroing in on one kind of matter and that is liquid, and from all the liquids we are considering alcoholic drink. The age of the material we are studying in order to determine whether drinking alcohol is approved by God is from 2-4000 years ago; from the days of Noah to the time of Christ. What was life like in those days? Well, they ate and drank and eating and drinking were social events just like they are for us, and in some cultures even much more so. The book called, "The Everything Wine Book" says in its introduction of wine, (fermented), "Wine is essentially social. It's part of family gatherings, friendly dinners, holidays, celebrations, impromptu visits, and romantic interludes" (pg. xi). I believe that was equally true of unfermented grape juice. The NISBE says, "From early days wine was an ordinary item of hospitality" (Gen. 48:18) (Vol. III:986).

Now imagine what it was like in Bible times. There was no Pepsi, no Coke, no soda pops, along with the many other drinks we enjoy today. And when they got company, what did they serve? When they had a special meal, what did they drink afterwards? Well, one of those very special drinks was grape juice. Nothing was more special as a drink, than grape juice. This was the best sweet drink available. Other fruit juice (shaykawr) was good, but nothing was more special than grape juice. I have no doubt that the most common special social drink was grape juice. That is why there is a special name for this juice but the other juices are just lumped under one title, shaykawr. Grape juice was

the best.

Now if I am correct that God did not approve of drinking fermented wine or any other fermented juice, then it would have been necessary that they would have had ways of preserving these drinks in an unfermented state. And so we want to consider in this message the need of preserving these drinks and in the next message, the methods of preserving them unfermented.

V. PRESERVATION OF WINE IN BIBLE TIMES

A. The Need For Preservation

So before we look at the methods of preserving wine in Bible times, let us take a look at life in Israel in Bible times. In Leviticus 17 we have outlined for us the seven major feasts of the Jewish year. The beginning of the creation year was in our August and September. This is when they commemorate Rosh Hoshanna. This year that will be September 13.

Well, six months later, in the month of Nisan is the feast of Passover. And the Lord said this would be their religious new year for them. So here is the picture. The civil new year begins in August/September and the religious new year begins March/April. So the seventh month of the civil year is the first month of the religious year and the seventh month of the religious year is the first month of the civil year.

Now the first three feasts fell during the grain harvest time, from March to June, which also brought in the religious new year. It is from these feasts that we get the symbol of bread for communion. These feasts spoke prophetically of Christ coming to be the bread of life, and so He was born at Bethlehem, the house of bread.

The last three feasts fall during the grape harvest, which also brings in the civil new year. From these feasts we get the symbol of wine in our communion. The grain harvest speaks of life and joy and peace. The grape harvest section speaks of wrath and death. Now both of these times were times of great joy in Israel.

During the time of the civil new year, it was lambing season. It was at this time, I believe, that Jesus was born. But in the religious new year, at Passover, the lambs were killed. That was Christ as a corn of wheat falling into the ground to die. During the time of the religious new year, the grapes budded and began to prepare to become the juice so treasured in Israel. And so, just before the grain harvest, the grape farmers would begin to prune their vines, in preparation for the grape season (John 15:1-8).

So the lambs were born during the harvest of fruit. And the lambs were slain during the harvest of grain. The vines were pruned during the harvest of grain, and harvested during lambing season. And so the Jewish year revolved around these two very important feast sections.

Now the land of Israel was a land of, not corn and wine, but corn and fruit. The corn came during the first 4 feasts and the fruit during the last three feasts. All of these feasts were prophetic. The first four have been fulfilled. The last three still await fulfillment.

It is the wine part of this we are interested in. So, let me try to paint somewhat of a picture of the land of Israel and the importance of the vintage. The word 'vineyard' occurs 59 times in the Bible, 37 times in the OT and 22 times in the NT. The word 'vine' occurs 58 times. 49 times in the OT and 9 times in the NT. Then the words for wine and fruit juice occur many, many more times. That gives us some idea of the importance of our topic in the Bible.

There were some parts of the land that was especially good for producing grapes. Such was the land that the tribe of Judah received (Read Genesis 49:8-12). I will deal with the difficulty of 49:12 later. As it is translated in the KJV, it gives the impression that Judah will drink wine till their eyes are red. The land Judah will inherit will be a land of vineyards. So common will wonderful, productive vines be that they will use them to tie their donkeys to them. They will even tie their donkeys to 'choice' vines. Now the vine is a delicate plant and is easily

damaged, yet the vine was so plentiful that they would tie their donkeys to them. That would be like having a wonderful, beautiful productive apple tree in La Crete. And you put a fence around it and then put your horses in the fence. You would only do that if beautiful productive apple trees were very plentiful. Such was the land of Judah.

I would like here to read a rather lengthy quote from McClintock and Strong. I think it will help us get a picture of the importance of wine in Israel.

Even before Israel took possession, the land of promise was a land of vineyards (Deuteronomy 6:11; 28:29; Numbers 13:23); and it is interesting to observe with what minuteness the divine legislator enacted rules and regulations for the culture of their vineyards, while the prospective owners still wandered in a burning desert (Exodus 22:5; 23:11; Leviticus 25:5, 11; Numbers 6:3; Deuteronomy 22:9; 23:24; 24:21). For this culture the portion of Judah was especially adapted, and in obtaining for his inheritance the hilly slopes of the south, the prophecy of his ancestor was fulfilled—he washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes (Genesis 49:11). Here, more than elsewhere, are to be seen on the sides of the hills the vineyards, marked by their watch-towers and walls, seated on their ancient terraces — the earliest and latest symbol of Judah.

The elevation of the hills and table-lands of Judah is the true climate of the vine, and at Hebron, according to the Jewish tradition, was its primeval seat. It was from the Judean valley of Eshcol "the torrent of the cluster" that the spies cut down the gigantic cluster of grapes. A vineyard on a "hill of olives" ("a horn the son of oil," (Isaiah 5:1), with the "fence," and "the stones gathered out," and "the tower in the midst thereof," is the natural figure which, both in the prophetic and evangelical records, represents the kingdom of Judah.

The vine was the emblem on the coins of the Maccabees, and in the colossal cluster of golden grapes which overhung the porch of the second Temple; and the grapes of Judah still mark the tombstones of

the Hebrew race in the oldest of their European cemeteries, at Prague (Stanley, *Sin. And Palest.* p. 162). Although from many of its most famous haunts the vine has disappeared — for example, from Engediboth in Southern Palestine and on the slopes of Lebanon there are specimens sufficient to vindicate the old renown of this "land of vineyards." "The grapes of Hebron are still considered the finest in the Holy Land. Bunches weighing from six to seven pounds are said to be by no means uncommon, and Sir Moses Montefiore said he saw one bunch at Hebron a yard long" Gadby speaks of supping at Beitshin, a village near Ptolemais, under a vine whose stem was about a foot and a half in diameter, and whose height was about thirty feet, which by its branches formed a hut upwards of thirty feet broad and long. "The clusters of these extraordinary vines," he adds, are so large that they weigh ten or twelve pounds, and the berries may be compared with our small plums." Strabo states that it is recorded that there are vines in Margiana whose stems are such as would require two men to span round, and whose clusters are two cubits long.

Now Margiana is the modern district of Ghilan, in Persia, south-west of the Caspian Sea, and the very country on whose hills the vine is believed to be indigenous. Nothing would be easier than to multiply testimonies relative to the large size of the grapes of Palestine, from the published accounts of travelers such as Elliot, Laborde, Mariti, Dandini (who expresses his surprise at the extraordinary size of the grapes of Lebanon), Russell, etc. We must be content with quoting the following extract from Kitto's *Physical Hist. of Palest.* p. 330, which is strikingly illustrative of the spies mode of carrying the grapes from Eshcol: "Even in our own country a bunch of grapes was produced at Welbeck, and sent as a present from the duke of Rutland to the marquis of Rockingham, which weighed nineteen pounds. It was conveyed to its destination more than twenty miles distant on a staff by four laborers, two of whom bore it in rotation." The greatest diameter of this cluster was nineteen inches and a half, its circumference four feet and a half, and its length nearly twenty-three inches. Beth-haccerem, "the house of the vine" (Jeremiah 6:1; Nehemiah 3:14), and

Abel-cerameh, "the plain of the vineyards," took their respective names from their vicinity to vineyards. Gophna (now Jifna), a few miles north of Jerusalem, is stated by Eusebius to have derived its name from its vines. (End quote.)

You see, when God called Israel a land of corn and wine, or better; grain and fruit, we see the truth of it in just the grapes alone. What a land! The NISBE says this: "The vintage season usually began in September and was a joyful occasion. Towns were often practically deserted as the people moved to temporary lodges in the vineyards."

So, let me take you to a vineyard in the Bible (read Is. 5:1-7). Now notice that the vineyard was on a hill. That, we have already seen, is common for a vineyard. A vineyard is a great way to use up hilly land. And this hill was a very fruitful hill. The NISBE says this, "Viticulture has always been prominent in the hill country of Samaria and Judea where the natural contours provide excellent terraces (cf. Is. 5:1). In early days the vine lay along the ground or trailed over walls and rocks (cf. Gen. 49:22), but later it was supported by poles or trellises (cf. 1 K. 4:25; Mic. 4:4; Zec. 3:10).

So the major parts of a vineyard were a piece of ground prepared for the vines and then the vines of course. A wall, to keep out predators. A tower to live in and keep a lookout over the vineyard. And a wine press. The wine press is where the grapes were placed after they were ripe and here they were trampled.

Let us look a little closer at this wine press. Turn to Joel 3:13 (read). In this verse we have the two parts of the winepress. There was an upper vat and a lower vat. This was hewn out of rock. The grapes were dumped in the upper vat and there they were trampled. From the upper vat the juice ran through a hole into the lower vat. This was the wine, the grape juice. Other fruits were processed like this as well, which we said was shaykawr.

So when it came to the vintage time, it was an exciting and very joyous time in Israel. Listen to

MaClintock and Strong on this: "The vintage, ... which formerly was a season of general festivity, as is the case more or less in all vine-growing countries, commences in September. The towns are deserted, and the people live among the vineyards ...in the lodges and tents The grapes were gathered with shouts of joy by the "grape-gatherers" (Jeremiah 25:30), and put into baskets (see 6:9). They were then carried on the head and shoulders, or slung upon a yoke, to the "winepress" (See "The Vine").

Listen again to the NISBE IV:1072, "The grape harvest and wine making were times of joyous celebration (cf. Isa. 16:10; Jer. 48:33), and the filling and overflowing of the wine vats represented the epitome of rich blessing (Joel 2:24). The fullness of blessing connected with the return from the Babylonian exile was symbolized by the possibility for everyone to 'buy wine and milk without price' (Is. 55:1). In Canticles the sweetness of love is said to be better than wine (1:2, 4; 4:10; 7:9)."

Turn with me to several passages of Scripture that bring out this joy of the vintage time (Judges 9:27; Jeremiah 25:30; Isaiah 16:10). So we get a picture of the joy of the land in vintage time. I imagine everybody in town knew somebody who had a vineyard. And arrangements would be made to help in exchange for grape juice, and thus everybody had a supply of grape juice for the season.

(Only if time.)

Now let me mention something here that will be important for later. When they turned the grapes into juice, they would first fill the vats with grapes. I imagine hundreds of pounds of grapes per vat. These grapes would press down on each other and they would begin to split and juice would begin to run out of the grapes before they even began trampling the grapes. And it was this first grape juice that made the 'good wine'. Every body wanted this first grape juice. This was the juice that had no pulp or lees in it.

In Deuteronomy, when we looked at the 'vine of Sodom' we had a reference to wine in the earlier part of the

chapter. The 'vine of Sodom' is spoken of after they had forsaken the Lord. The wine spoken of earlier was the wine they had when they lived in the Lord's blessing. So let's go to Deuteronomy 32. In verses 10-12 we see in what condition the Lord found these people originally (read). Then in 13-14 we see how the Lord blessed them (read). Every thing they had was the 'choicest'. Now what is the 'choicest' wine? It is the blood of the grapes, or as the KJV says, 'the pure blood of the grapes'. I think it is this first, special grape juice that it means here. They were so well to do, and had so much grape juice that they could sell the rest and drink only the best!

So I propose to you that after the vintage most Israeli homes had a new supply of wine. It would be very common to see large animal skins full of wine.

Concl: So we bring this message to a conclusion with this question: Why did I spend one message trying to give this picture of the land of Israel and the vintage in ancient times? Because precisely here lies a large factor that has created Christianity's Scanlon error. I listened to a taped message by David Hocking, a wonderful teacher of the Word of God. He held to complete abstinence from any alcoholic beverages. But he fell into the same error so many have fallen into and it is this: Grape juice could not be kept long before it fermented. So most of the grape juice was at least at some stage of fermentation. Here is what Hocking said: "Christians sometimes try to snow people on their views about wine. I have watched in 24 hours fermentation take place. So if you want me to say that there is no fermentation for months, find yourself another boy."

Listen to this view again as expressed by the "New Bible Dictionary", which says on page 1254, "The term 'new wine' does not indicate wine which has not fermented, for in fact the process of fermentation sets in very rapidly, and unfermented wine could not be available many months after the harvest...".

So consider this view that grape juice could not be kept long before it fermented, and then consider this: In Israel, during the vintage they made thousands upon thousands upon thousands of gallons of wine every year. I expect that anyone that could afford to buy wine had a supply of it. Anyone who had the opportunity to get some by

helping with the harvest did so. And if they had all this wine, and it could not be kept long without fermentation, then of course the Bible must speak of fermented wine when it gives its OK to its use.

On the other hand, if my view is correct that fermented wine comes from the vine of Sodom and is a poisonous drug, and they produced so many thousands of gallons of grape juice so that they could have it all year long; this creates the need for ways to preserve it without fermentation. It is this topic we want to consider in the next message.