

# Alcohol and Scripture

## Introduction

Does Scripture command the prohibition of alcohol? There are certainly those who advocate that it does but nowhere does Scripture expressly prohibit the consumption of alcohol?

There are two Hebrew words found in the Scriptures that concern us; 'shekar' and 'yayin'. Insofar as the Scriptures are concerned 'shekar' is generally used to portray 'strong drink' and 'yayin' wine. Contrary to what some think and teach, both terms can refer to alcoholic drink but first let us see how Strong defines these two terms;

'Shekar' (H7941)

*From [H7937](#); an intoxicant, that is, intensely alcoholic liquor: - strong drink, + drunkard (Shikor H7910), strong wine.*

'Yayin' (H3196)

*From an unused root meaning to effervesce; wine (as fermented); by implication intoxication: - banqueting, wine, wine.*

Of course fermented does not necessarily mean alcoholic and there is an opinion that 'yayin' refers only to non-alcoholic wine such as grapefruit juice but there is no Scriptural support for such an argument, quite the contrary, Scripture uses both 'shekar' and 'yayin' to describe alcoholic drink.

Whilst Scripture clearly condemns drunkenness (1Cor.6:10), it is wrong to teach that the Scriptures absolutely prohibit any consumption of alcohol.

## What the Tanakh (Old Testament) Says,

A very appropriate passage is Lev.10:8-9 which actually uses both words,

*YHWH said to Aharon, "Don't drink any wine (yayin) nor strong drink (shekar), neither you nor your sons with you, **when** you enter the tent of meeting, so that you will not die." (Lev.10:8-9).*

This passage is a good example: not only does it make use of both words; it also buries the prohibition argument. Here 'yayin' must refer to an alcoholic beverage, for why would YHWH prohibit the priests from consuming non-alcoholic wine before performing temple services? Also the passage only prohibits the temple priest from consuming alcohol immediately before he commences his priestly duties, by default he may drink alcohol when not on duty. If alcohol was totally prohibited there would be no need for this passage at all. A parallel to the above is found in Numbers when a person who takes a vow of dedication; the Nazarite Vow is instructed as follows,

*Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves for YHWH: He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine (yayin), or vinegar of strong drink, (shekar) neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine, from the kernels even to the husk. (Num.6:2-4).*

Here again both terms are used and the command to refrain from alcohol is again specific being restricted to the period of the vow only, Thus it is inferred that alcohol can be consumed at all other times if not then this passage also is unnecessary.

Whilst we could quote many other passages from the Tanakh let us leave with a look at Noach. It says of Noach that he was perfect and walked with Elohim (Gen.6:9), for this reason only he and his family were saved from the deluge. Yet this most perfect man consumed alcohol,

*And Noah, a man of the soil, began and planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. (Gen.9:20-21).*

Whilst drunkenness is unacceptable, it is clear that drinking alcohol was not a transgression of the Torah. Noach would never have made an alcoholic beverage if it was against Torah.

Finally there is a passage in Deuteronomy where Moshe is reminding the children of Israel that their tithes to YHWH must be offered at the temple in Yerushalayim but for those living a great distance from the city and unable to transport their tithe, especially if it is an animal, Moshe provides an alternative,

*'But if the distance is too great for you, so that you are unable to transport it, because the place where YHWH chooses to put His name is too far away from you: then, when YHWH your Elohim prospers you, you are to convert it into money, take the money with you, go to the place which YHWH your Elohim will choose and exchange the money for anything you want (to tithe) – cattle, sheep, wine(Yayin), other intoxicating liquor ( shekar), or anything you please. (Deut.14:24-26)*

Here Moshe includes alcohol for tithing.

### **What the Brit Hadashah (New Testament) Says,**

*"For he shall be great before YHWH, and shall drink no wine (oinos) and strong drink (sikera) at all. And he shall be filled with the Set-apart Spirit, even from his mother's womb. (Luke 1:15).*

The above verse refers to John the Immerser. Here the word wine is Strong's G3631 which is the Greek 'oinos' and correlates with the Hebrew 'yayin', whilst strong drink is a different word 'sikera.' Advocates for the prohibition of alcohol often amplify this verse implying that for one to be strong in YHWH and have the Holy Spirit alcohol is prohibited but the verse does not say any such thing. What the verse is saying is that YHWH has claimed this child and he is therefore in the same position as one who has taken a vow of dedication: for John however, it is to be a lifelong vow and therefore he must refrain from alcohol for the whole of his life.

*And do not be drunk with wine, in which is rebellion, but be filled with the Spirit. (Eph.5:18).*

Here again the prohibition is against drunkenness not the consumption of alcohol. Once again if alcohol was prohibited it would be impossible to get drunk and no need of Paul's statement. In 1Timothy the apostle Paul actually advocates the drinking of wine for health's sake,

*No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent ailments.(1Tim.5:23)*

It is quite obvious that the apostle is referring to alcohol; otherwise there would be no need for such a comment. We must remember that Paul was a very strong advocate of the Torah and would never encourage transgression.

We cannot close this subject without a comment on Mashiach's miracle; turning the water into wine. Many argue that this must have been none alcoholic wine but this is pure supposition and even if correct, we should never build a philosophy on a single reference particularly when there are several other verses associated with the subject.