

What the Bible Teaches About Drinking Wine



*Dr. Bruce Lackey
Assisted by: Dr. Bob C. Green*

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by
Dr. Bruce Lackey

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Bruce P. Lackey
3020 Northway Lane
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What the Bible Teaches About Drinking Wine

Some time ago, the newspapers around the country reported a famous preacher's comment about social drinking. He said, "I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism. I can't; Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That wasn't grape juice, as some of them try to claim."

Of course, many people have held this view, through the years, but it is a sad day when a man who is noted as a Bible preacher also espouses the same position. So, it is incumbent upon us to look into the Bible itself and see what the scriptures actually teach about the drinking of wine.

Another reason that such a study is so important is that, even though the drinking of hard liquor has decreased, wine consumption has grown by leaps and bounds over the past few years.

In order to arrive at the truth, we must consider the following facts from the Bible.

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1. The Bible warns against the misuse of words.

II Peter 2 tells us that, in the last days, we can expect people to twist the words of God. In verse one, Peter says, *"But there were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you."* Then, in verse three, he reveals what their method will be: *"And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you."*

Consider that phrase, *"feigned words."* The word *feigned* simply means "fabricated," or, made to mean what you want it to mean; misused; that is, using a good word, but with a wrong definition. Peter tells us that this method will be used by false teachers to make merchandise of people.

Verse 18 of the same chapter elaborates: *"For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh..."* The "great swelling words" would be words which have been expanded out of proportion, and have been made to mean something different from what was intended originally.

Those who are familiar with the methods of false cults can testify that this has long

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been their tactic. They take good Bible words, such as "born again ... salvation ... hell" and re-define them according to their own teaching. So, we can expect this method to be widely used.

2. To learn the meaning of words, we must obey 1 Corinthians 2:13.

The proper meaning of a word as it is found in the Bible can be learned only by comparing scripture with scripture. Sometimes we resort to the definitions that we find in the dictionary, but they may not always be biblical. We must remember that dictionary definitions have to do with the current usage of a word. But, by looking up a word in a concordance as it appears in several places in scripture, we can arrive at a true, biblical definition. That is the very principle which is taught in 1 Corinthians 2:13, when it says *"Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."* Because of this, a good concordance is invaluable in the study of the Word of God.

3. Some words in the Bible are generic (that is, general, not specific).

Genesis 1:29 gives us a good

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example: "meat." When we think of meat, we normally think of flesh: some type of ham, or beef, or fish; but when the Bible uses it, in many places it simply means food. In this verse, it obviously means food, not flesh, since it says that "*every herb bearing seed...every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed*" is meat! Verse 30 has the same meaning: "*I have given every green herb for meat.*"

The same idea is given in Leviticus 2, where God gave the law about the meat offering. Verse one says that it should be "*of fine flour.*" He is clearly talking about some kind of bread or cake that would be made, then have oil and frankincense poured upon it, after which they were to bake it and offer it before the Lord. The meaning is food, not flesh.

John 4:32 has the same usage, when the Lord Jesus said, "*I have meat to eat that ye know not of.*"

In like manner, corn is a generic word. Properly, what we call corn is maize, but our modern usage limits the meaning of the word. Originally, corn was a generic word for all kinds of grain. Several scriptures show this. Numbers 18:27 speaks of the "*corn of the threshing floor.*" As every farmer knows,

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you do not thresh corn, you pull it. Wheat, oats, and other grains are threshed, Thus, the Bible is using "corn" in the generic sense.

Job 24:24 mentions "*the tops of the ears of corn.*" Of course; the ears of maize do not grow on the tops of the stalks; he is referring to some kind of grain such as wheat or oats, where the kernels do grow on the top.

The most convincing verse is John 12:24, "*Except a corn of wheat ...*" I had difficulty with this for many years, because I did not understand that corn is a generic term. I thought of it only as maize. We would say, in the twentieth century, "except a grain of wheat."

Thus we have seen two generic words: meat and corn. We might also have mentioned beer, cidet; cereal; and many others.

I submit that the Biblical word *wine* is also generic. It means "**the juice of the grape,**" whether it be new or old, fermented or unfermented, alcoholic or non- alcoholic. Sometimes, it definitely means fresh grape juice. The following pages will give us clear instances in which we may determine its specific meaning.

4. The word "wine" sometimes means fresh juice.

Deuteronomy 11:14 says, *"I will give you the rain of your land in his due season; the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and the wine, and thine oil."* Everyone knows that a person does not gather alcoholic wine from the vine. Even if the grape rotted on the vine, the juice would be sour, acidic vinegar-wine, rather than alcoholic. Therefore, when this scripture speaks of gathering their wine, it means gathering fresh juice!

I Chronicles 31:5 is similar. *"The children of Israel brought in abundance the first fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey and of all the increase of the field."* The word *firstfruits* shows that they brought in the very first things that became ripe. Also, the verse begins with the words, *"As soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in ..."* There was no time for an aging process which would turn grape juice into alcoholic wine; he calls it wine!

Nehemiah 13:15 has the same meaning. *"In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath."* They were squeezing the juice

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from the grapes, yet he called it a wine press. Everyone knows that one does not get alcoholic wine from squeezing grapes!

Proverbs 3:10 promises, "... *thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*" If one could get alcoholic wine from newly picked grapes, people would not spend a lot of money building expensive distilleries and studying the best ways of wine-making. When scripture mentions wine coming from the wine-press, it obviously means fresh grape juice.

Isaiah 16: 10 is similar: "*The treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses.*"

Isaiah 65:8 goes even further: "*As the new wine is found in the cluster...*" Everyone knows that there is no alcoholic beverage while the juice is still in the grape! Wine is generic; here, it means fresh grape juice.

Jeremiah 48:33 has the same meaning: "*I have caused wine to fail from the winepresses.*"

I Timothy 5:23 seems to be a problem to many people, when Paul advises Timothy to "*drink no longer water, but a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.*" Many insist that here, the Bible gives the