

THE ONE-WINE THEORY  
AND  
BIBLE INTERPRETATION.

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IN illustrating the difficulties in Biblical interpretation occasioned by the theory that all Bible wines were alcoholic and hence intoxicating, it is only necessary to consider the usage of the two Hebrew words *yayin* and *shakar* as the same laws of interpretation apply to the Greek word *oinos* and the Chaldee term *lchamar* which apply to these two terms.

*Yayin* occurs in the Scriptures one hundred and forty one times. It first occurs in Genesis IX.21, and in this case, as in many others down through the various books of the Old Testament, it signifies fermented grape-juice or alcoholic wine. On this all authorities are agreed. But it does not follow from this that it always means such alcoholic wine.

The idea of some that in early times the juice of the grape and the juices of other fruits were not considered suitable for drinking until they had fermented is a most gratuitous and

foolish assumption. Not only has the Creator made the various fruits we eat, agreeable to the taste but their delicious juices are pleasant drinks also. Indeed the sweet sap of various trees, as well as the natural juices of fruits are used as refreshing drinks at the present day. It was doubtless so also in the times of the Scripture writers, and as they did not fully understand the chemical changes that occurred when their drinks fermented, it is not surprising that they called them by the same names before fermentation and afterwards. And this is what seems to be evident respecting the usage of the term *yayin* in the Hebrew Scriptures. It was used to signify the unfermented grape-juice and the same after fermentation as well.

Again, experience taught the Hebrews that the sweet grape-juice was both a refreshing and a healthful drink; one whose use could be approved, and so we have *yayin* in many places spoken of with manifest approbation. Experience also taught the Hebrews that the sweet juice after fermentation would cause intoxication and excited to all sorts of evil, or in either state when mixed with potent drugs it would intoxicate and stupify, and so we find *yayin* referred to with notes of warning and disapprobation of its use. Thus we have in the

Bible *yayin* spoken of in two very different ways, indicating that the grape-wine referred to must have been in the two cases quite different in its nature and effects.

The term *shakar* is used twenty-three times in the Bible, and refers to drinks made from the juices of other fruits than the grape, from palm-sap and from grain. Like *yayin* also, it is spoken of in quite different ways and manifestly referred to drinks both in an unfermented and fermented state. It may also have been more commonly mixed with various drugs than was the case with *yayin*. It is generally translated "strong drink" in the English Bible. It is evident, however, that in some places this translation conveys an entirely erroneous sense.

Now that the above representation of the usage of the two terms *yayin* and *shakar* is not a mere hypothesis, but is a correct representation of the facts in the case, such as a scientific interpretation of the Scriptures requires, will appear from the few following examples, cited to show the insuperable difficulties to which the erroneous one-wine theory leads in trying to harmonise and thus satisfactorily interpret the language of the inspired writers.

Compare the *yayin* of Exodus XXIX. 40 and the *shakar* of Numbers XXVIII. 7 with the *yayin*

and *shakar* of Leviticus X. 9. In the first two passages the *yayin* and *shakar* stand for the materials used in the Drink-offering. As the authorities teach us that the Drink-offering was never offered alone, but with the Food-offering, formed simply a united offering to Jehovah, it follows that the same laws applied to the two parts of the offering, and as most of the Food-offerings was eaten by the priests, so most of the Drink-offerings was drunk by them. Thus in the *Speaker's Commentary*, vol. I, p. 502, it is stated "The whole of the Meat-offerings and Drink-offerings, with the exception of what was burnt, or poured, on the Altar, fell to the lot of the priests. Lev. II, 8." Also in *Gospel Temperance* by Rev. J. M. Van Buren, p. 217, he quotes the statement of "Ambrose" (the late J. A. Wight, D.D.) that "wines were commanded to be drunk." But in Leviticus X.9 the priests were forbidden by "a perpetual statute" to drink fermented *yayin* or *shakar* when they entered the Tabernacle in their turns to perform their official duties. The *yayin* and *shakar* of the Drink-offerings, therefore, which the priests must drink within the precinct around the Tabernacle where they also must partake of the Food-offerings, must have been different in nature from the "wine and strong drink"

which they were strictly prohibited from drinking on entering the sacred enclosure. Thus we see that the one-wine theory, which would require us to believe that all the *yayin* and *shakar* of the Scriptures were fermented and hence intoxicating wines, cannot be true. It makes the statements of Scripture incompatible with one another and leaves us no rational principle on which to harmonise the Divine injunctions.

Compare again the *yayin* and *shakar* of Deuteronomy XIV.26 with the *yayin* and *shakar* of Proverbs XX. 1. In Proverbs we are told "*yayin* is a mocker, and *shakar* is raging," or, as in the Revised Version, "*shakar* is a brawler." It is agreed by all that the drinks referred to in this passage were fermented. And that alcoholic drinks are treacherous in their nature and injurious to those who use them is very evident.

In Deuteronomy, the inspired lawgiver promised the Israelites, in their future residence in Canaan, that those distant from the Tabernacle, for the sake of convenience, could turn the wines at their homes into money by selling them when they went up at the annual festivals, and then buy wines at the place of meeting and use them as freely as they liked. Now can we suppose that the wines he referred

to, and the traffic in which and the use of which he sanctioned, were the same in nature as those which the writer of Proverbs pronounced to be so very evil and the use of which he warned all to avoid? How can the words of the two writers be harmonised if the wines Moses referred to, like those of which Solomon spoke, were intoxicating drinks?

Take still again the mixed *yayin* of Proverbs IX. 2, 5, and of Solomon's Song VIII. 2 as compared with the mixed *yayin* of Psalms LXXV. 8 and Proverbs XXIII. 30. Can we suppose that the wine which Wisdom had mingled (IX. 2, 5,) and the "spiced wine" or "sweet wine" of the Bride (VIII. 2,) were of the same nature as the mixed wine in Jehovah's "cup of malediction" in the Psalm, or the "fermented *yayin* made stronger by drugs" referred to in the passage in Proverbs? On what sound principles of interpretation shall we depend to harmonise these conflicting representations, if we consider Wisdom's *yayin* which she has mingled and of which she invites all to partake, and the "spiced *yayin*" which the Bride prepared for her Beloved, as intoxicating in their character like the mixtures spoken of in the other passages?

Finally turn to the *yayin* of Isaiah LV. 1 and contrast it with the *yayin* of Proverbs XXIII.

31, 32. In Isaiah *yayin* is the emblem of saving grace, of which all are invited to buy and partake without money and without price. It is the emblem of present and eternal blessing, and of only blessing. In it there is nothing to fear or avoid, but it is the sum of all good for us to strive after and enjoy. What devout and intelligent interpreter of God's words, therefore, can believe that the figure used in this verse refers to the same intoxicating *yayin* as that mentioned in Proverbs, on which we are warned not to look, and which we are told will at last "bite like a serpent and sting like an adder"? God's inspired Word is eternal truth and is self-consistent throughout. The figurative representations found in it as well as its plain declarations will all harmonise when rightly interpreted. Misinterpretation alone will show contradictions in the various figures of speech or plain statements of different writers or of the same writer. Therefore a correct understanding of the language of the Bible will always show harmony of teaching throughout the entire book.

Enough has now been said to illustrate the incongruities that arise in attempting to interpret Scripture language respecting wines on the hypothesis that the *yayin*, *shakar*, *khamar* and *oinos*, always signified fermented drinks. And

more might be added to show that this view makes the Scriptures give the highest possible sanction to the manufacture, sale and use of alcoholic wines and arrays them in antagonism to the doctrine of total abstinence and to all prohibition of the manufacture of and traffic in fermented drinks. Indeed "Ambrose," cited before, wrote his article, first printed in the New York *Evangelist*, in opposition to the proposal to adopt constitutional prohibition in Michigan, the state in which he lived. But the present purpose in writing is fulfilled in calling attention to the fact that, simply on the ground of the proper principles of interpreting Scripture, as the one-wine theory of Bible wines makes the teachings of the Bible on the subject contradict one another, the theory must be rejected as false, and the two-wine theory which harmonises all the Scripture statements adopted as correct. Admitting that the Scriptures are of Divine authority, the interpreter's duty manifestly is to give an harmonious explanation of their meaning and not to interpret them as self-contradictory.

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