Tasting Guide

The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine: A Biblical Theology of Alcohol

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Thank you for pre-ordering my new book, *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine*! After working on it for over ten years, I'm delighted to be at this stage in which I can provide you with some bonus content. The present tasting guide is both intended to whet your appetite for the book and to provide some guidance on how you might try to bring some of the book to life (on your palate at least). This present guide could work well as an outline for a tasting event with friends, perhaps as part of a gathering of a book club while debriefing and discussing the book's contents. Or, alternatively, the tastings could be spread out over as many gatherings as desired.

With each of the eight individual tastings below, I am trying to help facilitate our ability to appreciate the variety of fermented beverages mentioned in Scripture. The tastings will enhance the book through experiential knowledge. By exposure to the variety of drinks mentioned throughout Scripture through tasting diverse beverages, I hope to highlight one of the main emphases of my book which is that there is also *a variety of theological symbolism* associated with fermented beverages in Scripture.

It should be noted that each of the tastings that I've chosen for this guide are rooted in analogy and approximation. Nothing in this guide will be exactly like the ancient, biblical beverages that I discuss. This is not simply due to differences between ancient and contemporary *products* (i.e., grape varietals), *processes* (i.e., equipment, methods, additives), and *palates* (i.e., desirable flavors and other characteristics), although all of that is certainly true. The most important difference is with respect to *perception*, as Paul Lukacs rightly stated in his book, *Inventing Wine* (page 31), since wine-making has become such a known science that moderns have lost the ancient enchantment with wine. In the ancient world, they did not fully understand how fermentation worked, and so it was imbued with divine qualities. For ancient Israel, in particular, this meant that wine was a gift from God. Psalm 104.14–15 (NRSVue) states, "You can the grass to grow for the cattle and plants for people to cultivate, to bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine and bread to strengthen the human heart." Indeed, as this passage makes clear, all agricultural produce was viewed as divine provision, but for fermented beverages this was doubly true because they required an extra touch from above. And so, as we proceed with this tasting by analogy, we can be certain that the wines that we are tasting can only approximate their ancient counterparts mentioned in Scripture by so much—there is a limit on how much our *products*, *processes*, and *palates* cohere with theirs. But we can aim to come in closer alignment with respect to our common *perception* as we can use this tasting as a space to cultivate a posture of generosity and thankfulness for the variety of gifts that we have received from God.

With that caveat, we can now proceed with the tasting; cheers and enjoy!

(1) Dealcoholized or Non-Alcoholic Wine (or Welch's Grape Juice)

The place I want to start is actually not with an alcoholic beverage at all, but rather dealcoholized or non-alcoholic wine (or even Welch's Grape Juice).

What to get: Any bottle of dealcoholized wine that you can find from your local bottle shop will do. If they don't have dealcoholized wine, a non-alcoholic wine is fine (but don't go for a "low-alcohol wine" for this opening tasting). The color or varietal of the wine don't really matter in this case. If it's too tricky hunting down dealcoholized or non-alcoholic wine, Welch's Grape Juice can also work for our purposes. My recommendation for this part of the tasting, if you can acquire it, is the dealcoholized wine below:

Noughty Rouge Dealcoholized Red Wine – Syrah

Reflections: The reason we're starting with dealcoholized wine is because I want us to begin by thinking about how wine is made, which gives us an opportunity to cover some of the basics of fermentation. In brief, fermentation is a natural process in which yeast converts sugar into alcohol, which gives off carbon dioxide as a byproduct. In fact, everything that grapes need to ferment is present with the grape itself. Obviously, grapes contain sugar, but yeast also clings to the skins. If you've ever been to a vineyard and seen grapes on the vine, you've likely noticed the filmy substance on the grape skins—that's the yeast. Because of this, grapes can even ferment on the vine itself, especially if there's a break in the skin (which happens commonly from birds and insects). Once the grapes are crushed at harvest time (which occurs once a year in late summer or early autumn), the sugary must (as the juice is called at this stage) is brought into contact with the yeast and the fermentation process is underway. Wine-making was far and away the primary goal of cultivating grapevines and was the best way to preserve the crop (the other option was to turn them into raisins). Of course, people ate grapes at harvest time, but the amount of produce, and their short shelf life, meant that the vast majority of the crop be turned into wine. What this means is that if you wanted to drink "grape juice," you'd only be able to do so at harvest time. Any other time of the year and the juice would have fermented into wine. And the window for drinking "grape juice" is actually very short because it doesn't take long for it to ferment either. The presence of alcohol can be detected quite quickly, even if the full fermentation process may extend weeks or months (depending on conditions, the ambient yeasts involved, etc.). For this reason, I don't think we should make a distinction like "unfermented" and "fermented" when we're talking about ancient wine. Instead, we should speak of *fermenting* and *fermented* wine.

But of course, this isn't the Bible's own language. There are different terms for wine, but the Bible doesn't quite make this distinction, nor does it reflect much of our contemporary classification system either. The term that most resembles grape

must in Hebrew is *asis*, which only occurs five times in the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible). It occurs twice in Joel, and then once a piece in Song of Songs, Isaiah, and Amos respectively (Song 8.2; Isaiah 49.6; Amos 9.13; Joel 1.5; 3.18). *Asis* likely refers to grape must because it is cognate with the Hebrew verb for treading (*asas*) meaning that *asis* is the must from the freshly-trodden grapes. The example of *asis* in Isaiah is quite interesting because, I contend, it helps us to identify that this term, although it comes closest to referring to grape must, is still able to intoxicate and cause drunkenness – "and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine (*asis*)" (Isa. 49.26, NRSVue) – reinforcing the idea that grape must is *fermenting* rather than in a static state of being *unfermented*.

We might assume that grape must is in view elsewhere with biblical references to "new wine" (*tirosh* in the Hebrew, or *oinos neos* in the NT). But the "newness" in view in those instances is not newly pressed/trodden juice, but rather the wine made from the most recent vintage. It's fermented, but fresher than previous vintages, the latter of which have been in storage (and that distinction can matter quite a bit, as we will see later in the tasting).

All of this means that the dealcoholized or non-alcoholic wine (or even grape juice) that you are enjoying for this initial part of the tasting is completely unnatural. Welch's, for example, is a relatively recent invention in the 19th century by a methodist named Thomas Bramwell Welch who wanted an alternative to wine for communion, made possible after the discovery of yeast in the seventeenth century, and both the subsequent development of pasteurization and the ability to refrigerate through ice boxes in the nineteenth century. Dealcoholized wine, though, is different from standard grape juice because the grape must is allowed to ferment first before the alcohol is subsequently removed through various methods. As a result, dealcoholized wine is less cloying than Welch's (and most other non-alcoholic wines that don't have a fermentation process), since more of the sugar is eaten up by the yeast. Thus, we start with these wines and juices to be clear on what *we're not talking about* with respect to wine in the Bible—we aren't talking about something that is "unfermented," as some conservative Christians might claim. The most common version of this view is known as The Two Wine theory, which I critique directly in chapter 2 of my book. Making wine or grape juice non-alcoholic is a lot of work, requires modern equipment and an understanding of modern science, and most importantly has to be fueled by concerns about the intoxicating effects of fermented beverages that ancient people did not have to the same extent. When the ancients did show some concern about intoxication, the most common way to address it wasn't abstinence from wine, but rather to dilute it, which brings us to the next part of the tasting.

(2) Diluted Wine (Three-Parts Water to One-Part Wine)

For this next tasting, I want us to think about the dilution of wine in the ancient world, and we're going to do a little bit of an experiment. To facilitate that, please take a 750ml bottle of wine that is around 14.5% (or higher) and pour it into a gallon-sized pitcher (or similarly-sized receptacle). Then take the same bottle and fill it up with water and pour it into the pitcher three times. The result will be 3 liters (just shy of a gallon) of diluted wine—three-parts water to one-part wine.

What to get: Try for a wine around 14.5% ABV or higher, just don't use anything too fancy for this! Here's a bottle that would work just fine:

Earl Stevens Sweet Red

Reflections: We've probably all heard something about diluted wine as a practice in the ancient world, but what's not so clear to people is whether everyone did it, how much water was used, and whether the end result meant that the diluted wine had negligible levels of alcohol content.

Dilution was a cultural practice that some people did and others did not. The Romans tended to find it barbaric to drink wine "neat" (that is, without mixing in some water). Of course, they thought drinking wine without water was barbaric this because some individuals and some groups had reputations for not doing it (such as the Scythians and the Germans). Surprisingly, ancient Israel, prior to Hellenization at least, appears to have looked down upon dilution, such that Isaiah could even use it as a metaphor for apostasy. The signs of the corruption of "the faithful city" (Isa. 1.21) is conveyed through the following images: "Your silver has become dross; your win is mixed with water" (Isa. 1.22, NRSVue). So dilution was common, but it was not practiced by everyone, and possibly not even ancient Israel.

But even when it was practiced, people didn't always dilute in the same way. When dilution ratios are explicitly described in ancient texts, we find all sorts of possibilities. Sometimes the ratio is 1:1 (meaning one-part water to one-part wine) or 2:1, but the most common seems to be 3:1. But still, other ratios were used. The 3:1 ratio is the one that I've chosen for us for illustrative purposes, not because wine was always consumed this way. At Greek *symposia* the symposiarch would decide the ratio for the whole group for that evening, since the water and wine would be mixed into a common vessel called a krater and then distributed to everyone for consumption. But at Roman *convivia*, by contrast, the mixing would happen directly in each person's glass, allowing for even greater variation in mixing ratios.

In the New Testament we can assume that diluting wine was more common than in the Old Testament as a result of increased Hellenization, but we shouldn't take that to mean that dilution was uniform or consistent in any way. References in the Bible to "unmixed wine" can be found, but that should not be taken to mean that "wine" without qualification implies dilution. Similarly, references to "mixed wines" in the Bible may refer to dilution, but, as I argue in chapter 3 of my book, other admixtures other than water are likely in view. One notable exception is the reference to the wine mixed in the cup of Babylon the Great in the book of Revelation. Given this figure's symbolic representation of the Roman Empire, as most New Testament scholars affirm, it is noteworthy that her wine is mixed directly in her cup (Rev. 18.6) in keeping with Roman customs of dilution.

The main misconception about dilution relates to alcohol levels of the wine, both before and after dilution. It is often thought that wines in the ancient world needed to be diluted because they were stronger than wines today. This is simply not true. Yeast has a natural limit on the alcohol it can produce, with some yeast strains being able to handle more than others. But wines in the ancient world would not often be much stronger than the wine chosen for this example. Rarely would wines reach higher than 15%.

After dilution, though, it was not the case that the diluted wine had negligible levels of alcohol. As you drink the 3:1 diluted wine, you'll notice that it is very easy to drink—*perhaps too easy*. Ostensibly diluting wine would weaken the effects of alcohol, which it undoubtedly did for many. That is, unless they continued to drink it throughout the evening. Despite the way that dilution was seen as being promoted by virtues like temperance, there are plenty of descriptions of drunkenness to highlight that this wasn't always successful. But stalling intoxication wasn't the only reason to dilute. Dilution would clearly be beneficial for social gatherings. Hosts could now have more wine to serve, and more wine meant that people could stay longer and continue to consume the wine over the course of a Greek symposium or Roman convivium because it was so "sessionable" (as people describe low ABV drinks today). But sessionable should not be equated with negligible. If you think the diluted wine that you're drinking now at the three-to-one ratio has a negligible alcohol level, you'd be mistaken. This diluted wine, which was previously 14.5% (or above), is actually still stronger than many cask ales hovering around 3.5% ABV that you'd find at a British pub. In the US, some States held onto post-prohibition laws that limited the sale of alcoholic drinks in grocery stores and gas stations to 3.2%, but most of these States have undone these laws, including Utah, with the only State still holding out (for now at least) being my home State of Minnesota. This means that I couldn't buy the diluted wine you're drinking from my local Kowalski's grocery store across the street from me. You know it's an outdated law when the Red, Mormon State of Utah is more progressive on alcohol than the Blue State of Minnesota! But regardless, the wine that you're drinking presently is not negligible—certainly not to Minnesotan legislators.

(3) Grape Kombucha (low ABV)

In the third part of our tasting, we turn to kombucha as a way for us to think about the storage of wine and biblical references to vinegar/sour wine.

What to get: You could either go for what's called a "Hard" Kombucha made with yeast strains that produce a higher ABV, which tend to be around 5% ABV or higher, like this one:

Boochcraft Kombucha – Grape, Coriander, Anise

Or, alternatively, you could go for a Kombucha with low, residual alcohol levels, like this one:

GT's Classic Kombucha – Divine Grape

Each of the Kombuchas that I've recommended here are made with grapes, which should be preferred for this part of the tasting. If a Grape Kombucha with some alcohol content can't be found, go for any Kombucha with residual alcohol. If only non-alcoholic Kombucha is available, that will be fine, but aim for one made with grapes (if possible).

Reflections: If wine is exposed to oxygen, either intentionally or through poor storage, it will turn into vinegar. But this is a process that takes some time, and depending on when it is consumed, it may have only been partially completed. And this isn't something that only happens with wine, it can happen with any other fermented beverage as the alcohol oxidizes and converts to acetic acid. A lot of wines that weren't tightly sealed in wineskins, amphorae, or other vessels would show signs of oxidization. In other words, there'd be some acetic acid alongside the alcohol. The wine would be sour or vinegary. If the wine was exposed to oxygen long enough, the whole thing could be vinegar. Roman soldiers were known for drinking *posca*, a mix of vinegar and water, which likely stemmed from their inability to store wine well while traveling and campaigning, and something like *posca* was probably what was offered to Jesus on the cross in the Passion Narratives of the Four Gospels. Whether one was aiming to make vinegar as a sauce, preservative, or even as a beverage, it would often have

residual alcohol—in other words, you'd have wine-y vinegar. So for this part of the tasting we are trying a grape-based Kombucha. Not because the Bible ever talks about Kombucha, but because the vinegary flavor of Kombucha, whether in "hard" form or with residual alcohol, serves as a helpful illustration of this.

When we read about "vinegar" in the Bible, we may think anachronistically of the vinegar we have in our pantry that has less than 0.5% ABV as being more or less what the Bible means by the term too. But rather than assume that each instance of vinegar refers to something that has arrived at a level of stasis after acetification has fully taken place, we should recognize that it may be at various stages in that process. This observation explains why the Nazarite vow in Numbers 6, which prohibits the consumption of fermented beverages while the Nazarites have undertaken their temporary vow, also prohibits the consumption of vinegar (Num. 6.3). The reason is because there could still be alcohol in it. The same goes for why the Nazarites were meant to abstain from grapes—they can ferment on their own. The text isn't calling for the Nazarites to boycott all grape products because of a guilt-by-association with wine, but rather because, like wine, both grapes and vinegar, depending on the state they're in, can contain the ability to intoxicate.

It was probably the case that most wines in the ancient world had a little bit of a tart taste from the results of acetification, especially if they've been stored and aged for some time (hence, once again, why the Bible would show interest in fresh, new wine from the most recent vintage that hasn't had as much time to be accidentally exposed to oxygen). To really ensure that this didn't happen, tree resins would be used, which brings us to our next section in the tasting.

(4) Greek Retsina

To address the use of resin in ancient wines we're going to try a Greek Retsina next.

What to get: The most widely distributed Retsina (that I've come across) is the following:

Retsina of Attiki, Kourtaki

If you can find better Retsina, go for it, but the goal here is really just to consider the contribution of resin to the flavor of wine. Any Greek Retsina will do.

Reflections: The best way to ensure a tight seal on the vessels storing wine is to seal them with resins or pitch. Although this is not something that the biblical texts ever talk about, the material evidence of wine in the ancient world reveals the ubiquity of resin. Patrick McGovern, who is an archeologist and chemist at the University of Pennsylvania who runs their Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and is a leading expert on ancient fermented beverages (and who graciously wrote an endorsement for my book, I'm thrilled to say!), writes about how whenever they find the tell-tale signs that a vessel was used to store wine (i.e., tartaric acid) they also find residue from resin.

While resins would help to keep wines from oxidizing and thus turning into vinegar (or at least becoming tart and vinegary through the presence of acetic acid), resins would also impart their own flavor to the wine. Given this, Paul Lukacs points out in *Inventing Wine* that, despite how strange this might sound, ancient wines would taste more like "tree sap" than fruit (page 7).

Some people would also add resins to wine as flavoring agents and not simply use it as a sealant. This may have been done at times simply because people quite liked the flavor, or because it did a good job of covering up off-flavors or masking the signs of oxidization. With the Retsinas that we have in our glass now, resin is added as a flavor enhancer rather than residually affecting the flavor of the wine when used to seal vessels. But we are dealing with the moderate use of it because it offers a distinct and desirable experience. Remember we're only focused on approximation with these tastings. The Retsina that we're trying for this part of the tasting is designed for the modern palate—palates that, for the most part, aren't used to the presence of resin in wine. But modern Retsinas contain enough of the distinctive resinous flavor to help us discern an approximation of what ancient wines tasted like. Greek Retsina's are usually white, but we should imagine that the resinous quality pervaded all styles of wine in antiquity. And we should also assume that the resinous flavor was often far less tame back then. This means that that distinctive piney flavor that you've likely not experienced before in wine (unless you've had a Retsina), would be found in virtually all wines in the ancient world, and even more so.

One notable example where resin is used as a flavor enhancer in the Bible is when the Roman soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh just prior to his crucifixion in Mark's Gospel (Mark 15.23). This is not to be confused with the sour wines offered to him while on the cross, but if you struggle to keep it all straight, you're in good company with readers of the Gospels ever since they were penned. Rather than wine mixed with myrrh acting as a sedative, as so many interpreters have assumed, myrrh's association with wine made the mixture a bit more opulent (as McGovern notes in his book, *Ancient Wine*), suggesting that the soldiers – who were there to kill him let's remember – were extending the regal mockery of "the King of the Jews" already pervasive in the scene. Or, if they used too much myrrh, it could have been that they were trying to harm him, since it would make the wine smell like "gasoline" (as Koskenniemi, Nisula, and Toppari contend in their *JSNT* article from 2005), which, again, because they're soldiers tasked with torturing and killing Jesus, should not surprise us (and Matthew calls the admixture poisonous—"gall" in Matt 27.34).

This also reminds us once again why biblical writers would want to highlight the fresh quality of "new wine" from the most recent vintage. Not only would it have had less of an opportunity to oxidize compared to aged wine, it also could be less likely to have been exposed to, or to need, the addition of resins. Outside the Bible we have writers who comment on the fact that not everyone enjoyed the taste of resin in wine. Some wrote about how resin was over-used by certain people, such as what Strabo says about the Gauls (*Geogr*. 4.6.2). Others, like Pliny the Elder, commented on how they best wines were the ones that didn't need any additives whatsoever (*Nat*. 14.9.74), and wines that never came in contact with pitch/resin (*Nat*. 13.24.46). Indeed, there was a sense that some wines were better than others, which leads to the notion that Jesus miraculously made superior wine at the wedding of Cana, raising the question further for the next part of the tasting—what did ancient people think was good wine?

(5) Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough (or Pinot Grigio)

For this next part the goal is to taste a wine that has very little color at all. The more it resembles water in color and clarity the better. To make this more fun, serve the wine in a water pitcher and tell everyone (with a wink and a wry smile) that we're taking a water break before the next tasting.

What to get: A clear Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough, New Zealand would be perfect, like this one:

In the Clear, Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc

If you can't find a Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, other Sauv Blancs will do for the purposes of this illustration as long as they're fairly clear (but they most likely won't be better to drink because Marlborough is king when it comes to Sauv Blanc). Similarly, you could go for a Pinot Grigio for this, but they're not as good as Sauv Blanc (in my opinion), especially Sauv Blancs from Marlborough. As long as the white wine looks like water, it should work. What you definitely don't want for this round is a white wine that's yellow/gold in color, which includes a lot of wines that have had a bit of barrel aging (which will usually affect the color), such as most Chardonnays.

Reflections: When Jesus turned water into wine at Cana in John 2, we're told that it was better than the wine they were drinking previously (indeed, what they had polished off previously—which presumably means they didn't hate it). "You have kept the good wine until now," the master of the banquet says (John 2.10, NRSVue). A lot of modern talk about ancient wine being a "necessity" obscures the significance of Jesus making wine that was better than what had just been enjoyed to the dregs. Indeed, wine wasn't strictly-speaking a necessity either for caloric intake or as an alternative to water. Did wine provide calories? Yes, of course. Was the water often bad? Yes, of course. But to stress those points is to miss the fact that *wine was an artistry and a craft*. Ancient people appreciated some wines and not others; there were good wines, and then there were better ones.

But what did ancient people living in the first century CE think was good wine? Modern anachronisms creep in so quickly at this point. Surely – we can imagine the thinking proceeding like this – Jesus must have made a full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon, but if it wasn't that, it must have been some other kind of red wine since everyone who *really* fancies their wine knows that red wine is superior to white wine. Of course, this is a caricature of today's wine-drinkers, and it also isn't representative of ancient wine-drinkers either.

There's a lot of evidence that white wines were preferred in certain corners of the ancient world at the time of Christ due in part to the fact that they were rare and more difficult to make (since you have to separate the skins from the must to achieve a higher level of clarity). The famous Roman wine that the ancients lauded, Falernum, was most likely a white wine. A wine shop in Herculaneum (one of the two major cities destroyed by Vesuvius in 79 CE) reveals that four kinds of wine were on offer—judging by the different colors of the wine jugs—and the one that was most expensive was a white wine. The famed wine of Lebanon (cf. Hosea 14.7) was most likely made with muscat grapes, as Patrick McGovern notes in his book, *Ancient Wine*, and thus lighter in color. Even in Roman Palestine, there's evidence of grapes being used for white wine, thanks in part to the work of Shivi Drouri and his team, who go foraging and discover wild, indigenous grapes that they then discern through DNA testing have claim to antiquity in some cases.

Given the noted preference, by at least some ancient wine-drinkers, for white wine, could it be that the good wine at Cana was actually white? This would cohere with the ancient preference just noted, and the rarity and difficulty associated with white wine could suggest that it was more miraculous than if it were red wine. But I would add that the way that the text is written lends itself to the idea that the wine was likely white, since there's nothing visually discernable about the miracle. In other words, I think the wine probably looked a lot like the water.

Now, to be clear, I'm not saying that Jesus performed a party trick like an amateur magician in which he added water to vessels that previously held the wine so that the residue of the red wine mixed with the water to create something pinkish that everyone mistook for wine. The stone jars at Cana were most likely vessels used for drinking water, not wine, being vessels that were ritually pure because they were made of stone (as opposed to vessels used solely for ritual handwashing, as has so often been assumed), which Yonatan Adler has helped to demonstrate in his book, *The Origins of Judaism*. In fact, there's nothing about the wine being red at all in the text of John. To be sure, any time the color of wine is mentioned or alluded to in the Bible, it is always red. If the wine at Cana was white, it would be the only real counterexample. In paintings, children's Bibles, cartoons, and Jesus films, the wine at Cana is always presented as red, and the miracle, or the "sign" as John calls it, is always noticed straight away. Indeed, we're primed to hear the word "wine" and immediately think "red wine." But in John the miracle is detected in the tasting, not beforehand.

So, as odd as it may sound to us today, the wine at Cana could have been white. And thus, we are drinking a white wine (preferably a good Sauv Blanc from New Zealand), which is nice and clear in addition to being super tasty. Of course, I don't think Jesus made a Sauv Blanc at Cana, but here we are trying one not least to point out that white wines can be good and complex, and to help the possibility of the wine at Cana being white stick out in our minds.

(6) Midas Touch from Dogfish Head (Ancient Ale series).

With this portion of the tasting we now shift over to beer. Like wine, beer also has ancient pedigree, and certain cultures that neighbored Israel were far greater beer-drinkers than wine-drinkers, like the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians. But, I contend, Israel was also comprised of beer-drinkers.

What to get: For this we don't want to showcase any style of beer. The best options are those from my favorite brewery, Dogfish Head, who have teamed up with Patrick McGovern, "the Indiana Jones of ancient ales and extreme fermented beverages," as he's been called, the scholar I mentioned earlier when talking about Retsinas. They have an entire line-up of Ancient Ales in a series by that name. None of their beers are themselves directly related to the kind of beer that would have been mad or consumed in ancient Israel, unfortunately. But this series provides the best example on the market of historically- and archeologically-sensitive beers. That said, I recommend Midas Touch, which is a beer based on evidence from the tomb of King Midas (in ancient Turkey/Türkiye) and the feast made for his burial in the middle of the first millennium BCE:

Dogfish Head Brewery - Midas Touch (Ancient Ales series)

This beer is made with grain, grapes, and honey as sugar sources, so it's a bit of a hybrid beverage that resembles beer, wine, and mead all at once. It's also made from spices and herbs that were prominent in that region, most notably saffron, to give it a distinctive flavor. Midas Touch is deceptively boozy for a beer, being around 9% ABV. If you can't find this or something else from their Ancient Ales series (e.g., Chateau Jiahu), then another option would a Gruit-style beer, like Fraoch Heather Ale by Williams Brothers or Weekapaug Gruit by Cambridge Brewing. If none of these are available, a beer style that uses minimal or no hops would be preferred, since hops weren't used in beer during biblical times.

Reflections: The reason why we're sampling a beer now is because the variety of fermented beverages in the biblical text didn't simply include grape-based drinks, but also grain-based drinks as well. Anywhere you can make bread, you can make beer.

But ancient beer was quite different to modern beers. For one, they didn't use hops (and today many styles, like IPAs showcase the versatility of hops). Most beers were probably between 2–5% depending on the ambient yeasts involved and depending on whether any additional sources of sugar (like grapes, dates, or honey) were added in the process (which could also, incidentally, provide other sources of yeast). Ancient beer would often be chunky, with grain husks and chunks of soggy bread often still in the beer. As such, ancient beer was typically consumed through straws, usually made of reed, with metal or bone tips that acted as filters to stop the solids and allow the beer to come through. Many ancient depictions

of beer-drinking display beer as a communal event in which several people sit around a large vessel and drink from straws. So, if we were really going for historic authenticity, we'd have the beer in communal jugs and everyone would drink from straws. But, once again, we're just going for approximations. I'm not sure how many of you would be up for that kind of experiential knowledge!

It is actually a disputed point to claim that the Bible mentions beer, but I argue that the Hebrew term, *shekar*, which was translated as "strong drink" in the King James Translation, is actually the term for beer. Because *shekar* is cognate to the verb for getting drunk, *shakar*, the King James translators were reflecting a view that *shekar* is a general term for an intoxicant. For most of us today, I'd venture to guess that a term like "strong drink" evokes images of distilled spirits like whisky. But distillation wasn't developed until the medieval period. Thus, whatever *shekar* was, it couldn't have been stronger or more intoxicating than wine, because the yeast would have a natural limit. Today, if scholars want to identify *shekar* with a specific kind of beverage, the suggestions are usually that it is made from grapes, dates, or grain. I'll save my main arguments for the book itself, but it doesn't seem likely to me that Israel's neighbors would be known for drinking beer, but somehow Israel wouldn't be. Indeed, is worth noting that the Hebrew word *shekar* comes from the Akkadian word *šikaru*, which was the main term for beer. There is also archeological evidence for beer consumption, such as the straw tip filters noted earlier. Of course, if *shekar* refers to beer then a translation like "strong drink" is really misleading given how not-so-strong ancient beers likely were.

This does raise a question, why would beer be associated with drunkenness (given the cognate verb *shakar*) if it wasn't as intoxicating as wine? I think this reflects the culture and habit of consumption, rather than the product itself. It's similar to how beer is viewed today. There's an elegance and sophistication to wine, but beer is for frat parties, dive bars, and getting drunk while watching football (as is so often the assumption). We have these associations culturally even though wine is so much stronger than beer on average. The associations are not based on the product themselves, but how we expect people to drink them. Something similar could inform the use of *shekar* for beer, especially since there's evidence in the ancient world that cultures that could make wine often said disparaging things about beer, as chronicled in Max Nelson's book, *The Barbarian's Beverage*.

I also suspect that these kinds of cultural associations with beer exert some type of pressure on English translators to avoid rendering *shekar* as beer. Not very many people will balk at seeing the word "wine" in their Bibles, but certainly more will be scandalized by seeing the word, "beer." This is even discernable in the NIV, which often renders *shekar* as beer, except in a handful of places where it opts for something generic (i.e., "fermented drink") presumably due to the concerns that readers would have. Deuteronomy 14.26 is a great example, since it tells people to purchase wine and *shekar* as part of their tithe and to consume it in honor of the LORD. But the NIV renders it as "wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish." Clearly, the NIV translators were squeamish about drinking beer as an act of worship.

Numbers 28.1–8 is another intriguing example, since it refers to the daily offerings of *shekar* are to be made at the altar (cf. Num 28.7). Libations of wine are mentioned often in Scripture. But what's different here is that the libations aren't just for holy days, festivals, etc, but every day. And Numbers says that the daily libation entails pouring out *shekar*. Beer was libated in Mesopotamia and other places where beer was prominent, so that's not surprising. And indeed, understanding *shekar* as beer here makes the most sense because a daily offering of anything would mean that it needs to be something accessible and plentiful. Wine can only be made once a year, but you can make beer any week of the year. And yet, once again, the NIV got nervous: "The accompanying drinking offering is to be a quarter of a hin of fermented drink with each lamb. Pour out the drink offering to the LORD at the sanctuary" (Num 28.7; emphasis added). The idea of pouring one out for God was obviously a line they didn't want to cross. But why? Wine is libated all the time. As Judges 9 says, "wine . . . cheers gods and mortals" (NRSVue). Wine libations were pleasing to God, why not beer ones too? Indeed, if *shekar* is

typically rendered as “beer” in the NIV except for examples like these, it highlights how modern prejudices about beer are powerfully at work.

Wine was a gift from God, but so too was beer, since like wine, they didn’t understand how and why beer fermented. And so, the gifts that ancient Israel received from God, including beer, they offered back to him in gratitude as part of the temple system. But the symbolism of wine and beer, as gifts from God that bring joy, is only one part of the bigger picture of the symbolism associated with fermented beverages in the Bible, as we will see next.

(7) Italian Lambrusco

For this next part of the tasting, we'll be talking about wine as a symbol for God's wrath.

What to get: I've chosen Italian Lambrusco for this. It's better for our purposes if the color is on the darker side (dark red, dark purple, etc), so avoid the light red or pinkish ones. Here's one that I recommend:

Azienda Agricola Leonardi Giovanni Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro.

If you struggle to find this one, any Lambrusco with a nice, dark color should do.

Reflections: People will often say that wine represents joy and blessing in the Bible, and I always like to say that that's true, except for all of the places where it's not. And the way that wine can symbolize God's wrath is the biggest case in point. Wine is a multivalent symbol and metaphor, capable of being used to refer to all sorts of things in Scripture. As a metaphor for joy and blessing, wine is a great image because it offers us a glimpse into what joy feels like. The lightness we experience, the loosening up of inhibitions, and the on-rush of positivity from a light buzz are all part of the picture created by the metaphor. Those associations are apt for talking about blessing. But there's more to the common experience of wine that leave open the possibility for other kinds of metaphors, such as when wine is consumed in excess and there's an onslaught of dizziness, disorientation, and sickness. When the Bible uses wine as a metaphor for judgment and wrath, especially as part of the broader cup of stupor motif, it's these sorts of experiences that are most salient for the metaphor. In other words, these sorts of experiences from excess alcohol consumption, if you've ever felt them, are meant to communicate what judgment feels like.

There is one passage in the Hebrew Bible where foaming wine in particular is used with reference to the stupefying cup motif. Psalm 75.8 (NRSVue) says, "For in the hand of the LORD there is *a cup with foaming wine*, well mixed; he will pour a draught from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs" (emphasis added). The reference to foam has led most scholars to think that the psalmist is describing fermentation. If so, it's an apt image for divine wrath. Have you ever seen wine or some other liquid ferment? It bubbles and foams, appearing agitated like it's boiling hot. One can easily imagine how this association could develop, and I do think it contributed to the wider matrix of the theme of wine symbolizing wrath and judgment.

But I contend that the foam here is not the foam of fermentation, but of carbonation. Because yeast gives off CO2 when it converts sugar into alcohol, if wine is sealed in a vessel before fermentation has been fully completed (and the final stages

can sometimes drag out depending on the conditions), then the CO2 will be trapped and result in carbonation. This is incidentally what Jesus was talking about with the parable of the new wineskin and the way that wineskins are capable of breaking from wine of the most recent vintage (i.e., new wine)—implying that fermentation may have kickstarted again within the new wineskin and pressure from the CO2 caused it to pop (cf. Mark 2.22).

There are two reasons why I think carbonated wine is probably more likely in view than fermenting wine. The first reason is that in Psalm 75 the image is of wine foaming *in the cup*. Cups aren't vessels used for fermentation, so it's actually quite an odd image to suppose that wine is fermenting still. And that brings me to the second point, which is that it's not only an odd image, but it's also an image that lacks potency. In terms of alcohol that's literally true. Fermenting wine that's still foaming from fermentation does have alcohol content, but it's not as strong as it could be and will be when fermentation is completed. If the associations of disorientation, dizziness, and sickness, that I mentioned are part of how wine represents judgment and wrath, foaming wine from fermentation is not really going to accomplish those things in the same way. If the foam is the result of carbonation, by contrast, it would be stronger and thus a more potent image for communicating what judgment feels like. Perhaps too the bite of carbonation helped to shape this image.

But with wine's representation as an image of wrath and judgment, it does not mitigate the way that wine also represents joy and blessing in the Bible. Both of these things are true. Indeed, both of these things can be true with reference to the same (or similar) type of wine. Deuteronomy 32.14, in a positive set of images about God's provision (including milk, wheat, honey, oil, etc., in context), refers to drinking "the foaming blood of the grape" (NIV), which I take to be a sparkling or carbonated red wine. And so carbonated wine can refer to judgment (Psalm 75.8) or blessing (Deut 32.14), and in the latter case the language of the *blood* of the grape suggests that it was a sparkling red wine.

So this is why we're drinking Lambrusco. Not because they had Lambrusco back then, but because it helps us to think about the possibility of carbonated wines in the ancient world. If you've never had Lambrusco before, it's probably a surprise to imagine a carbonated red wine. But carbonated or sparkling wine is not limited to Champagne or Prosecco. Any wine technically could be carbonated, if the wine-maker wanted it to be carbonated.

The idea of a carbonated wine representing both blessing and judgment reinforces the duality of wine, something that has led to Louis Grievett calling wine "the food with two faces." With the symbolism of wine representing judgment, then, it's as if the associations with joy have been inverted on themselves and have become a dark parody of what it's primarily intended to mean. But just as wines themselves are made of different varietals of grapes, so too it's as if the symbolism of wine in the Bible has various varietals. And we do well to attend to their nuances like a connoisseur or sommelier might. What we want to avoid are cheap blends, both in the real world and in accounts of wine in the Bible. Although the Bible makes use of wine as a theme of judgment, that is not the final word. On the other side of judgment, there is a consistent refrain about how an abundance of wine represents God's salvation and restoration of his people and the land.

(8) An Indigenous Varietal from Israel-Palestine

For this final part of the tasting, we'll be trying wine from Israel-Palestine.

What to get: The preference here is for anything from Cremisan in Palestine, but especially wines in their Native Grape Series. Here are some great options:

Cremisan - Hamdani / Jandali

Cremisan – Baladi

Cremisan – Dabouki

If wines from Cremisan are difficult to find, another producer from Palestine to seek out is Philokalia. You could also try to look out for Recanati, which is based in Israel. The goal is to grab a bottle with a varietal that you've likely not heard of (i.e., not a major European varietal). If none of these options will work, then go for a major producer from Israel, like Psâgot, and try something like their Cabernet Sauvignon:

Psâgot - Cabernet Sauvignon

Reflections: When the prophets anticipate what it's like for the era of restoration to arrive, they imagine a lot of wine, and Jesus proleptically offers us a glimpse of the abundance of wine in the kingdom of God when he turned water into wine at Cana.

For our final tasting we are drinking wine from Israel-Palestine in order to reaffirm that the biblical imagery of wine is fundamentally about land and soil, and indeed a specific bit of land. Because of Islamic control of the land for several centuries, wine-making essentially came to a halt, although table grapes were still being cultivated. But this meant that wine-making had to be reintroduced into Israel, despite its great heritage for wine that we read about in Scripture. The Rothschild family from France specifically brought over European grapevines in the 19th century and so Israel has become a great producer of varietals like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and others. If you're drinking one of these varietals from Psâgot, or another major Israeli producer, they are a testament to Rothchild's belief that European varietals would do well in Israel, and indeed they have.

But if you're enjoying a unique varietal from Cremisan (or Philokalia or Recanati), then you're enjoying something a little more special in my opinion. These producers make wines from varietals that are indigenous to Israel-Palestine, thanks to the foraging work of Shivi Drouri and his team. In some cases, the varietals cultivated by these producers and used for wine aren't simply indigenous to the land, but might also have claims to antiquity and the time of Christ. It's quite exciting to see local producers making great wines with local varietals, and so I hope you're able to enjoy some for this part of the tasting.

We are also drinking wine from Israel-Palestine for this final bit of the tasting to reflect on the promises of agricultural abundance in the land and what they signaled to people in an agricultural society. Images of sweet wine dripping down the mountains, as Amos and Joel envision (Amos 9.13; Joel 3.18), doesn't just mean that the people won't be running out of wine at any of their parties. It also means that weather will be conducive to such productivity, there won't be drought or plagues devasting the crops, economic stability will be achieved as wine can be sold and traded, and their enemies will not be destroying or seizing their lands and thus preventing them from making and enjoying all of that wine.

The contemporary wine industry in Israel and Palestine is exciting, esp. given how it was suppressed for so long. But its return is not the long-awaited fulfillment of biblical prophecy. This is true if for no other reason than the ongoing devastation that we see in the land today. Isaiah 2.4 and Micah 4.3 specifically describe the era of abundance and restoration as a time in which the nations will unlearn war and completely forget about violence. The instruments of warfare will be refashioned into agricultural utensils. Swords will become plowshares, and spears will become pruning hooks (or vintner's knives used for pruning vines). There won't be any bloodshed except for the blood of the grape. And so we drink the wine of this final part of the tasting in hopeful anticipation of that future restoration and in prayerful desire to see things on earth as it is in heaven, as Jesus taught us to pray, even now before that day fully comes.

Conclusion

With that, we conclude our tasting guide. My hope is that you were able to try some of the options that I specifically recommended in this guide. If so, I hope that this tasting has broadened your knowledge of contemporary and ancient beverages, and helped to open up the meaning of key biblical texts in a new way. If you're keen to learn more about ancient fermented beverages and the broader topic as it occurs throughout biblical literature, I hear there's a great book headed your way!