John Anthony Dunne does an excellent job of describing alcoholic drinks in the biblical world, how alcohol is portrayed in biblical imagery, and even the relevance of things like "new wine" for Christian hopes about the future. At the same time, he provides an uncompromising exposition of biblical prohibitions against drunkenness and recognizes the gravity of abusing alcohol as well as the risks of alcoholism. Dunne provides a sane and sober analysis of what is for many a difficult topic of the Bible: alcohol and the Christian life.

Rev. Dr. Michael F. Bird, Deputy Principal at Ridley College,
Melbourne, Australia

This is more than a book to help Christians determine whether to drink or not to drink. It is more than an encyclopedia of every mention of alcoholic beverages in the Bible (although it is thorough in its scope). It is more than even a book about wine in the Bible. In this volume, Dunne explores how the biblical authors employ images—literal and figurative—of beer, wine, wine growing, and winemaking. He helps us see the wide-ranging use of such images to signal variable theological themes, including exile, judgment, restoration, blessing, and eschatological abundance. If you wonder if there is all that much to say about wine in the Bible, there is! And you'll find it here. I highly recommend this comprehensive and accessible book.

Jeannine K. Brown, The David Price Professor of Biblical and
Theological Foundations, Bethel Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota

What I love about this rich biblical theology of the symbolism, production, and use of alcohol is the theologically mindful posture that Dunne gifts to us—whether you imbibe or not—that is aware of how alcohol represents both the goodness of God as well as the responsibilities of his people. John Dunne doesn't merely tackle the modern debates about alcohol in Scripture but resurrects the ancient enchantment of alcohol, seeing it as a divine gift and miracle. He enables us to see the picture unfolding regarding our covenantal relationship with God and one another and how the production and use of alcohol orients us toward creation and new creation. This book is more than an academic study—it is a promise.

Aimee Byrd, author of *Saving Face*, *The Hope in Our Scars*, and
Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

If, as the psalmist observes, wine makes the human heart glad, then so also will reading John Anthony Dunne's discussion of its place in Christian Scripture. He is rigorous and informative without being dull and pedantic. In short, Dunne has produced a sober analysis of an intoxicating topic!

Courtney Friesen, Professor of Religious Studies and Classics at the
University of Arizona and author of *Reading Dionysus*

John Anthony Dunne has brewed up for us a rich and refreshing biblical theology of alcohol, a theme that is as vital as it is (until now) underexplored. His distillation of the technical, cultural, and theological aspects of fermented drinks is sure to gladden the hearts of many. Three cheers for the author!

Rev. Dr. Andrew Judd, Deputy Principal and Lecturer in Old Testament,
Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia, and author of *Modern Genre Theory:*
An Introduction for Biblical Studies

With a range of insights into not only the material production of alcoholic beverages but also thoughtful understanding within material, literary, and social contexts, Dunne's book is clearly the new essential work for anyone interested in understanding drinking in the Bible. Whether wine, beer, or otherwise, Dunne's work sheds light not only on this consumptive act in the Bible but also on biblical society and life more broadly. Whether one is a Jew, a Christian, or just otherwise interested in biblical drinking, this is an indispensable and comprehensive look at this element of biblical life.

Rabbi Drew Kaplan, host of the podcast, The Jewish Drinking Show

Lay person, seasoned theologian, and would-be archaeologist alike will benefit from John Dunne's up-to-date and very lucid exposition of the many biblical passages that revolve around a fermented beverage, preeminently grape wine. He unlocks the metaphorical complexity and richness of this ethereal beverage in God's covenant with Israel and the Last Supper's foreshadowing of the heavenly banquet promised by the prophets and in the book of Revelation.

Patrick McGovern, Scientific Director of the Biomolecular Archaeology Project for Cuisine, Fermented Beverages, and Health, University of Pennsylvania Museum, author of *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture* and *Ancient Brews: Rediscovered and Re-Created*

In this book, Dunne provides a valuable resource for understanding the many ways that Scripture alludes to alcohol use, especially the many theological points that use this imagery. Dunne is both informative and poetic in his approach to the topic.

Madison N. Pierce, Associate Professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan

Dunne has produced a work that is rich and detailed as he explores the biblical traditions around alcohol. In a work that is both scholarly and pastoral, *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine* offers an insightful theology of alcohol that invites the reader to move beyond typical taboos around whether Christians should or should not drink. Dunne opens the ancient world and the biblical text to demonstrate that wine and alcohol provide a critical thread running through the Bible that relates to God's engagement and love for the world. This is a book that challenges unfounded negative assumptions about alcohol and celebrates the gift of wine as a critical theological sign and symbol of God's kingdom.

Mark W. Scarlata, Senior Lecturer in Old Testament, St Mellitus College, author of *Wine, Soil, and Salvation in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament*

The Mountains Drip Sweet Wine is a brilliant addition to the growing collection of work that focuses on alcohol and drinking in the Bible. Dunne provides thorough detail on every aspect of viticulture and also does not ignore the important role of beer that was consumed widely in the ancient world. Insightful exegesis of a range of relevant biblical passages is illuminating for all readers, whether new to the study of alcohol in biblical texts or well acquainted. What comes across most strikingly is how central alcohol was to the ancient cultures that Dunne explores, saturating nearly all aspects of life from the social and religious to the economic and political. Despite the distance of many centuries, alcohol still plays a prominent role in our own lives, and it is therefore intellectually vital that we reflect on how biblical texts and their interpretation have shaped our contemporary attitudes and preferences surrounding alcohol consumption. In doing this, Dunne challenges our assumptions and misconceptions regarding wine and beer and provides us with a way to appreciate the many references to alcohol that are spilt across the pages of the Bible.

Rebekah Welton, Lecturer in Hebrew Bible, University of Exeter, author of *"He Is a Glutton and a Drunkard": Deviant Consumption in the Hebrew Bible*

THE **MOUNTAINS SHALL DRIP SWEET WINE**

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR LIFE

THE MOUNTAINS SHALL DRIP SWEET WINE

A Biblical Theology of Alcohol

JOHN ANTHONY DUNNE

general editor JONATHAN LUNDE

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For

T. J. Bernstein
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Greg Franklin
Travis Lodes
Jason Smyth
Calvin Sodestrom

May the wine of friendship never run dry.

CONTENTS

DETAILED TABLE OF CONTENTS

REFLECTING ON RELEVANCE

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of ancient sources in this book follow the conventions of the *SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd ed.); some additional abbreviations are also included.

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABV	Alcohol by Volume
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
AGUSA	Assemblies of God USA
AHRW	*Alcohol Health and Research World*
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJBI	Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
APG	Agora Picture Book
AT	Alpha Text
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BAC	Blood Alcohol Content
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BARIS	British Archaeological Reports International Series
BBE	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
BHGNT	Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series

BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BPT	*Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia*
BRev	*Bible Review*
BS	The Biblical Seminar
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBTS	Catholic Biblical Theology of the Sacraments
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin, 1862–
COQG	Christian Origins and the Question of God
COS	*The Context of Scripture*. Edited by William W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002
CT	*Christianity Today*
DPL²	*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Scot McKnight, Lynn H. Cohick, and Nijay K. Gupta. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
DSSSE	*The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997–1998
EDEJ	*The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*. Edited by John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010
EEC	Evangelical Exegetical Commentary
ESV	English Standard Version
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IPA	India Pale Ale
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JIBS	*Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies*
JME	*Journal of Molecular Evolution*
JR	*Journal of Religion*

JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JWR	*Journal of Wine Research*
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KJV	King James Version
KTAH	Key Themes in Ancient History
KTU	*Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*. Edited by Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013. 3rd enl. ed. of *KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places*. Edited by Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995
L&N	Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989
LAB	Liber antiquitatum biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
LTQ	*Lexington Theological Quarterly*
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
NET	New English Translation
NETS	*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007
NDBT	*New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Edited by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000
NIAAA	National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997

NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NPNF[1]	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1
NPR	*National Public Radio*
NRSVue	New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985
PACS	Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series
Pal. Hist.	Palaea Historica
PEQ	*Palestinian Exploration Quarterly*
PNAS	*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PSL	Princeton Science Library
RB	*Revue biblique*
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RJ	*Reformed Journal*
RM	*Research in Microbiology*
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAM	Studies in Ancient Medicine
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SR	*Scientific Reports*
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
SwJT	*Southwestern Journal of Theology*
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976

TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 17 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2021
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
UBS	United Bible Societies
UBSHS	United Bible Societies Handbook Series
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

SERIES PREFACE

The question "What does the Bible have to say about that?" is, in essence, what the Biblical Theology for Life series is all about. Not unlike other biblical explorations of various topics, the volumes in this series articulate various themes in biblical theology, but they always do so with the "So what?" question rumbling about and demanding to be answered. Too often, books on biblical theology have focused mainly on *description*—simply discerning the teachings of the biblical literature on a particular topic. But contributors to this series seek to straddle both the world of the text and the world in which we live.

This means that their descriptions of biblical theology will always be understood as the important *first* step in their task, which will not be completed until they draw out that theology's practical implications for the contemporary context. Contributors therefore engage both in the *description* of biblical theology and in its contemporary *contextualization*, accosting the reader's perspective and fostering application, transformation, and growth. It is our hope that these informed insights of evangelical biblical scholarship will increasingly become enfleshed in the sermons and discussions that transpire each week in places of worship, in living rooms where Bible studies gather, and in classrooms around the world. We hope that this series will lead to personal transformation and practical application in real life.

Every volume in this series has the same basic structure. In the first section, entitled "Queueing the Questions," authors introduce the main questions they seek to address in their books. Raising these questions enables you to see clearly from the outset what each book will be pursuing, inviting you to participate in the process of discovery along the way. In the second section, "Arriving at Answers," authors develop the biblical theology of the topic they address, focusing their attention on specific biblical texts and constructing answers to the questions introduced in section one. In the concluding "Reflecting on Relevance" section, authors contextualize their biblical-theological insights, discussing specific ways in which the theology presented in their books addresses contemporary situations and issues, giving you opportunities to consider how you might live out that theology in the world today.

Long before you make it to the "Reflecting on Relevance" section, however, we encourage you to wrestle with the implications of the biblical theology being described by considering the "Relevant Questions" that conclude each chapter. Frequent sidebars spice up your experience, supplementing the main discussion with significant quotations, illustrative historical or contemporary data, and fuller explanations of the content.

In sum, the goal of the Biblical Theology for Life series is communicated by its title. On the one hand, its books mine the Bible for theology that addresses a wide range of topics so you may know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [he] . . . sent" (John 17:3). On the other hand, contributing authors contextualize this theology in ways that allow the *life*-giving Word (John 1:4; 20:31) to speak into and transform contemporary *life*.

Series Editor
Jonathan Lunde

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The present book was a long time coming. I first set out to synthesize the Bible's teachings on alcohol in August 2011 as my initial contributions to a brand-new blog that I helped launch, *The Two Cities*. It always felt like I had done too much legwork for just two blog posts, and so I had hopes of developing things further. Due to the helpful prodding of Katya Covrett at Zondervan Academic, the present book project became official in 2013, for which I am tremendously grateful. The whole team at Zondervan Academic (past and present) has been so enthusiastic over the years, not to mention remarkably patient, given my requests for extensions (*mea culpa*). I'll spare you all the wine puns about my thoughts needing to mature, but I do think the book benefited from more time. That meant that I could research ancient winemaking and brewing more extensively, and also that I could workshop my ideas in more contexts, including by giving papers at the annual, international, and regional meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, the British New Testament Conference, the Evangelical Theological Society, the Society of Vineyard Scholars, the St Andrews Symposium for Biblical and Early Christian Studies, and the Twin Cities New Testament Symposium, and also by giving guest lectures at L'Abri International Fellowship (in Switzerland and Minnesota), Salem Covenant Church (New Brighton, MN), and Princeton Theological Seminary, as part of professor F. W. "Chip" Dobbs-Allsopp's class on "Wine and the Bible" in collaboration with Nathan Stucky's Farminary Project. To everyone who engaged my work in those venues, cheers and thank you.

As for specific acknowledgments, those consistent voices of encouragement over the years deserve first mention: my parents, my siblings and their families, Trevor and Rachel Cartwright, my fellow cohosts from *The Two Cities* podcast, and the indefatigable Gordon Franz. Many thanks to my students at Bethel Seminary who participated in my class "Wine and Meals in the Bible." They were all so engaged, giving me plenty of great feedback, and so I name them here: Chris Auer, John Beaugard, Orly Bisquera, Charity Blomberg, Andy Bramsen, Stuart Collins, Dan Cook, Lexi Folen, John Godin, Wendy Green, Lissa Hutcheson, Sullivan Keehr, Nick Klein, Dagny Lemunyon, John Patton, Paul Richard, Monica Ritchie, Jeffrey Smith, Amy Staley, Danny Steward, Sean Thomas, Dustin Thompson, Jill Utecht, Michael Wahlstrom, Christian Walk, Jessi Walk, and Seth Zielicke. Thanks are also due to my TA for that course, Rebekah Wold Defries, and to Austin Reichow-Chavez, who helped me find social-scientific studies and polling data. I also appreciate my DMin students Karen Beaumont and Brian Brunke, who conducted independent studies with me on alcohol in the American church.

I am especially grateful to everyone who read some or all of the first draft of my book and joined me for a merry night of debriefing, including: Jeannine Brown, Dan Cook, Aaron Downs, Andy Johnson, Laura Kozamchak, Rose Nelessen, J. D. O'Brien, Taylor Patz, Kavan Rogness, Amy Staley, and Casey Summers. Those who weren't able to attend but nevertheless provided feedback on parts of that first draft also include: Brad Blakeley, Nick Fox, Kaz Hayashi, Ryan Heinsch, Stephanie Kate Judd, Andrew Judd, Jennifer Pietz, Ben Rhodes, Mark Strauss, Sean Thomas, Dustin Thompson, Logan Williams, and Justin Winzenburg, as well as those who read the full draft and wrote extensive notes: Andrew Cowan and especially Deborah Fransway. The feedback and queries from Chris Beetham at Zondervan Academic were incredibly helpful at the copyedit stage as well.

Having colleagues who work broadly in this area and are willing to dialogue has been invaluable. I have known Gisela Kreglinger since my doctoral days at St Andrews, where I had the pleasure of participating in her reflective wine-tasting events and hearing her lecture on portions of what became her *Spirituality of Wine*. Gisela's expertise, passion, and sensibilities about wine have been inspiring to me. Patrick McGovern has been a warm dialogue partner, and I am honored that he engaged earlier drafts of this book. He is my academic hero in this field, given his expertise in archaeology and chemistry, and also his collaboration with my favorite brewery, Dogfish Head, in re-creating ancient styles of beer. Peter Hemstad, who is a grape breeder and the co-owner and COO of St. Croix Vineyards (Stillwater, MN), along with their head winemaker and production manager, Martin Polognioli, allowed me to help with harvesting and pruning on multiple occasions, and shared some of their insights with me while we worked. Rebekah Welton has become a good friend as a result of this project. I am grateful for her scholarship, her detailed feedback on my early drafts, and our delightful conversations—all of which have sharpened my thinking.

It must be said that this book is deeply indebted to Jonathan Lunde, the general editor of the Biblical Theology for Life series, who gave me invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this book. Dr. Lunde (as I can't help but call him) was my former undergraduate professor, and in his "NT Use of the OT" class—the most formative class I would ever take—I chose to write my final paper on the use of Amos 9 in Acts 15, which was not on the shortlist of preapproved passages. His willingness to approve my topic in May 2008 (for a paper that wasn't due until the end of the following semester when the course was offered) meant that I could spend the whole summer researching in advance. Since that time, Amos's vision of sweet wine dripping down mountains has remained a constant fascination, and thus it is only fitting that this book is named after that passage as an acknowledgment of both where this research started and Dr. Lunde's role in giving it life.

Finally, I dedicate this book to my former housemates at "the Bora Residence,"

with whom I lived for two years during graduate school. When I first moved in, I only knew half of them, and those I did know I wasn't acquainted with outside of our mutual involvement in an on-campus ministry. As it happened, the circumstances necessitating my move were the most depressing and disorienting of my life. The generosity they showed me, someone outside of their immediate friend group, has always meant so much, considering that I was now trying to navigate my life with the realization that the vision that I had for myself would never materialize. Even more fitting for this book, though, that house was not simply the context in which I came to imagine a new trajectory for my life, but it was also where my own appreciation for fine beverages originated. Specifically, it was their knowledge of various styles of craft beer, and their interests in extending road trips to visit highly esteemed breweries, that made me passionate about excellence, nuance, and diversity in this space. My housemates were not only hospitable to me when I needed it most, but they gave me a gift—the gift of passion for the subject matter of this book. And so, to them I raise my glass. Since this book is part of a larger series called Biblical Theology for Life, I can think of no better toast than this—*L'chaim!*

John Anthony Dunne
Repeal Day (aka my birthday), 2023

PART 1

QUEUEING THE QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF ALCOHOL

Whether or not we personally drink alcohol, our Bibles are soaked with it. References to alcoholic beverages in Scripture are everywhere; sometimes they are literal and sometimes they are symbolic—from production to consumption to intoxication. The most common term for wine in the Old Testament, *yayin*, occurs 141 times, with an additional thirty-four occurrences of the Greek term *oinos* in the New Testament. However, these statistics—which in themselves convey the prominence of the theme—do not even come close to representing the fullness of alcohol's biblical representation. It would be overwhelming to itemize all of the additional terms in the Bible for wine and other intoxicating beverages and count off their occurrences. This would not even include the multiple terms related to the agricultural side of production, the equipment for winemaking, vessels for storage and drinking, the consumers of alcoholic beverages themselves, the effects of drunkenness, and more.

Alcohol is truly a major topic in biblical literature. If we ignore passages about alcohol, we will end up setting aside quite a bit of biblical material, and we will miss out on one of the richest topics presented to us in Scripture. We will also lose out on experiencing the richness that alcohol provides to other theological topics, such as creation, covenant, kingdom, temple, and more. Thus, references to alcohol are not just everywhere in Scripture; they are also quite robust, often possessing a great deal of symbolic structure and, if you like, theological tannins for readers to savor.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ISSUE

Despite the pervasiveness of alcoholic drinks in Scripture, it is too often the case that Christians reduce the topic to little more than proof texting. Typically, the debate concerning what the Bible has to say about alcohol is almost singularly conceived in terms of *permissibility*: *Does Scripture permit Christians to drink alcohol?* Many simply look for the definitive passages that seem to settle the debate once and for all. To be sure, this is a well-meaning question with practical implications, and it will be addressed in this book, but there are a few problems with this approach if it is the only framework we have.

To start, the question is far too generic. Although it seeks for wisdom, it will only receive generalizations and simplifications in return. Definitive answers work

neither for the ancient text nor for our modern world. Christians today hail from widely divergent cultures, espousing dramatically distinct perspectives, so cookie-cutter answers are not serviceable. With this in mind, we should trade in the generic permissibility question for ones that are more sensitive to the complexity of the issue. *Does Scripture prohibit the consumption of alcohol for all people at all times? If permissible, should a Christian drink alcohol? If a Christian is going to drink, how should they do so? If a Christian chooses to abstain, do they need biblical justification for that decision?* These questions provide some added nuance to our original question, and yet they have only provided nuance *to one area of interest*—namely, individual permissibility. Certainly, when we ask permissibility questions, we ought to be sensitive to the fact that an issue like alcohol consumption is not straightforward. Yet additionally we need to recognize that there are other kinds of questions worth asking as well.

In addition to being more sensitive to the contexts of Christians, we need to be sensitive to the contexts of Scripture. We need more questions at our disposal than those pertaining to permissibility, because the themes related to alcohol in Scripture are actually quite complex. At a basic level, one of the things that becomes apparent about alcohol in the Bible is that some passages seem more positive, and others more negative. On the one hand, consider this example from Proverbs:

> Honor the Lord with your wealth,
> with the firstfruits of all your crops;
> then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
> and your vats will brim over with new wine. (Prov 3:9–10)

On the other hand, we have passages like this from the same biblical book:

> Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler;
> whoever is led astray by them is not wise. (Prov 20:1)

When we simply ask permissibility questions alone, we might not know what to do with such a tension. Typically, Christians tend to opt for one of these types of texts as conclusive, prioritizing some texts over others. If we have a personal opinion on whether Christians are free to enjoy alcohol from a biblical perspective, our position is likely informed by the set of texts we see as most naturally aligning with our view. When we approach Scripture's teaching on alcohol only as a matter of permissibility, we will inevitably sideline a number of texts that do not appear to answer the question the way we want, or even at all. So, which do we prefer—the warning of Proverbs 20:1 or the blessing of Proverbs 3:9–10?

There are at least three problems with making an either-or choice here. One problem is that our undue selectivity will lead to a truncated account of Scripture's

teaching. The *entire* biblical portrait should matter to us rather than just a piece of it here or there. In my estimation this is perhaps the most significant problem that needs to be corrected, though it is not the only one. A second problem pertains to the diversity of terms used for alcohol in the two passages from Proverbs: "new wine," "wine," and "beer" should not be conflated in our assessment of what Proverbs says about alcohol, let alone what the whole Bible says (see ch. 2 of the present work). A third and final problem to note is a failure to recognize the nuance of the biblical authors. In the examples above, do we recognize a difference between *abundance*, on the one hand, and *excessive consumption* on the other?

Equipped with different kinds of questions, we can arrive at a more informed, comprehensive, and theologically enriching account of alcohol in the Bible. For example, we need to ask *questions of content*. What types of alcohol are mentioned in Scripture? How were they produced? Were ancient wines commonly watered down? With these questions we are trying to ensure that we understand what the Bible is referring to when it mentions anything pertaining to alcohol. We can also ask *questions of function*. What kinds of images and symbols do the various biblical authors associate with alcohol production and consumption? How do the biblical authors connect the images and symbols of alcohol with broader biblical-theological topics that eclipse issues of permissibility? These types of questions highlight that we should expect distinct emphases in the biblical material. Finally, we can ask *questions of characterization and representation*. Who are the people who drink or abstain from alcohol, respectively, and what is their rationale for doing so? On what occasions and in what kind of spaces is alcohol consumed or avoided? With these questions we are looking for ways that alcohol consumption and abstinence are associated with certain people, times, and spaces.

As we ask these additional questions, we should not assume that all biblical writers will answer them *identically*. In fact, there is quite a biblical assortment when it comes to the connotations of alcohol. Thinking about this as a metaphor for a moment, we might compare the symbolic diversity to that of grapevine varietals within the world of wine. If you are familiar with many new-world wines in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, they are often named after the dominant grapevine varietal that was used to create the wine (in the US, at least, the dominant varietal must be at least 75%). For example, a Merlot is a well-known red wine made primarily from Merlot grapes. The same is true of other wine styles that are named after a specific varietal, like Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Sauvignon Blanc, etc. Old-world wines from Europe and the Mediterranean, by contrast, are usually named after the region where the wine was made, often referred to by the French term *terroir*, which places more emphasis on factors like climate and soil. Famous French examples include Côtes-du-Rhône, Beaujolais, Bordeaux, and Burgundy. Applying this dynamic of winemaking as a metaphor for the biblical material, we might say that Scripture's statements about alcohol can be clustered together in *symbolic varietals*. The metaphor

helps us recognize the inherent diversity of the biblical material and also helps us to conceptualize the kinds of diversity that it contains. Rather than treat alcohol in the Bible like a cheap blend, we should cultivate an appreciation for its diversity, just like we would with a *full-bodied* Cabernet Sauvignon, or a *peppery* Shiraz, or a *buttery* Chardonnay. In a manner of speaking, although alcohol is pervasive in Scripture, it does not go down the same way each time. We should taste and see the nuance and become connoisseurs of its delicious complexity.

To illustrate the metaphor further, let me point out some obvious examples that usher us into the kinds of rich theological themes that will be explored in subsequent chapters. For instance, there are passages where alcohol-related imagery primarily conveys the notion of *God's wrath*. Take a look at one noteworthy example:

> God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. (Rev 16:19b)

Without even unpacking anything in this passage, it is clear that the image is meant to terrify. "I'll have what she's having" is not a likely response that readers would have to this. And yet, at the same time, there are also a number of texts in the Bible that use similar language to refer to *God's restorative actions*. Accordingly, consider this text:

> On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
> a feast of rich food for all peoples,
> a banquet of aged wine—
> the best of meats and the finest of wines. (Isa 25:6)

When we compare these two texts side by side, we can see the usefulness of categorizing them according to distinct symbolic varietals. Wine does not symbolize one thing in the Bible; it symbolizes many things, depending on the context. Playing with our metaphor of symbolic varietals, one of these examples is quite sweet and the other is bitter. How can the same symbol have such a different association? A tension exists in the biblical portrait, but what should we do with it? Is this a problem to be resolved, or a complexity to be savored? Alcohol is clearly not a basic symbol containing a single meaning or value but is rather capable of conveying very different things, depending on the context. The diversity of alcohol as a symbol is actually true of many metaphors in Scripture, such as leaven (yeast), salt, or even the world. Leaven, for example, can be used both as a positive image for the expansion of the kingdom of God (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:21), or as a negative image of the spread of false teaching and bad morals (Matt 16:6, 11–12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor 5:6–8; Gal 5:9). As I will demonstrate in this book, alcohol presents us with an even greater theological diversity in Scripture than we have just seen.

THE NATURE OF THE BOOK

Even with the pervasiveness and complexity of alcoholic beverages in the Bible, there have not been many book-length studies that have explored it. A handful of books are an exception to this and are worth noting here briefly, since they will be dialogue partners throughout the book. Lothar Becker has produced the closest thing to an overview of the topic in the Bible.[1] His study provided a much-needed corrective to Robert P. Teachout and Samuele Bacchiocchi, who argued for a Two-Wine theory, which suggests that nearly half of the references to wine in the Bible are nonalcoholic (cf. ch. 2).[2] Carey Ellen Walsh offers a thorough archaeological overview of ancient Israelite viticulture (i.e., overseeing a vineyard), from production to the social dynamics of consumption.[3] Multiple studies on ancient Israelite viticulture could be noted that give more depth to a particular area of focus, but the strength of Walsh's work is her breadth and literary analysis.[4] Walsh's study also pairs nicely with the work of Patrick E. McGovern, whose comprehensive archaeological, chemical, and anthropological research on the origins and development of viticulture covers ancient Israelite practice alongside other ancient cultures.[5] Joel Butler and Randall Heskett deliver an accessible account of the wine industry's development historically, using the biblical material as a launching pad.[6] Their study supplements the work of Tim Unwin and Paul Lukacs respectively on the development of the wine industry up to the end of the twentieth century.[7] Gisela Kreglinger provides a theological and contemplative approach to wine in the light of Scripture and church history, drawing also from her personal experience of growing up on a vineyard in Franconia—firsthand experience that most authors in this space do not possess—and she invites readers to savor the goodness of God with every sip of wine as a spiritual practice.[8] Manuel Dubach addresses how the concerns related to drunkenness in the Old Testament are more related to societal impact than to drunkenness per se,[9] which is a perspective that Rebekah Welton also emphasizes in her own way, highlighting the social and religious concerns at the root of "deviant consumption" that go beyond excess.[10]

1. Lothar Becker, *Rebe, Rausch und Religion: Eine kulturgeschichtliche Studie zum Wein in der Bibel*, Theologie 23 (Münster: LIT, 1999).

2. Robert Paul Teachout, "The Use of 'Wine' in the Old Testament" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979); Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspective, 1989).

3. Carey Ellen Walsh, *The Fruit of the Vine: Viticulture in Ancient Israel*, HSM 60 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000).

4. For more in-depth archaeological studies, see, e.g., Rafael Frankel, *Wine and Oil Production in Antiquity in Israel and Other Mediterranean Countries* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

5. Patrick E. McGovern, *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture*, rev. ed., PSL 66 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

6. Joel Butler and Randall Heskett, *Divine Vintage: Following the Wine Trail from Genesis to the Modern Age* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012).

7. Tim Unwin, *Wine and the Vine: An Historical Geography of Viticulture and the Wine Trade* (London: Routledge, 1991); Paul Lukacs, *Inventing Wine: A New History of One of the World's Most Ancient Pleasures* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).

8. Gisela Kreglinger, *The Spirituality of Wine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); idem, *The Soul of Wine: Savoring the Goodness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019).

9. Manuel Dubach, *Trunkenheit im Alten Testament: Begrifflichkeit – Zeugnisse Wertung*, BWANT 4 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009).

10. Rebekah Welton, *"He Is a Glutton and a Drunkard": Deviant Consumption in the Hebrew Bible*, BibInt 183 (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

Finally, Jordan D. Rosenblum has written a helpful introduction to rabbinic literature using fermented beverages as an entry point into the main themes and features of "the sea of Talmud," and so his study features many interesting analyses of rabbinic interpretation of biblical texts related to imbibing.[11]

Each of these studies is worthwhile in its own right, and they all have benefited me greatly. But what is clearly missing is a sustained biblical-theological approach to the full biblical witness on alcohol. For some reason this arena is missing from every major series on biblical theology, and it is not given any attention in such biblical dictionaries as the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (*NDBT*) or the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (*ABD*), to name just two. We can broaden this observation further to note that food generally is rarely engaged from this perspective.[12] As a biblical theology, the present book is concerned with synthesizing the biblical material, but it attempts to do so by allowing the rich diversity in the Bible to be seen. One way of conceiving biblical theology is that it involves a synthesis of biblical exegesis for the sake of the church—the community that regularly interprets biblical texts together.[13] As a Protestant, I focus directly on the sixty-six books that comprise our canon of Scripture, yet my hope is that this book will also be of value for Catholics and Orthodox alike, as well as Jewish readers and others interested in a Christian perspective on the topic. With respect to the larger canons of Catholics and the Orthodox, my stress on the diversity of symbols would only be enhanced by adding more textual material. Similar nuances appear in the Apocrypha, to be sure, but extracanonical texts and traditions will not be the focus of the present investigation, even though they will be referenced from time to time supplementally.

In the end I hope that this synthesis is indeed helpful *for life*, even as it includes but goes beyond questions of permissibility. One aim of this book is undoubtedly to provide an account of a biblical theology of alcohol in the sense that its discussions provide a basis for thinking through one's own personal approach to alcohol. But a biblical theology of alcohol is not eclipsed by one's personal consumption or nonconsumption of alcohol. A biblical theology of alcohol is for all Christians who love their Bible and try to live by it, whether they drink or not. The idea that alcohol in the Bible might be irrelevant to Christians who do not drink is like a Catholic priest saying that he does not need to know about the church's theology of marriage because he is not personally married. It is probably not unfair to say that most Catholic priests know much more about the theology of marriage than their married parishioners, despite their personal lack of participation in it. In other words, making sense of the references

11. Jordan D. Rosenblum, *Rabbinic Drinking: What Beverages Teach Us About Rabbinic Literature* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

12. See Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

13. For a helpful taxonomy of approaches, see Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

to alcohol should be of interest to anyone who reads the Bible, even teetotalers (the term from the temperance movement for people who were *capital T, totally abstinent*).

THE SHAPE OF THE BOOK

The bulk of the book's contents is contained within the section called "Arriving at Answers," where we will be looking closely at the biblical material on alcoholic beverages. Chapters 2–3 address the main content questions for our study, including the "types" of alcoholic beverages in Scripture and whether there are many references to begin with (ch. 2), and also whether these beverages were often diluted with water to make their alcohol levels negligible (ch. 3).

Subsequent chapters address various function questions, stressing the diversity of images and symbols throughout Scripture (or "varietals," referring back to the viticultural metaphor). We begin with that in chapter 4 by looking at how alcoholic drinks literally functioned in ancient Israelite societies, including their production and use. From there we turn to look at positive biblical images of alcohol in the life of ancient Israel, where it is associated with blessings like sexuality and the covenantal promise of the land (ch. 5), and where it plays a key role within the temple system through libations to God and tithes for priestly consumption (ch. 6).

The next four chapters then explore potential problems and dangers related to alcohol. Chapter 7 contains a discussion on what types of prohibitions or restrictions Scripture explicitly makes regarding alcohol, and chapter 8 looks at the biblical characters who abstain from alcohol and why (to help us with questions of characterization). In chapter 9 we engage the wise, yet seemingly conflicting, counsel on the consumption of alcohol in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Chapter 10 then emphasizes the dangers that accompany drunkenness, including the vulnerability of sexual exploitation, violence, and divine judgment.

The next several chapters trace a thematic thread pertaining to alcohol within the development of exile, judgment, and restoration. The privation of alcohol is a motif for the curse of the covenant often associated with the exile (ch. 11), and God's judgment is presented as a cup of wrath, which is a parody of God's good gift of alcohol (ch. 12). Chapters 13 and 14 then look at the reinstatement of God's good gift of alcohol through the restoration and abundance that comes on the other side of disasters like the exile (ch. 13), and how a climactic feast will inaugurate the future era of abundance when God acts to restore all things (ch. 14). The next two chapters build on the imagery of the eschatological banquet and explore the use of wine in the Eucharist, both in the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples (ch. 15) and with the ongoing celebration of that meal in the early church, as a foretaste of the feast to come (ch. 16).

In the final section of the book, "Reflecting on Relevance," I will turn to consider how the diverse theological portrait outlined in the "Arriving at Answers" section can

be applied in various ways in the church today (ch. 17). In particular, the pluriform images will underscore the necessity of a diversity of approaches within the life of the church—approaches that should be greeted with respect and care for the good of our fellow siblings in Christ.

As this introductory chapter already makes plain, I refer to *alcohol* throughout this book rather than strictly to wine. Part of the rationale for this comes in the next chapter, where we will see that not all references to alcoholic beverages in Scripture are grape based, and hence this is not a biblical theology of *wine* solely. One advantage of referring to alcohol is this reminder of the diversity of beverages in Scripture. This outweighs the term's shortcomings, given that it is admittedly reductionistic, since there is certainly much more to wines and beers than the presence of alcohol, and also anachronistic, since biblical authors were unaware of chemicals like alcohol (and ethanol, to be more specific). However, I use the term alcohol heuristically for our benefit, because of its frequent usage in the US and other contexts as a shorthand for alcoholic beverages. Given that there are more kinds of alcoholic drinks on offer today, focusing on their common denominator aids us in questions of application. Additionally, my interest in what the Bible has to say about alcohol, rather than strictly wine, allows me to address biblical depictions of intoxication, which in many places never mention the content that led to the condition. I also use the terms *intoxicant* and *alcoholic beverage* interchangeably, and I define them, for the purposes of this study, as any substance that can alter one's emotions or behavior (i.e., intoxication) and that can modify them severely when consumed in excess (i.e., drunkenness).

As we finally turn to explore what the Bible has to say about alcohol, it is important to recognize that everyone approaches this topic having been shaped by their background and experiences. We all hold various tensions within us when we consider the role of Scripture *for life*, and this is certainly true for a topic like alcohol. Whereas I cannot assume, dear reader, what your disposition to alcohol is, I do think it is important that I show you my cards (since I was born and raised in Vegas after all). I am not an uninterested interpreter. In full disclosure, one of my favorite hobbies is exploring wineries, craft breweries, and cocktail bars across the US and around the world. I am also a homebrewer, and I love hosting craft-beer receptions, tastings, and cocktail parties. At the same time, I also have close family members who have had their lives upended by addiction to alcohol. Naturally, my perspective on this topic is shaped by my own background and experiences. So my goal is to try to respect the practical tensions that we might uniquely bring to this study, while at the same time offering my assessment of what Scripture has to say about alcohol holistically, in all of its diversity. I hope that, as we explore this rich biblical topic and all of its difficult practical issues, you will be challenged and encouraged along the way, whether you personally consume alcohol or not. There is a feast that awaits us all.

PART 2

ARRIVING AT ANSWERS

CHAPTER 2

THE TYPES OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IN THE BIBLE

Modern consumers of alcoholic beverages can choose from a variety of options within the three main categories of wines, beers, and spirits. In the ancient world, however, spirits of 40 percent (or higher) alcohol by volume (ABV) did not exist, since distillation developed in the medieval era. This means that beverages made with spirits were not around either, such as fortified wines. Which alcoholic beverages were available depended on various factors, such as cultural preferences, regional suitability, infrastructural supports, trade partnerships, and socioeconomic class. Broadly speaking, though, alcohol production in the ancient world included wines, beers, and meads (made from honey), which could at times be combined together to make a kind of "grog."[1]

When it comes to alcoholic beverages in the Bible, wine is recognized as the primary, if not the sole, beverage. Yet questions about the kinds of wines that biblical figures consumed, or what the various terms for wine mean, are rarely addressed outside of specialized books or dictionaries. Additionally, whether there are references to other drinks like beer or mead is not something that most Bible readers ponder, even though it is a matter of scholarly dispute. Answering these questions will help us better recognize how alcohol was enjoyed, and then also how it functioned both in daily life and in the biblical texts. The goal of this initial chapter in the "Arriving at Answers" section of this book is to provide clarity on the types of intoxicants mentioned in the Bible, as well as some of the common misunderstandings about them.

CATEGORIZING ANCIENT ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

The most common category of beverage in Scripture is grape based, but there are references to other fruit-based drinks and possibly even grain-based ones too. The Bible uses different terms to distinguish between types of wine, but the distinctions in Scripture are different from modern categorizations. Contemporary wines are categorized as red, white, rosé, sparkling, or dessert wine. If we have more familiarity with wine, we might further classify them by provenance or region (e.g., Napa Valley

1. See McGovern, *Ancient Wine*, 262–78, 279–98, cf. 186.

or Hunter Valley), or vine varietal (e.g., some reds include Malbec and Petite Sirah), unless they are a blend of varietals.

The Bible, however, does not really categorize wine by color, varietal, or provenance. An exception may be found in the term *soreq* (Isa 5:2; Jer 2:21; cf. Isa 16:8), often translated as "choice vine," which could refer to a species of vine that produces red grapes (cf. Gen 49:11).[2] Since there was a town called Sorek (Judg 16:4; same Hebrew spelling), it is likely that a vine called *soreq* designated either the vine's origin from that area before being replanted elsewhere, or its comparable quality to vines from Sorek.[3] Only twice does the Bible overtly mention the provenance of wine: Lebanon (Hos 14:7) and the city of Helbon in modern-day Syria (Ezek 27:18). We can assume that most wines in the region of ancient Israel, from the Late Bronze Age to the Hellenistic period, were reds (Prov 23:31).[4] References to a wine's color refer to it as dark (Gen 49:12; cf. Sib. Or. 14.292) or compare it to blood (Deut 32:42; Isa 34:5; 49:26; Ezek 39:17–20; Joel 3:13; Zech 9:14–15; Matt 26:28–29; Mark 14:24–25; Luke 22:17–18, 20; John 6:53–58; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25; Rev 14:17–20; 17:6), even calling it the "blood of [the] grape[s]" (Gen 49:11–12; Deut 32:14; cf. 1 Macc 6:34; Sir 39:26; 50:15).

What gives red wines their color is when the *must*—expressed juice from grapes—ferments with the skins, known as *maceration*. Maceration would have been the most consistent way to ferment grape must in the ancient world because yeast residue collects on the skins, and yeast is needed to convert sugar into alcohol. Without maceration, though, the must would ferment from natural yeast strains in the air. White wines were possible, though they were trickier to make, and were often orange in color due to maceration. They gained prestige after the Hellenistic period (cf. Pliny the Elder, *Nat*. 14.11.80). In fact, a wall near a wine shop in the ruins of Herculaneum (destroyed by Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE alongside Pompeii) colorfully advertises various options for wine, with a white wine listed as the most expensive (*Ad Cucumas* in insula VI.14).

Nowhere does the Bible refer to white wine, although there is some archaeobotanical evidence suggesting that white wine became more prominent in the Levant (the eastern coastal Mediterranean region inclusive of the land of Israel) during the Hellenistic period as wider trade increased.[5] Notably, Shevi Drori has been studying wild varietals in Israel-Palestine that have some claim to antiquity, including Dabouki, Marawi/Hamdani, Jandali, and Bittuni, among others (including some that are presently unnamed). Other than Bittuni, these varietals listed here would be used for white wines.[6] Although these varietals are indigenous to Israel-Palestine, debate about their antiquity persists.[7]

2. *HALOT* 3:1362.

3. So similarly Walsh, *Fruit*, 109–10.

4. So, e.g., Walsh, *Fruit*, 107–8; Dubach, *Trunkenheit*, 197.

5. Walsh, *Fruit*, 107; Michal Dayagi-Mendels, *Drink and Be Merry* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1999), 37.

6. Elyashiv Drori et al., "Collection and Characterization of Grapevine Genetic Resources (*Vitis vinifera*) in the Holy Land, towards the Renewal of Ancient Winemaking Practices," *SR* 7:44463 (2017): 1–12.

7. McGovern, *Ancient Wine*, 333, is not convinced about the antiquity of Marawi/Hamdani or Jandali.

Most wineries in Israel-Palestine today use common European varietals, like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, because winemaking was reintroduced in the nineteenth century by Baron Edmond Rothchild of Château Lafite in Bordeaux after it ended in the seventh century under Islamic control. Internationally, winemakers do not often use indigenous varietals because, although the main grapevine species for winemaking, *vitis vinifera*, produces thousands of grape cultivars, 99 percent of wines are made from just twenty-five varietals favored by market forces.[8] A few modern producers in Israel-Palestine, however, like Cremisan, Recanati, and Philokalia, have been making wines from local varietals.

If white wine is implied anywhere in the New Testament, the best candidate would be when Jesus turned water into wine.[9] One reason is because the text does not say that the miracle was *visibly discernible*, allowing for a resemblance between the wine and water. It was only *when the wine was tasted* that the miracle was recognized (John 2:9). Whether or not this suggestion is likely (see ch. 13), white wine is not assumed anywhere else in Scripture.

THE TWO-WINE THEORY

Some contemporary Bible readers, especially in the US, assume that the categories of wine represented in the Bible are actually "fermented" and "unfermented" respectively. This is known as the Two-Wine theory, notably defended by Robert Paul Teachout and Samuele Bacchiocchi.[10] This theory essentially affirms that positive references to wine refer to unfermented grape juice, whereas negative ones, especially involving drunkenness, point to alcohol.[11] Judging whether references to wine imply alcohol, however, based on whether its effects are clearly stated, is the equivalent of assuming today that references to coffee normally imply the decaffeinated variety, unless there are overt references to the effects of caffeine. It is little more than special pleading to suggest that beverages that are clearly intoxicants in many contexts simply are not alcoholic in the ones where it would conflict with a predetermined perspective on alcohol.[12]

Most importantly, however, this position fails to account for the way fermentation works. Everything needed for fermentation is found with the grape itself. Once the grapes are crushed, the yeast on the skins combines with the sugary must, and

8. McGovern, *Ancient Wine*, 364, 369; cf. 1.
9. So also, Butler and Heskett, *Divine Vintage*, 115.
10. Teachout, "Use of 'Wine'"; Bacchiocchi, *Wine*.
11. Cf. Bacchiocchi, *Wine*, 47–48.
12. Yet Teachout ("Use of 'Wine,'" 18) asserts that his study was not biased by preconceived beliefs.

fermentation begins. It is actually quite easy for grapes to ferment; they can even ferment on the vine, or while they are still in the collection receptacles after they are harvested, if the skin is broken. In fact, broken skin on grapes often leads to the presence of the best yeast for full fermentation, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*.[13] Without this variety of yeast, wines will likely top out around 5 percent ABV just from the wild yeasts present on the skins and in the air. But with it, ancient wines could reach up to 14–15 percent.[14] This yeast is used intentionally by vintners and brewers today, but its use in winemaking can be detected as far back as 3150 BCE.[15] The likelihood of an ancient wine being fully fermented by *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* would be increased by the following factors: the use of grapes with broken skin, previous exposure to the yeast strain (since it is known to linger on equipment, infrastructure, and soil at breweries and vineyards),[16] and if fruit juices or honey were added as additional sources of sugar and yeast.[17]

Ancient wines probably varied greatly in ABV, but strong wines would be the only kind worth storing and aging because they would spoil otherwise. Thus, the very fact of ancient wine storage and trading, attested in the literary and archaeological record, suggests that sufficient fermentation was regularly achieved. In a telling moment, Teachout registers his amazement at descriptions of wine storage in the Bible, saying, "the liquid produce of the vineyard was stored (1 Chr 27:27) and used during the whole year," even though "no hint is given as to how grape juice was kept from fermenting."[18] The simple reason is that the juice was not kept from fermenting, and without sufficient fermentation it would have spoiled in those conditions.

Despite this fact, both Teachout and Bacchiocchi contend that there is ancient evidence for preserving grape juice from Greek and Latin sources.[19] The two primary methods were boiling the wine down (cf. Columella, *Rust.* 12.19), or submerging vessels of wine into cold bodies of water (producing *semper mustum* or *aiegleukos*; cf. Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 14.11.83; Columella, *Rust.* 12.29; Cato, *Agr.* 120). Yet these and other methods do not receive mention in the biblical texts, nor is there evidence that they were practiced in ancient Israel. These methods also could not provide large-scale solutions to preserving must, given the quantities produced annually by each vineyard. Moreover, this discussion largely assumes that ancient people understood how fermentation worked, but in fact they did not, and instead they

13. Robert Mortimer and Mario Polsinelli, "On the Origins of Wine Yeast," *RM* 150 (1999): 199–204.

14. Patrick E. McGovern, *Uncorking the Past: The Quest for Wine, Beer, and Other Alcoholic Beverages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 16; Walsh, *Fruit*, 187–88; Paul A. Henschke and Anthony Borneman, "Yeast," in *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, ed. Julia Harding and Jancis Robinson with Tara Q. Thomas, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 848.

15. This was detected in Canaanite amphorae found in king Scorpion I's tomb in Abydos, Egypt. See Duccio Cavalieri et al., "Evidence for *S. cerevisiae* Fermentation in Ancient Wine," *JME* 57 (2003): 226–32. Cf. McGovern, *Ancient Wine*, 103–6.

16. Alessandro Martini, "Origin and Domestication of the Wine Yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*," *JWR* 4.3 (1993): 165–76.

17. McGovern, *Uncorking*, 64, 137.

18. Teachout, "Use of 'Wine,'" 101.

19. Teachout, "Use of 'Wine,'" 396–403; Bacchiocchi, *Wine*, 107–19.

assumed that it was a magical or divine occurrence.[20] Boiling down the must, in particular, would not preserve the must *as juice* in most instances, since the cooking process was not designed to kill the yeast (which they did not know about) but to create a concentration, often in the form of a syrup, which was typically used as an additive to sweeten wine (cf. Columella, *Rust.* 12.21).[21] Similarly, submerging vessels of wine in bodies of water would only work if the water was deep and cold (which is not so simple throughout Israel), and it would only forestall fermentation as long as cold temperatures were maintained, since most yeasts prefer the warmth and would be reactivated unless retrieved during a particularly cold winter.

> Bacchiocchi claims, without support, that "the best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration."[22] Despite the fact that no one from antiquity talked about "the best wines" like this, one prominent naturalist, Pliny the Elder (1st c. CE), said that "no other wine has a higher rank" than the Roman wine, Falernum, affirming that it is "the only wine that takes light when a flame is applied to it" (*Nat.* 14.8.63 [Rackham, LCL]). Taking light, of course, speaks to Falernum's high ABV. Conversely, Pliny mentioned another type of grape called "the good-for-nothing," since it was "the only vintage that does not cause intoxication" (*Nat.* 14.4.31–32 [Rackham, LCL]).

Indeed, the only way to stop the process of fermentation after the grapes have been crushed is through pasteurization, which was not fully understood until after the discovery of yeast by Antonie van Leeuwenhoek in the seventeenth century.[23] Developed by Louis Pasteur in 1865, pasteurization is the process of heating a liquid long enough and at the appropriate temperature to kill all microorganisms, including yeast cells. Pasteurization was first applied to winemaking in 1869 when a Methodist named Thomas Bramwell Welch (1825–1903) wanted to find a way to serve communion wine without alcohol.[24] This innovation led to the famous brand of Welch's grape juice. Now, for the first time, people could consume "unfermented wine" year-round, thanks as well to the invention of ice boxes in the nineteenth century and refrigerators in the early part of the twentieth century, without which Welch's grape juice would spoil, if not ferment.

Thus, despite the contention of the proponents of the Two-Wine theory, the

20. Lukacs, *Inventing Wine*, 1, 3.
21. McGovern, *Ancient Wine*, 309; Frankel, *Wine and Oil*, 43.
22. Bacchiocchi, *Wine*, 139.
23. Patrick E. McGovern, *Ancient Brews: Rediscovered and Re-Created* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017), 17.
24. Michael M. Homan and Mark A. Gstohl, "Jesus the Teetotaler: How Dr. Welch Put the Lord on the Wagon," *BR* (2002): 29.

truth of the matter is actually that there are no references to "unfermented wine" in the Bible. The notion of a stable, unfermented grape juice is actually a modern invention.[25] This is also true regardless of which term for wine is used in the Bible, such as those often translated as "new wine," as we will see below. The reason is because grape must begins to ferment immediately and will be fully fermented in a matter of days. When we categorize ancient wines in terms of fermentation, we should speak of *fermenting* must and *fermented* wines. If an ancient person wanted to drink grape must, they could do so at the harvest in late summer (see also ch. 4).[26] Once everything was harvested, there would be no further opportunity until the following year.

Thus, the Bible does not distinguish between fermented and unfermented wines, nor does it make a distinction between wines the way modern wine-drinkers might expect, based on *terroir* or varietal. Nevertheless, the Bible does have its own categorization of wine as seen in the various terms from the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. I contend further that biblical terminology is not limited to grape-based intoxicants, meaning that there are likely references to beer as well. In the following sections, we will explore those key terms.

FULLY FERMENTED WINES

In the three languages of the Bible, the primary words for fully fermented wines are *yayin* (Hebrew), *khamar* (Aramaic), and *oinos* (Greek). Residual sugar may remain, but each of these generally refer to wines that have completed fermentation and have aged to some degree since harvest. They also appear to be fairly interchangeable, since the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translates both *yayin* and *khamar* with *oinos*. Thus, they are broad terms, with some texts even referring to various kinds of *yayin* (Neh 5:18) and various types of *oinos* (Philo, *Drunkenness* 218).

Against Two-Wine theorists, many instances of *yayin* in the Old Testament, for example, are clearly presented as positive *and* inebriating through the use of Hebrew euphemisms. One of the blessings of *yayin*, for example, is how it brings *joy and gladness to the heart* of the consumer (Ps 104:15; cf. *oinos* in Sir 40:20), and makes life joyful (Eccl 10:19). *Yayin* also causes people to have "a good heart" (NIV: "high spirits"), which is another euphemism for intoxication, applied to Amnon (2 Sam 13:28), King Ahasuerus (Esth 1:10), and readers of Ecclesiastes (Eccl 9:7; NIV: "joyful heart"). In the story about Nabal, being "good in heart" from *yayin* meant that he was "very drunk" (1 Sam 25:36–37), which reveals that the euphemism implies the altering effects of intoxication, though not always to the point of drunkenness.

25. So also, e.g., Becker, *Rebe*, 145; Walsh, *Fruit*, 109.

26. Jack M. Sasson, "The Blood of Grapes: Viticulture and Intoxication in the Hebrew Bible," in *Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Lucio Milano (Padua: Sargon, 1994), 401.

Two other rare Hebrew terms in the Old Testament seem to refer to a specialized wine. The first is *shemer*, which technically refers to wine sediment, called dregs or lees (cf. Ps 75:8 [75:9 MT]; Jer 48:11). In Isaiah 25:6, however, the term designates a superior kind of aged wine—a wine that aged unfiltered, but which would be filtered before consumption (cf. ch. 14). The second term is *khemer* (not to be confused with the Aramaic term *khamar*), which only occurs once in Deuteronomy 32:14 and is translated as "foaming"—"the foaming blood of the grape"—because the cognate verb means "to foam." Some scholars argue that the link to foaming means that *khemer* is wine that is still fermenting,[27] since foaming is a by-product of fermentation caused by the release of carbon dioxide when yeast converts sugar into alcohol. If carbon dioxide is unable to escape from a sealed vessel, though, the liquid will become carbonated. The foaming of *khemer*, then, might not suggest fermentation but rather carbonation. Similarly, Butler and Heskett suggest that *khemer* could designate a carbonated red wine, since the verb for foaming is also used in Psalm 75:8 (75:9 MT) with fully fermented wine, *yayin* ("foaming wine").[28]

Similar euphemisms for intoxication—often translated as being "cheerful," "gladdened," "merry," or "in good spirits"—are so commonplace that they occur in contexts that merely *assume* the presence of alcohol (Judg 19:6, 9, 22; 1 Kgs 21:7; 2 Chr 7:10; Eccl 7:2–3; Prov 15:15), including for Haman (Esth 5:9), the Philistines (Judg 16:25), and even Boaz (Ruth 3:7).

NEW WINES

The second most common term for wine in the Old Testament is *tirosh*, which is typically translated as "new wine." When the New Testament speaks of "new wine," it adds the adjective *neos* ("new") rather than using a term different from *oinos* (Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37–38; cf. Luke 5:39),[29] though *gleukos* is a rare exception (see discussion on sweet wines below). This further suggests that *oinos*, when it is not qualified by another adjective or phrase, refers broadly to fully fermented wine.

Much confusion persists about the nature of "new wine." Beyond Two-Wine theorists, many scholars contend that new wine designates unfermented wine.[30] In the New Testament, however, "new wine" designates *fermenting* and *newly fermented* wine, as seen in Jesus's parable of the wineskins (e.g., Mark 2:22), since new wine bursting old wineskins implies the pressure of carbon dioxide within a sealed wineskin during fermentation (cf. ch. 4).

The issue is not as straightforward in the Old Testament, however. Several scholars view *tirosh* as the raw material for wine (i.e., grapes).[31] Proponents of this regard Isaiah 65:8 as conclusive, since *tirosh* is in "the cluster of grapes," although

27. *HALOT* 1:330; Becker, *Rebe*, 218.

28. Butler and Heskett, *Divine Vintage*, 53.

29. Jesus's comment about drinking wine *new* in the coming kingdom does not apply (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25). Cf. ch. 14.

30. BDB 440 glosses *tirosh* as "must, fresh or new wine"; L&N 1:77 (§6.197–98) regards *oinos neos* as "grape juice," or juice "in the initial stages of fermentation."

31. E.g., G. Fleischer, "תירוש," *TDOT* 15:655, 657.

this ignores how grapes can ferment on the vine. Others point to another passage in Isaiah that mentions consuming *tirosh* after it is *gathered*, suggesting that it refers to harvested grapes (Isa 62:8–9; cf. Deut 11:14). Although associations with the harvest seem accurate for *tirosh*, the proposal that *tirosh* refers to grapes does not. Rather, *tirosh* and grapes are likely connected by metonymy, meaning that grapes were linked to the telos of winemaking.[32] When texts mention *tirosh* alongside grain, the grape view finds some support, since grain is raw material. Yet when paired with grain in Joel 2:24, *tirosh* and oil overflow their respective vats, suggesting that both are *produced from* the raw materials of grapes and olives (cf. Hos 2:8, 22 [2:10, 24 MT]).[33] Moreover, Micah explicitly mentions drinking *tirosh* (Mic 6:15), making it more likely that *tirosh* is grape must than just grapes.

Yet other texts suggest that *tirosh* is not merely drinkable, but also intoxicating. *Tirosh* can "take away understanding" just like *yayin* (Hos 4:11) and euphemistically bring "cheer" (Judg 9:13). Further, its absence can cause "the merrymakers" to "groan" (Isa 24:7), just as they mourn the loss of *yayin* and *shekar* (Isa 24:9; on *shekar*, see below).[34] The intoxicating nature of *tirosh* is also corroborated by the way that the LXX translators do not make much of a distinction between *yayin* and *tirosh*, since they typically translate both with *oinos*.[35]

The two exceptions to the LXX pattern of translating *tirosh* as *oinos* are revealing. Hosea 4:11 (LXX) renders *tirosh* with *methysma*, a generic term for an intoxicant that was needed because *oinos* was used for *yayin* in the same verse. Isaiah 65:8 (LXX) translates *tirosh* in the grape cluster with a word for grape (*rhōx*). Although this could support the raw-material view, it is notable that this decision only occurs here in a context about grape clusters. Everywhere else they render *tirosh* as an intoxicant (*oinos* or *methysma*).

In this light, it is best to view *tirosh* as the desired result of the harvest—fresh wine. The evidence suggests that *tirosh* refers to the fresh batch of newly fermented wine that one can only enjoy once a year after harvest.[36] Passages, then, that seem like *tirosh* refers to grapes or grape must should be considered like those that mention *yayin* being expressed in winepresses (e.g., Isa 16:10; Jer 48:33). They anticipate what is to come from the whole viticultural process, eliding some steps in that process. But rather than view *yayin* and *tirosh* as essentially synonymous,[37] *tirosh* stresses that a wine is fresh and unaged (cf. virgins enjoying *tirosh* in Zech 9:17).[38] To be clear, *tirosh*'s freshness is not *pre-fermentation* freshness. Instead, *tirosh* designates fresh wine that is just as intoxicating as *yayin* and will become *yayin* with time.[39]

32. The metonymical argument has been overstated in favor of *tirosh* being grapes; see S. Naeh and M. P. Weitzman, "TĪRŌŠ—Wine or Grape? A Case of Metonymy," *VT* 44.1 (1994): 115–20. Cf. Dubach, *Trunkenheit*, 48–50.

33. S. R. Driver, *The Books of Joel and Amos*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 79–80.

34. J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 314.

35. Bacchiocchi mistakenly insists that since *tirosh* was translated as *oinos*, then *oinos* can be unfermented (*Wine*, 61–62, 71).

36. Rightly Walsh, *Fruit*, 194–97.

37. So Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 113.

38. Dubach, *Trunkenheit*, 197.

39. Scholars who regard *tirosh* as a reference to grapes must also view its difference with *yayin* in terms of time, but do so incorrectly as before and after fermentation respectively. See Hinckley G. Mitchell, "Tirosh and Yayin," *JBL* 1 (1891): 70–72; Becker, *Rebe*, 99, 123, 218.

GRAPE MUST AND SWEET WINES

There are three Hebrew terms for grape must in the Old Testament, but they are rare. Two of them only occur once; one designates the juice (*dema*) expressed at harvest time that was dedicated to YHWH during the consecration of Israel's firstborns (Exod 22:29 [22:28 MT]),[40] and the other is included in a prohibition of grape juice (*mishrah*), along with all grape products, for the Nazirite vow (Num 6:3). The third term for grape must, *asis*, occurs the most, but only five times (Song 8:2; Isa 49:26; Joel 1:5; 3:18 [4:18 MT]; Amos 9:13).

The primary indication that *asis* refers to grape must is that the cognate verb *asas* means "to tread" (cf. Mal 4:3 [3:21 MT]), suggesting that *asis* comes from expressing juice by treading (cf. ch. 4).[41] The clearest examples are the passages in Joel and Amos that describe *asis* dripping down mountains, imagining a future when the grapes grown on the mountainsides are pressed to the point that the collection vats overflow right there on the hills (Joel 3:18 [4:18 MT]; Amos 9:13). It could also be that *asis* is technically a general term for any fruit juice, since *asis* and pomegranates are paired in Song of Songs 8:2.[42] Given how difficult it would be to produce a significant amount of pomegranate juice, however, it is more likely the *asis* there was accented with pomegranates, just as *yayin* in the same verse is flavored with spices.[43]

Asis is variously translated into English as "new wine," "sweet wine," or "nectar," to name a few, and such variety is also reflected in the Greek terms used in the LXX.[44] As we saw with *tirosh* above, *asis* is likewise a harvest term, being available for a short window of time each year after the initial treading of grapes. Since fermentation begins shortly after grape skins come into contact with the sugary must, it should be reiterated that *asis* is not "unfermented wine" or even "unfermented must."[45] Primary fermentation—when the bulk of the sugars are converted to alcohol—usually only takes about a week, and the initial presence of alcohol is detectable within a day.

The swiftness of the fermentation process helps to explain why even *asis can cause intoxication*.[46] For example, the prophet Joel calls for drunkards and consumers of wine (*yayin*) to mourn the absence of *asis* as a result of the locust plague (Joel 1:5). These imbibers were obviously not disappointed by a lack of grape juice but by the fact that there would not be any wine from that year's vintage. Moreover, the prophet Isaiah writes, in a context of judgment, that YHWH's enemies will become drunk on

40. The NIV clarifies this by translating it as "vats."

41. E.g., Becker, *Rebe*, 126 (cf. 99); Dubach, *Trunkenheit*, 198; Walsh, *Fruit*, 198.

42. E.g., Frankel, *Wine and Oil*, 198.

43. So also Walsh, *Fruit*, 197–99.

44. Cf. "new wine" (Isa 49:26 LXX), "sweetness" (Joel 4:18 LXX; Amos 9:13 LXX), and "juice" (Song 8:2 LXX) in NETS.

45. Contra *HALOT* 2:860; Eugene Carpenter, "עסיס," *NIDOTTE* 3:470.

46. Dubach, *Trunkenheit*, 198.

their own blood as with *asis* (Isa 49:26), implying again that *asis* can intoxicate.[47] If grape-based *asis* can cause drunkenness, that reinforces that *asis* should be regarded as "fermenting must" or even "sweet wine," with the sweetness stemming from the residual sugar that has yet to ferment. This seems to be why the Greek translators of Joel and Amos render *asis* as "sweetness" (*glykasmos*), emphasizing that the fermenting must is still sugary.

Elsewhere in the Bible there are references to sweet alcoholic drinks that do not specify how the sweetness was acquired, whether from incomplete fermentation (as with *asis*), sugary additives, or drying out the grapes into raisins first before extracting juice (cf. ch. 4). In the Old Testament, this includes references to "sweet drinks" (*mamtaqqim*) in Nehemiah 8:10 and Song of Songs 5:16. *Mamtaqqim* might also derive its sweetness from incomplete fermentation like *asis*, because it is also translated as *glykasmos* in the LXX just as *asis* is in Joel and Amos LXX.[48] In the New Testament, the Greek term *gleukos* in the story of Pentecost (Acts 2:13), implies a sugary wine. It is often translated as "new wine," but it should be clear that its "newness" implies that the fermentation of sugar has not fully completed.[49]

Gleukos in Acts 2:13 assumes fermentation to some degree because it was believed at Pentecost that those claiming to hear the disciples' message in their own language were drunk from it. This rare word occurs once in the New Testament, but in its other appearances it refers to fermenting must. For example, in Josephus's rendition of the Joseph story, the cupbearer squeezes out *gleukos* from grapes into Pharaoh's cup (*Ant.* 2.64), and in the Greek translation of Job, Elihu compares the urge in his stomach to respond to Job to being like bubbling *gleukos* about to make a wineskin burst (Job 32:18–19 LXX).[50] Yet the problem with this understanding of *gleukos* in Acts 2:13 is that Pentecost is a springtime festival and harvest occurs in late summer, so *gleukos* would not have been available. This has led to some creative solutions.[51] C. K. Barrett suggested that *gleukos* may pejoratively suggest that the people were getting drunk from "cheap stuff," based on Lucian's (2nd c. CE) contrast of *gleukos* with nicer wines (*Ep. Sat.* 22).[52] Yet it may just be that the comment was simply sarcastic, not least because *fermenting* wine would not have been available in the spring, but more importantly because no one was actually drunk at Pentecost anyway.[53]

47. Rebekah Welton argues that the verb for becoming drunk is a metaphor for becoming fermented. Thus, she suggests that YHWH will ferment his enemies' blood like *asis*. See "Yahweh the Wrathful Vintner: Blood and Wine-Making Metaphors in Isaiah 49:26a and 63:6," *JIBS* 4.3 (2002): 22–25.

48. *HALOT* 2:596 refers to *mamtaqqim* as "sweetness" and "sweet drinks" without comment on alcohol levels.

49. L&N 1:77 (§6.199) regard *gleukos* as "a new, sweet wine in the process of fermentation."

50. The Hebrew word in Job 32:19 is *yayin*, making this the only instance where *yayin* is translated as *gleukos*.

51. E.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer insists, on the basis of evidence in the Temple Scroll (11QT[a] [11Q19] XVIII–XXI), that some Jews observed three Pentecosts (new grain, new wine, and new oil), and that Acts 2, set during the Pentecost of new grain, alludes to the previous Pentecost of new wine. See his *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 234–35.

52. C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:125.

53. Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 121.

Bacchiocchi claims to find evidence of unfermented wine in Athenaeus's (3rd c. CE) discussion of *glykus* in *Deipnosophistae* 2.45e (not to be confused with *gleukos*). Athenaeus designated the Latin term *protropum* with the Greek word *glykus*—wine made from the "free run" of juice from grapes before being pressed (cf. ch. 4)—drawing attention to an expression of it from a Greek island called Lesbos. Bacchiocchi cites an English translation from 1854 that refers to this as "sweet Lesbian wine,"[54] which Bacchiocchi embarrassingly cites as "sweet lesbian *glykus*" and explains in this way: "the unfermented sweet grape juice is called 'lesbian—effoeminatum' because the potency of fermentable power of the wine has been removed."[55] Setting aside the gross misogyny and homophobia underpinning this claim, "Lesbian" was obviously the adjectival form of Lesbos, which Bacchiocchi clearly missed and distorted by adding his own Latin gloss ("effoeminatum") and by citing it with a lowercase "l".[56] Moreover, it is clear that *glykus* could cause inebriation because the point in context is that it affected rational capacities *less* than other wines.

SOUR WINE AND VINEGAR

Sour wine, or vinegar, appears a few times in Scripture (Heb. *khomets*; Gk. *oxos*). If alcoholic beverages are exposed to oxygen, whether intentionally or through improper storage, the alcohol converts to acetic acid and creates vinegar. Depending on when the sour wine is consumed, there would be varying degrees of alcohol left over, since the full conversion process can take a couple months in some cases. The resulting acetic acid is what makes one's teeth hurt (Prov 10:26), and vinegar is even aligned with poison in some contexts (Ps 69:21). Vinegar had many purposes, however, since it could be used as a preservative, a condiment for dipping bread (Ruth 2:14; cf. possibly Matt 26:23; Mark 14:20), a topical medicine for wounds (Prov 25:20), and a means of sanitizing water. In the Gospels' passion narratives, we see how sour wine was frequently used to quench thirst when it was offered to Jesus on the cross, even though the intent of the offer varies. In John's Gospel, Jesus receives sour wine from someone nearby (presumably a soldier) after declaring that he was thirsty (John 19:28–30) without any hint of malicious intent.[57] The jar was likely there for the

54. See *Deip.* II, 24 in Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists, or The Learned Banqueters*, trans. C. D. Yonge, 3 vols. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 1:74.

55. Bacchiocchi, *Wine*, 60.

56. Moreover, the best manuscript evidence does not even refer to "Lesbian" *glykus* (see S. Douglas Olson, ed. and trans., *Athenaeus: The Learned Banqueters, Volume I: Books 1–3.106e*, LCL 204 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007], 257), which was likely added later on to explain what the Latin loan word meant to Greek audiences.

57. Cf. Patrick Faas, *Around the Roman Table: Food and Feasting in Ancient Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 122; Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 80n10.

soldiers, since sour wine (a mixture of vinegar and water known as *posca* in Latin) was a favorite drink of Roman soldiers.[58] Luke records soldiers offering Jesus sour wine, presumably intended originally for their own consumption, but in Luke their offer is clearly intended to mock Jesus (Luke 23:36). In Matthew and Mark, bystanders offer Jesus sour wine in an attempt to aid him after they misunderstand his "cry of dereliction," assuming he was appealing for Elijah's help. This underscores its role as a thirst quencher, since it was offered to keep Jesus alive a little longer (Matt 27:48; Mark 15:36). These scenes resist easy harmonization, but they nevertheless underscore in their respective ways how sour wine (*oxos*) was a thirst quencher.

BEER

Whether or not the Bible refers to grain-based alcohol, or beer, is hotly debated. The disputed terms are the Hebrew words *sobe* and *shekar* in the Old Testament, and the Greek word *sikera* in the New Testament (a Semitic loanword). Both *sobe* and *sikera* are rare biblical terms, but *shekar* occurs twenty-three times, making it the third most used word in the Old Testament to refer to alcohol after *yayin* and *tirosh*.

Sobe occurs three times in the Old Testament (Isa 1:22; Hos 4:18; Nah 1:10). Most scholars contend that *sobe* is a generic term for an alcoholic beverage, and so it is often simply translated as "drinks" or the act of drinking (as a noun).[59] But since Isaiah 1:22 refers to *sobe* that has been diluted, many translations regard it as wine (so, e.g., NRSVue), and even a superior kind of wine (so, e.g., NIV; ESV). Yet, based on cognate evidence from Akkadian, some scholars contend that it is probably a reference to a wheat beer.[60] Without more evidence it is difficult to say what *sobe* is definitively other than an intoxicant, though it could refer to beer (so, e.g., NET).

Sikera is only found once in the New Testament (Luke 1:15), but it is the most commonly used Greek word in the LXX to translate *shekar* (cf. Lev 10:9; Num 6:3; 28:7; Deut 14:26; 29:6 [29:5 LXX]; Judg 13:4, 7, 14; Isa 5:11, 22; 24:9; 28:7; 29:9). Since *sikera* is a Semitic loan word, part of the case for determining what *sikera* is depends on what *shekar* is, to which we will turn next. But it is worth noting that the standard ancient Greek dictionaries gloss *sikera* as "beer."[61]

Scholars are largely unclear on what *shekar* is. Because *shekar* is cognate to the Hebrew verb for becoming drunk (*shakar*) and the noun for a drunkard (*shekor*), many English translations have rendered it as "strong drink" (notable in the KJV). This translation has led many Bible readers to misunderstand *shekar*. If wine is off

58. L. Th. Witkamp, "Jesus' Thirst in John 19:28–30: Literal or Figurative?," *JBL* 115.3 (1996): 494–95.

59. BDB 685 opts for "liquor." Cf. Walsh, *Fruit*, 203–4; Dubach, *Trunkenheit*, 33.

60. So, e.g., Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 28–30, 80; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 186; *HALOT* 2:738; 4:1501.

61. BDAG 923; L&N 1:77 (§6.200).

the table for some conservative readers because it contains alcohol, surely "strong drink" is too! Norman Geisler, who argues that ancient wines were highly diluted with water (cf. ch. 3), maintains that modern wines should be forbidden because they are comparable to "strong drink," which he says is "forbidden in the Bible."[62] Even if the comparison between *shekar* and contemporary wine in terms of ABV is apt, *shekar* is plainly not forbidden in the Bible. *Shekar* was (1) poured out for libations on the altar in the tabernacle/temple (Num 28:7–10); (2) consumed as part of one's tithe to YHWH in a sacrificial meal (Deut 14:26); (3) recommended for the poor by King Lemuel's mother (Prov 31:6); and (4) lamented when taken away as a judgment of privation (Isa 24:9).[63]

So then, if *shekar* was not a forbidden drink, what was it exactly? Outside of "strong drink," the next most common translation for *shekar* is "fermented drink," because many scholars think it is a generic term for any intoxicant.[64] Scholars who do try to identify *shekar* as a specific type of alcoholic beverage have proposed grappa, date wine, or beer. Part of the difficulty in identifying one of these is that *shekar* is never overtly linked with its main source of fermentable sugars, whether grapes, dates, or grains. Yet what grappa and date wine have in common is that both of them could potentially be stronger in alcohol than standard grape-based wine, potentially explaining why *shekar* is cognate to terms for drunkenness.

Grappa in particular is a grape-based spirit, and those who identify it as the referent for *shekar* contend that its fermentable sugars likely come from grapes. One reason for this identification is because *shekar* is included in the Nazirite vow, prohibiting anything that comes from the vine (Num 6:3; Judg 13:14).[65] A grape spirit like grappa, however, is an improbable suggestion historically because its strong alcohol content is derived from distillation.[66]

Distilling alcohol requires a technical understanding about the different boiling temperatures for water (212°F / 100°C) and alcohol (173°F / 78°C), and appropriate equipment to collect the evaporated alcohol so that it can condense separately and produce a higher concentration of alcohol. Proper distillation was actually a medieval invention, although it had experimental precursors.

Furthermore, the argument that *shekar* is made from grapes is by no means clear from the Nazirite passages. The inclusion of *shekar* could be intended to ensure that no kind of alcohol be consumed by Nazirites undertaking their vows, not just alcohol that is derived from the grapevine. Otherwise, if they are both

62. Norman L. Geisler, "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking," *BSac* 139:553 (1982): 50, cf. 51.

63. See this fourfold breakdown in Michael M. Homan, "Beer, Barley, and שֵׂכָר in the Hebrew Bible," in *Le-David Maskil: A Birthday Tribute for David Noel Freedman*, ed. Richard Elliott Friedman and William H. C. Propp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 25–26.

64. E.g., Frankel, *Wine and Oil*, 198; Sasson, "Blood," 399–400; Becker, *Rebe*, 128; Dubach, *Trunkenheit*, 201–5.

65. E.g., Lawrence E. Stager, J. David Schloen, Daniel M. Master, eds., *Ashkelon 1: Introduction and Overview (1985–2006)* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 271, 309, 341; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 101–2; Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 3:450.

66. The difference between grappa and brandy is that grappa is made specifically from pomace, the collection of skins and stems left over after pressing the grapes.

grape based, the pairing of *yayin* and *shekar* would seem to be redundant. Indeed, in Numbers 6:3 the vow includes abstinence from vinegar (*khomets*) made from *yayin* and also vinegar made from *shekar*. As mentioned in the previous section, vinegar can be produced from any type of alcohol, but if *shekar* is made from grapes, then stressing vinegars made from *yayin* and from *shekar* is redundant. It does not seem, then, that *shekar* is made from grapes (on the Nazirites, cf. ch. 7).

Date wine, on the other hand, was distinct from grape-based *yayin* and was a well-established alcoholic beverage in antiquity, being widely attested in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.[67] Patrick McGovern argues that *shekar* refers to date wine on the basis of Proverbs 20:1, which compares *yayin* to a mocker, and *shekar* to a brawler. Even though the proverb does not identify the ingredients used for *shekar*, the argument is that *yayin* is not as strong as *shekar*, and thus the sugar source for *shekar* must be greater than that of grapes.[68] Although dates do have a higher sugar content than grapes, that does not mean that the resulting alcoholic beverage would necessarily be stronger, because the yeast will peter out when the same level of ABV is produced (around 15%).[69] With reference to the proverb, though, if the second line that refers to *shekar* is meant to be a heightening of the first line (i.e., brawling is more excessive than mocking) rather than simply parallel to it, it by no means follows that the heightening would be due to the *actual* alcohol content. It could just as easily be heightened due to societal associations and perceptions of *shekar*.

> In many settings in the modern West, beer is often regarded as more of a party drink compared to the sophistication of wine. This reputation is persistent, even though on average wine has a much higher ABV than beer. The difference in perception is not the relative strength of wine and beer but the cultural associations with the habits and settings of consuming them. Part of the reason for this is that beer could be produced year-round (cf. ch. 4) and thus consumed in greater quantity. From what we know about beer in the ancient world, it held a similar reputation in certain cultures that predominantly made wine, like Greece and Rome.[70]

Although beer in the ancient world was not stronger than wine, often roughly 2–3 percent ABV without the addition of other sugary ingredients, Max Nelson notes that beer was commonly perceived by many to be the strongest intoxicant.[71]

67. For *shekar* as date wine, see Walsh, *Fruit*, 200–202.

68. McGovern, *Ancient Wine*, 235–36.

69. So also, Walsh, *Fruit*, 202, though she views *shekar* as date wine.

70. See esp. Max Nelson, *The Barbarian's Beverage: A History of Beer in Ancient Europe* (London: Routledge, 2008).

71. Nelson, *Barbarian's Beverage*, 72.

The point here is simply that Proverbs 20:1 is by no means conclusive in determining the nature of *shekar*, other than the fact that it is an intoxicant like *yayin*.

> Michael Homan contends that date wine is an anachronistic proposal for a handful of passages that predate the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE (e.g., Isa 5:11, 22; 24:9; 28:7; 29:9; Mic 2:11), since that is probably when Judahites were first introduced to it.[72] If one is inclined to date Old Testament texts more conservatively than Homan, that would strengthen this argument further.

This leads to the third and final suggestion that *shekar* refers to grain-based beer.[73] In favor of this proposal are a few different considerations. To start, *shekar* is derived from the Akkadian word for beer, *sikaru*.[74] Beer was also a common beverage among Israel's neighbors, especially in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and so it is hard to imagine that Israel would not consume it as well.[75] Furthermore, it is even harder to imagine that there would be no word for beer in Hebrew.[76] In the LXX, *shekar* is often translated as *sikera*, as noted earlier, which does not provide much help here because it is a Semitic loanword.[77] As J. J. M. Roberts points out, though, in one instance in the LXX the Greek translators of Isaiah 19:10 misread the Hebrew word for "wages" (*sekar*), which looks very similar to *shekar*, and rendered it as *zythos* in Greek, which is the word for Egyptian beer.[78] By the time of the Mishnah (3rd c. CE), it is clear that *shekar* was understood to be grain-based beer.[79] A tractate on the Passover describes how celebrants should get rid of *all grain-based foodstuffs* from their homes, and what it itemizes includes "Median beer [*shekar*], Edomite vinegar [*khomets*], Egyptian barley beer [*zitom*]" (m. Pesahim 3:1).[80] This is an intriguing reference because it clearly identifies *shekar* as a grain-based product. Incidentally, it also recognizes that certain vinegars can be grain-based as well (*khomets*), referring back to the previous discussion on why the two vinegars in Numbers 6:3 suggest that *shekar* is not made from grapes. If you have ever used malt vinegar on fried fish and chips at a British

72. Homan, "Beer, Barley, and שֵׂכָר," 31.

73. E.g., *HALOT* 4:1501; Michael M. Homan, "Beer and Its Drinkers: An Ancient Near Eastern Love Story," *NEA* 67.2 (2004): 92–93; idem, "Beer, Barley, and שֵׂכָר," 25–38; Jennie Ebeling, "Grains, Bread, and Beer," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Food in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*, ed. Janling Fu, Cynthia Shafer-Elliott, and Carol Meyers (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 109–10.

74. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 79–80; Homan, "Beer, Barley, and שֵׂכָר," 29.

75. Homan, "Beer, Barley, and שֵׂכָר," 38.

76. Rightly Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 80. Contra King and Stager, *Life*, 103.

77. Elsewhere *shekar* is translated as a generic intoxicant (*methysma* in 1 Sam 1:15; Mic 2:11; *methē* in Prov 20:1; 31:6; cf. Isa 28:7) and once as *oinos* (Prov 31:4). Isaiah 56:12 is missing from the LXX.

78. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 80.

79. As Magen Broshi admits, while arguing for date-based alcohol in ancient Palestine ("Date Beer and Date Wine in Antiquity," *PEQ* 139.1 [2007]: 55).

80. Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 233. The Hebrew was derived from sefaria.org.

pub, for example, you are well aware that vinegar can be made from beer. Although the Mishnah is a later source, the question that this evidence raises is whether *shekar* meant anything other than grain-based beer from its Akkadian derivation to the time of the Mishnah. I suggest that the evidence from the Mishnah shows that the identification of *shekar* as beer remained consistent.

Yet there are counterarguments to this proposal that deserve attention. The case against *shekar* being beer is at least threefold. First, the argument is that beer was not as strong as wine in the ancient world, which calls into question its association with cognate terms for drunkenness.[81] Second, beer required a significant amount of water to make (for the growth of grain and to produce the beer), but Israel did not receive as much rain as her neighbors in Egypt and Mesopotamia (and this is partly why those places were not ideal for producing wine; i.e., *viniculture*; cf. ch. 4).[82] Finally, *shekar* was used as a libationary offering in sacred space (cf. Num 28:7), and so it could not have been beer since it is not mentioned as a libationary offering anywhere else (cf. ch. 6).[83]

None of these counterarguments are insurmountable for the proposal that *shekar* refers to beer, however. In response to the first point, I have already addressed how *shekar* could be associated with drunkenness, even if it was not technically as strong as wine in the discussion on Proverbs 20:1 above. The second point, about the need for more water, misses the fact that anywhere people can make bread, they can make beer (cf. ch. 4). As for the third point, this fails to account for grain as a regular offering to YHWH (cf. ch. 6). It seems that a cultural bias against the use of beer in sacred space is what is contributing to this final argument. In fact, such a bias against beer can be seen in the scholarly interest in wine, which is more complicated to make than beer—beer being primarily a domestic beverage made by women who also baked bread.[84] When all of the evidence is considered and the arguments are weighed, I contend that the most likely understanding of *shekar* is that it refers to grain-based alcohol.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, there is a clear diversity of terms for alcoholic beverages in Scripture. As a summary of only the main terms from what precedes, see figure 2.1 below.

81. Walsh, *Fruit*, 201.

82. Walsh, *Fruit*, 201.

83. E.g., Alter, *Hebrew Bible*, 1:581; Baruch Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 219.

84. So rightly, e.g., Jennie R. Ebeling and Michael W. Homan, "Baking and Brewing Beer in the Israelite Household: A Study of Women's Cooking Technology," in *The World of Women in the Ancient and Classical Near East*, ed. Beth Alpert Nakhai (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 46.

Figure 2.1: Glossary of the Main Types of Alcoholic Beverages in Scripture

Beverage	Hebrew	Aramaic	Greek
Fully Fermented Wine	*yayin*	*khamar*	*oinos*
Wine Aged on Lees	*shemer*		
Sparkling Red Wine	*khemer*		
New Wine	*tirosh*		*oinos neos*
Fermenting Must, or Sweet Wine	*asis*, *dema*, *mishrah*, *mamtaqqim*		*gleukos*, *glykasmos*
Sour Wine, or Vinegar	*khomets*		*oxos*
Beer	*shekar*		*sikera*
Wheat Beer (possibly)	*sobe*		

Having some clarity on what these terms mean will aid us in the rest of our study, since we can build on these distinctions and also set aside many of the common misunderstandings that have already been addressed.

We have also seen in this chapter that the common Two-Wine theory does not account well for the biblical evidence. In overviewing the most common terms above, it should be acknowledged that the theory would at least make some intuitive sense if the proponents of this view were claiming that the Bible clearly uses different terms—one set of terms to designate the good kind of wine, and one set of terms for the bad kind. In all of the instances where proponents of this theory have claimed to find unfermented juice, *the same terms* are used elsewhere in the Bible to cause intoxication and even drunkenness. If ancient Israelites and early Christians were so concerned about fermented beverages, why would they not create different terms to avoid confusion? The reason, simply, is because they did not share the modern concerns of teetotalers.

Yet, even though we now have clarity on the meaning of key terms and have highlighted serious issues with the Two-Wine theory, we also need to consider whether alcoholic beverages were watered down so much that their ABV was negligible, as many commonly assume. Water was certainly a known additive in the ancient world, among many other things, which means that the biblical terms for mixed drinks also need our consideration (which will supplement fig. 1). This is what we will explore next to complete our study of the biblical terms for intoxicating drinks.

RELEVANT QUESTIONS

1. If the way we categorize wines and other alcoholic beverages reveals something about us, what does the categorization of alcoholic beverages in the Bible suggest about the ancient cultures that consumed them?
2. Given that the Two-Wine theory cannot be supported biblically, does teetotalism need some other biblical justification in order for some Christians to remain teetotalers?