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# The Fruit of the Vine: Wine at Masada and in the New Testament

Jo Ann H. Seely

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe  
who created sweet wine, good must from grapevines,  
that is pleasing to a person and good for man,  
that gladdens the heart and makes the face shine.

It is consolation to mourners, and those of bitter spirit forget their misery.

It is medicine to all who drink it. (to him who drinks it sensibly).

It is heart's joy, gladness, and great delight to its drinkers.

He, our God, created it of old for pleasure,  
among the works established from the beginning,  
so that all who drink it shall bless God,  
and praise the Author of understanding,  
who prepared the delicacies of the world,  
and formed the sweet things of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

This ancient Jewish benediction preserved from the Cairo Genizah is an expanded version of the one sentence blessing required by rabbinic law before wine could be drunk.<sup>2</sup> It extols the virtues of the fruit of the vine, acknowledges the goodness of God as provider, and cautions the overindulgent. The poem also reveals the broad spectrum of life in which ancient peoples partook of wine—from mere pleasure drinking to comfort for those in mourning. Wine was highly valued in antiquity. It was a common table drink, a desirable trade item, a gift to kings, a medical aid, a ritual offering, and part of nearly every aspect of life as it was shared by family, friends, priests, and kings to celebrate happiness and sorrow, worship and covenant.

This article will consider the use of wine in ancient Palestine, focusing primarily on its use in the first century A.D. The wine

stores at Masada demonstrate that an effort was made to make wine available even in difficult circumstances. What can be learned from the wine kraters found at Masada? How was wine produced and what types of wine were available in ancient Palestine? What insight does the Old Testament provide, and how is wine viewed during New Testament times? Wine was more than just a staple of life; the “blood of the grape” became a rich symbol encompassing the blessing of God as well as his wrath and the ultimate passion of the Lord himself as he trod the winepress.

### **Wine at Masada**

The excavations at Masada provide a small window into first-century Israel, and although the inhabitants were living under extreme conditions, the basic staples of life were present. Josephus describes the stores thus: “The stores laid up within would have excited still more amazement, alike for their lavish splendour and their durability. For here had been stored a mass of corn, amply sufficient to last for years, abundance of wine and oil, besides every variety of pulse and piles of dates.”<sup>3</sup> Josephus writes that the rebels at Masada supplemented their supplies by vicious attacks on the nearby villages. On a night raid to En Gedi, they “rifled the houses, seized the ripest of the crops, and carried off their spoil to Masada. They made similar raids on all the villages around the fortress, and laid waste the whole district.”<sup>4</sup> Both Josephus’s account and the archaeological data indicate that there was plenty of food and wine on Masada.

One particular storeroom at Masada was thought to have been designed specifically for the storage of wine (or a liquid of some type). It had plastered walls and three well-plastered circular pits or depressions in the floor spaced across the length of the room. Scholars suggest that this room was for stocking wine and the pits were used to either facilitate pouring the liquid from the large storage jars into smaller vessels or to contain any wine that spilled during transfer. Most of the wine jars found seem to be of the Herodian period as indicated by their shape, but many had inscriptions in ink or charcoal with the new owners’ names on them.<sup>5</sup> Of particular interest were the wine jars recovered bearing

the inscription “To King Herod of Judea,” which were apparently sent to Herod from Italy.<sup>6</sup> This was the first time the name of Herod had been found in an inscription. Also noted on the jars was the name of the Roman consul, C. Sentius Saturninus, who was in office in the year 19 B.C., providing an exact date for the archaeologists.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting inscription found on some of the jars was the Hebrew letter *tav*, which has been suggested to represent the word *tərûmāh*, or priestly due. The people at Masada may have been attempting to live according to the law as outlined in Numbers 18, which commanded them to bring to the Levites “all the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee” (Num. 18:12). The Levites were then to give a tenth of this offering to the priests for their use (Num. 18:26–28). Certain of the jars may have been set aside for those of either the priestly or levitical lineage or even just separated from the stores in an effort to fulfill the commandment.<sup>8</sup>

## Wine in Ancient Palestine

*Vitis vinifera L.* (the grape vine) has been cultivated in Palestine from the Early Bronze Age and is found in nearly every section of the country from the north to the south. Ample archaeological evidence demonstrates the widespread cultivation of grapes, including agricultural terracing, stone towers associated with vineyards, and thousands of winepresses, dating from the Early Bronze Age to the Byzantine period. The stone towers, often referred to as watchtowers, were used not only to guard the vineyards at harvest time, but also to store the grapes and protect them from the heat until they were transported to the winepresses.<sup>9</sup>

**Production.** Harvesting of the grapes occurred in September and October. Care was to be taken to not gather all of the fruit, as grapes are specifically mentioned to be left for the poor to glean (Lev. 19:10; Deut. 23:24). Harvesting and treading the grapes was a happy time of community comradeship and singing. The scriptures describe times of sorrow when “gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out

no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage shouting to cease" (Isa. 16:10).

Most winepresses were hewn out of solid rock, but some were built and plastered. A typical winepress would include a vat large enough for several men to tread the grapes. Sometimes a beam was placed overhead with ropes suspended to help support the treaders. As the grapes were pressed, the expressed juice would flow through a connecting channel, which contained a filter of thorns, from the first vat to a lower, smaller vat, where the juice would sit, allowing the lees to settle to the bottom. From this second vat, the juice would be poured into containers and moved for storage. The grape skins left in the first vat would often be pressed again to produce an inferior wine that could be used to make vinegar. At times a wooden beam with either weights or a screw attached was used to press the grapes. Winepresses were also occasionally used to crush olives after the grapes were pressed and to serve like cisterns to catch the winter rains.

Wine was stored either in earthenware pots or wineskins (*askoi*). The skins were usually made from goat or lamb hides with the neck and legs tied. The skins were able to stretch as the wine fermented and gases formed. Once the skins had already been used and stretched, new wine could not be poured into them or they would burst (Matt. 9:17). Earthenware jars, or amphorae, were sealed with clay, but a small hole was left by the handle to release the gases as fermentation took place. Eventually this hole was sealed with clay and stamped with the owner's name or seal. The softer rock beneath limestone so prevalent in Palestine allowed the digging of storage cellars all over the country. The wealthy had cellars in their own homes, and the pointed ends of amphorae were buried in the ground to keep the wine cool.

**Words for Wine.** The Mediterranean world has a rich vocabulary related to viticulture; here we will consider only the most common scriptural terms for wine.<sup>10</sup> Although the words have varying meanings, they are often used as synonyms in the text, where they all seem to suggest wine that was fermented and not simple grape juice.<sup>11</sup>

*Yayin*: The most prevalent of all the words for wine in Hebrew is *yayin*. It has a very wide distribution with cognates found in both Semitic and Indo-European languages, including



Amphorae from Masada. These two-handled jars with narrow necks were used to carry and store wine. The pointed ends could be buried in the ground to keep the wine cool.

Greek (*oinos*) and Latin (*vinum*). Scholars have argued that *yayin* does not have a Semitic etymology but probably came from Hittite or an Anatolian origin.<sup>12</sup> *Yayin* refers to wine in general and is used 141 times in the Old Testament in many different contexts.

*Tirosh*: On a few occasions, *tirosh* is translated as “new wine,” but most often it is translated simply as “wine.” It occurs thirty-eight times in the Old Testament. *Tirosh* should not be confused with grape juice when translated as “new wine,” as the context in this passage shows: “New wine take[s] away the heart,” or understanding (Hosea 4:11). *Tirosh* later becomes the expression for ritual wine and is used instead of *yayin* in the Qumran texts.<sup>13</sup>

*Asis*: This term appears only five times in the Old Testament and is derived from a root meaning “to press, crush,” from which it takes the meaning of juice. It is used in poetry as a synonym for *tirosh* and was also considered intoxicating. In Isaiah we read that Israel’s oppressors “shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine [*asis*]” (Isa. 49:26).

*Oinos*: This term is the common Greek word translated as “wine” in the New Testament. Out of thirty-seven occurrences of

“wine” in the New Testament, thirty-three are translated from the word *oinos*. *Oinos* designates wine that is fermented and is used in references in which warnings are given concerning intoxicating effects of wine (see Eph. 5:18).

*Gleukos*: This term is usually translated from Greek as “white,” but in one case in Acts *gleukos* is translated as “new wine.” It was considered an intoxicant—those who heard the Apostles speaking in tongues at Pentecost accused them of being “full of new wine (*gleukos*)” (Acts 2:13).

Additional vocabulary relating to wine includes *must*—the juice from freshly pressed grapes, *lees*—that which is strained out after the wine has been left to sit and ferment, *dibs*—a thick syrup made from boiling the wine down and used to spread on bread or to mix with water as a beverage, and *wormwood*—a bitter herb (*Artemisia absinthium*) that was sometimes added to wine and that was used to make a strong tea used as a folk remedy for intestinal ailments. In the Bible, wormwood is often referred to symbolically as sorrow or bitterness (Deut. 29:18; Jer. 9:15; Rev. 8:10-11).

**Types of Wine.** In the ancient world, varieties of wine were made from prunes, raisins, cherries, dates, apples, and pomegranates, but the wines of Palestine were almost entirely made from fermented grape juice.<sup>14</sup> (There is one mention of pomegranate wine in Song of Solomon 8:2.) Once the grapes were pressed, the juice would begin to ferment within six to twelve hours.<sup>15</sup> The quantity of alcohol in the wine is uncertain, but scholars explain “the amount of alcoholic content which could be achieved by fermentation was not high when compared with what can be attained through modern methods of distillation, unknown in the ancient world.”<sup>16</sup> Wines that were a year old were still considered new wine, and tradition held that a man could not drink old wine while giving his Jewish slaves new wine because of its inferiority.<sup>17</sup> Although wine improved over time, wines were generally consumed within three or four years. Modern pasteurization or containers that would allow longer storage periods were not available.<sup>18</sup>

Wines available in Palestine in the first century include red, white, clear, and dark wine.<sup>19</sup> Sorek (bright red) was thought to be very choice wine. Wines were also classified by taste including sweet, bitter, sour, smoked,<sup>20</sup> and boiled or cooked. Spices and

scents were added not only to enrich the flavor, but also to help enhance wine that was spoiling due to storage conditions. The Talmud describes some of the spices or other substances added to wine, listing balsam, honey, pepper, myrrh, *sapa* (a sweet syrup used by the Romans), capers, and wormwood.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to wine, vinegar was produced by allowing either the wine or the lees of the wine to sour, causing a fungus (*Mycoderma aceti*) to develop and turn the alcohol into an acetic acid. Vinegar was also prepared from wine made of the grape skins after the new wine had been pressed. Vinegar had several functions—it was used as a dressing for salads and a sop in which to dip bread (Ruth 2:14) and on occasion in a diluted state as a drink. Vinegar was also used as a solvent for herbs and drugs and utilized for medicinal reasons. Vinegar mixed with myrrh was what was offered to Jesus on the cross just before he died (Matt. 27:34; Mark 15:23; John 19:28–30).

## Wine in the First Century

**Temple, Ritual, and Offerings.** Wine played a significant part in the ritual at the temple during the New Testament period, not only as a libation accompanying the daily sacrifices, but also as an offering brought by individuals. At the conclusion of the morning and evening sacrifices, a priest poured out the drink offering of wine—called a libation—on the base of the altar (like the blood of other offerings), at which time the Levites began to sing, pausing for the trumpets blown by the priests, which signaled the people to bow down in worship.<sup>22</sup> The individual sacrifices (burnt, trespass, peace—but not sin<sup>23</sup>) could be accompanied by a meal offering and a drink offering. The peace offering was always followed by a shared meal which included wine. Each of the sacrifices was accompanied by a specified drink offering: for a lamb, 1/4 hin of wine (one hin is about five liters); a ram, 1/3 hin; and a bull, 1/2 hin (Num. 15:5–10).<sup>24</sup> Traditionally the offerers ate and drank together afterward.

The daily sacrifices and offerings were doubled on the Sabbath, and additional sacrifices and drink offerings were made on new moons and feast days, all of which were in addition to the individual votive and freewill offerings.<sup>25</sup> The Feast of Tabernacles



in particular characterized by extra offerings of wine and water, perhaps because of its harvest connections.

The temple stored large amounts of wine from the offerings and tithes of the people. Three obligations could involve bringing wine to the temple: firstfruits, priestly due, and tithes. A harvest's firstfruits required a donation from the seven crops listed in Deuteronomy 8:8, including grapes. The priestly due (or *tərûmāb*) was taken from the best of all the fruit of field and tree—"whatsoever is used for food and is kept watch over and grows from the soil is liable to tithes."<sup>26</sup> In some cases, wine was donated for each of these offerings because it was easier to store. Altogether there



Inscription from a wine (or oil) vessel. Part of this inscription reads "suited for the purity of hallowed things." The inscription was probably written on a jar that stood at the head of a row in a Masada storeroom. After the jar had been emptied, it was destroyed to prevent storing contents in it that were not ritually clean—that, in other words, did not fit the description on the jar (Yigael Yadin and Joseph Naveh, "The Aramaic and Hebrew Ostraca and Jar Inscriptions," in *Masada I: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965, Final Reports*, ed. Joseph Aviram, Gideon Foerster, and Ehud Netzer [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989], 35).

was a considerable amount of wine to take care of at the temple, and it was put in the care of a treasury officer who was presumably a Levite. Also among the priests serving their turn at the temple was a drink officer who was chosen by casting lots.<sup>27</sup> Another of the priests was responsible for the vessels on the shewbread table, which many believe contained wine (Num. 4:7), and for the twelve loaves or bread of the presence.<sup>28</sup>

The most obvious symbol of wine at the temple was the large sculpted vine that twisted above the front entrance. Josephus says that above the temple doors “spread a golden vine with grape-clusters hanging from it, a marvel of size and artistry to all who saw with what costliness of material it had been constructed.”<sup>29</sup> Josephus also describes the vine as having “grape-clusters as tall as a man” hanging from it.<sup>30</sup> This vine caused some in antiquity to mistakenly believe that the cult of Dionysos had become part of Israelite worship.<sup>31</sup> The cult of Dionysos (the Greek wine god) was evident in some of the more Hellenized cities in Palestine such as Caesarea and Beth Shean (Nysa Scythopolis) in the north and Rafiah in the south. In Beth Shean, Dionysos was the principal deity, and there is literary, epigraphic, archaeological, and numismatic evidence of his cult there.<sup>32</sup>

**Common Table Drink.** “The ordinary table beverage of the Mediterranean world in Roman times was wine mixed with water.”<sup>33</sup> This mixture was not only preferred for reasons of taste and custom, but mixing water with wine also helped to purify the water. The wine was poured through a strainer (to remove lees and insects) into a large bowl, where it was mixed with various amounts of water. From there it was poured into individual cups or bowls. Jewish literature before and after the first century records mixing wine with water: “It is harmful to drink wine alone, or again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one’s enjoyment” (2 Macc. 15:39). Rabbi Eliezer (circa A.D. 100) is quoted in the Mishnah: “They do not say the Benediction over the wine until water has been added to it.”<sup>34</sup> The ratio is thought to be one part of wine to two parts water, but later Talmudic sources record a one to three mixture.<sup>35</sup>

**Feasts and Special Occasions.** Wine was served at festivities, such as circumcisions, engagements, and weddings, and especially on Sabbath, when the customary blessing (*kiddush*) on

the wine was pronounced. Wine was particularly important at feasts, such as the four cups required at the Passover.<sup>36</sup> Those in mourning were offered wine as a “cup of consolation” (Jer. 16:7) not only to help lift their spirits, but also because food could not be properly prepared in a home where a death had caused a state of uncleanness.

The celebration Purim included an admonition to drink in great quantities. The Talmud says, “It is the duty of a man to mellow himself (with wine) on Purim until he cannot tell the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordecai.’”<sup>37</sup> In Jewish custom, this was probably the only case in which excessive drinking was appropriate. Drunkenness was regarded negatively and denounced on numerous occasions in the Old Testament.<sup>38</sup> The New Testament says drunkards are not prepared for the kingdom (Luke 21:34; and 1 Cor. 6:10), bishops and deacons are not to be drunkards (1 Tim. 3:3, 8), and Christians are to be filled with the Spirit rather than with wine (Eph. 5:18). Paul suggests that Christians not drink any wine at all if it causes a weaker brother to stumble (Rom. 14:21).

**Abstinence.** Several groups and individuals abstained from drinking wine. Priests during their course of service at the temple were forbidden to partake of wine (Lev. 10:8–9; Ezek. 44:21). Nazirites (those who took on a special personal vow) were prohibited from any product of the vine including grape juice, wine, grapes, vinegar, or raisins (Num. 6:3). Nazirite vows were still very much in practice during the first century. At least temporarily, John the Baptist may have been a Nazirite (Luke 1:15), and Acts 18:18 suggests that Paul was completing a Nazirite vow.

The Rechabites also proclaimed total abstinence from wine,<sup>39</sup> while the drinking habits of the Essenes are debated. Because of Josephus’ description of Essene meals, some scholars believe that the Essenes did not partake of wine: “It is in fact due to their invariable sobriety and to the limitation of their allotted portions of meat and drink to the demands of nature.”<sup>40</sup> Others argue that the Essenes were merely circumspect in their use of wine and did not become intoxicated.<sup>41</sup> Yadin suggests that the only day the Essenes drank wine was on the Feast of New Wine, which occurs fifty days after Pentecost, as recorded in the Temple Scroll.<sup>42</sup>

**Medicinal Uses.** The scriptures record several instances of medicinal applications of wine. Paul suggests to Timothy that he “drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23). One explanation of this passage is that mixing wine with water killed “the numerous bacteria and organisms [in the water] that still are troublesome in the Middle East.”<sup>43</sup> The most celebrated instance of the medicinal use of wine is the story of the Good Samaritan and his compassion on the man who fell among thieves: “And [he] went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him” (Luke 10:34). Wine and oil were sometimes mixed together for dressing wounds and at other times administered separately.<sup>44</sup> Though not as effective as modern medicine, the wine was probably helpful in reducing infection and was the only antiseptic that was readily available to the Samaritan.

Wine is accorded numerous medicinal properties by some first-century writers. Pliny the Elder provides a list of ailments and poisons for which wine is to be administered<sup>45</sup> and prescribes wine mixed with water for cardiac disease and stomach disorders.<sup>46</sup> Resinated wine (wine with pine resin added for either enhancement or as a preservative) was thought to be effective for a variety of illnesses:

Dioscorides Pedanius, a first-century A.D. army physician, explained in his *De Materia Medica* (v. 34) that although resinated wine might cause headaches and dizziness, it aided digestion, was diuretic, and good for people with colds, coughs, intestinal pains, dysentery, dropsy, and other ailments. Indeed, Dioscorides made it sound like a wonder drug.<sup>47</sup>

In later centuries, wines produced in Gaza and Ashcalon were considered good for stomach distress, fever, colic, kidney diseases, and liver ailments. The wines also were mixed with various herbs for making eye salve.<sup>48</sup>

## Old Testament

**Symbol of Fruitfulness and Fertility.** Viticulture is first mentioned in the Old Testament when Noah built an altar to offer

sacrifice, and then he “began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard” (Gen. 9:20). Vineyards, vines, and grapes became symbols of fruitfulness and of the Lord’s gracious care of his children.

The spies sent by Moses into the promised land returned with a cluster of grapes so large that “they bare it between two upon a staff” (Num. 13:23). The enormous bunch of grapes represented the bounty and fertility of the land prepared by the Lord for the Israelites. Descriptions of the promised land always include the vine: “A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey” (Deut. 8:8). Psalms says, “Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house” (Ps. 128:3), using the vine again as a symbol of fertility. However, the metaphor of the grape as a symbol for abundance and fertility appears only in references to the land prepared by the Lord for Israel—the vine of the enemy “is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps” (Deut. 32:32-33).

An important example of the figurative use of the vine is the allegory of the vineyard in Isaiah 5. Israel is compared to a vineyard that has been carefully developed and tended in order to produce good fruit (and by extension good wine) but does not.

Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. . . . What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?  
(Isa. 5:1-2, 4)

Israel not only produced wild grapes, but also participated in the evil overindulgence in wine: “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them” (Isa. 5:11), and “woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him” (Isa. 5:22-23).

### **Symbol of the Atonement of Christ and Final Judgment.**

Warnings against the wickedness of intoxication are mild compared with the images of wine as blood and the pain of being trodden as grapes in a winepress. The first appearance of the symbol of the winepress in reference to the Messiah arises in the blessing given to Judah by his father Jacob: "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk" (Gen. 49:11-12). In the book of Isaiah, the reapplication of these images helps us understand both the suffering of the Savior and the judgment upon the sinners:

Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth. (Isa. 63:2-6)

The unrepentant will be trodden down like the grapes in the press as the Lord executes his judgment, but as their blood stains his garments (just as the grape juice stains the garments of the treaders), he will redeem them. The Lord will tread the press alone; it will not be a time of singing and joy in the vineyard. Even the beam overhead that lends support to those treading the grapes will not be there to uphold him; he will bring salvation by his own arm to the people.

Jeremiah employs the metaphor of the cup of fury to demonstrate the wrath of the Lord that will come upon all nations in judgment: "Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the Lord had sent me" (Jer. 25:15-17).

There follows a list of Israel and all her neighbors that will partake in this terrible drink: "Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue,

and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you” (Jer. 25:27). Lamentations specifically mentions Israel as one to reap this punishment: “The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me: he hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a winepress” (Lam. 1:15).

**Symbol of Covenant.** Wine is also an integral part of covenant in the Old Testament. Abraham partakes of the bread and wine blessed by Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God, before he pays his tithes (JST, Gen. 14:18-20). Jacob offers wine and oil at the pillar he erected to commemorate the Lord’s renewal of the covenant of Abraham with him at Bethel (Gen. 35:9-15). Wine as a drink offering becomes a significant part of the system of sacrifices and offerings in the Mosaic covenant (see details of this in the section above concerning temple, ritual, and offerings).

The writings of the rabbis and the apocryphal literature have many references to wine—more than can be accommodated within the scope of this paper. An example of the centrality of the symbol of the vine and the wine it produced can be found in the Jewish traditions concerning the Garden of Eden. These traditions suggest that a river of wine flowed through the Garden for the use of its inhabitants<sup>49</sup> and that the Tree of Knowledge was a grapevine.<sup>50</sup> The grapevine planted by Noah following the flood was also thought to have come from the Garden.<sup>51</sup>

## New Testament

**The Wedding at Cana and Other Social Situations.** The miracle of turning water into wine was an appropriate way for Jesus to begin his ministry, during which he elevated wine as both a symbol of the gospel and a symbol of the blood of the new covenant. The wedding at Cana was a celebration in which wine would have played a very typical part.

Before the miracle at Cana occurred, the disciples had manifested their faith in Christ and had made the commitment to follow him. Just prior to visiting Cana, the disciples said, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write,” and spoke in terms such as “Messias” (or Christ), “Son of God,” and “King of Israel” (John 1:41, 45, 49). They then attended the wedding

with Jesus and his mother and were witnesses to the miracle. After his account of the event, John tells us, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2:11).

On other occasions, Jesus participated with common people in their local customs and was censured by the Pharisees for doing so. Jesus describes John the Baptist as "neither eating nor drinking," to which his opponents said, "He hath a devil," but, Jesus continues, "the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber" (Matt. 11:18-19).

When Jesus ate at the house of Levi, the scribes and Pharisees questioned his disciples, "How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?" (Mark 2:16). Jesus' response was plain: "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). Jesus further explained that while the bridegroom is with them, they are not to fast; it is a time of joy. "But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days" (Mark 2:20). The problem was not the substances Jesus was eating and drinking, but the people with whom he was eating and drinking.

**Wine and the Vineyard as Symbols.** Following this interchange with the Pharisees, Jesus explains that his message is like new wine—it must be put in new bottles. Old bottles or used wineskins filled with new wine will burst when the wine begins to ferment and gases form because the containers have no flexibility or room for expansion. The gospel cannot be constricted to the forms and limitations of the old law, just as old wineskins cannot hold the new wine (Mark 2:22).

Later Jesus refers to Isaiah and appeals to the metaphor of the vineyard to confront the chief priests and Pharisees:

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. (Matt. 21:33-34)

The chief priests and Pharisees may not have understood the true significance of this parable, but from the story it became clear that



the vineyard of Isaiah (the house of Israel) had not been tended carefully; when the servants of the householder were sent to it, they were turned away, and even the Son himself was slain when trying to go unto the vineyard. The Pharisees “perceived that he spake of them” and “when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet” (Matt. 21:45–46).

Nowhere does the image of wine have more impact than in the final days and moments of the life of the Savior. The fourth cup of Passover wine at the Last Supper was offered by the Lord to the Apostles as a replacement for the sacrificial blood under the Mosaic covenant: “For this is my blood of the new testament [or covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

Following this introduction of the sacrament, the Lord proceeded to Gethsemane, a garden with an appropriate name—the *gat* meaning press, of *shemen* or oil.<sup>52</sup> Here Jesus prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). The Savior partook of the cup (an allusion to the cup of wrath from the Old Testament) and suffered all the agonies of the world. In Luke one reads that as Jesus suffered in the garden “his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). One can almost visualize the grapes being trodden and the “blood of the grapes” pressed out as the Lord was alone in the press at Gethsemane. Finally, as he hung upon the cross, Jesus was offered vinegar, an inferior type of wine, for his thirst. Jesus told his disciples that he would partake of wine again only “when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt 26:29).

John in Revelation tells us that, before the expected marriage supper of the Lord and the joy of drinking the wine together, the wicked (Babylon) will “drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation” (Rev. 14:10). The wine of wrath will be full strength—not diluted with water, the form to which the Israelites were accustomed. It is a gruesome scene.

And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs. (Rev. 14:19–20)

The Lord's clothing will appear as a "vesture dipped in blood," and "he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:13, 15). The mercy of God was extended to all his children as the Savior suffered in the press for all in the meridian of time, and now the justice of God will be meted out as the Lord treads the winepress to execute judgment on the wicked who would not accept his offering.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

The fruit of the vine gave many gifts to ancient Israel. It provided nourishment to both body and soul as beverage and offering. In times of plenty, it was a sign of righteousness; in times of sickness it was a healing agent for the wounded. It was imported by King Herod and was stored by the people at Masada. Wine became a symbol of grace and wrath, but the terrible scenes of judgment are not the final images of wine in the scriptures. In the end, wine will again represent the happiness and blessings poured out by the Lord upon his people. Zechariah describes the joy the Lord will bring, "And their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord" (Zech. 10:7). Amos says of those days, "The mountains shall drop sweet wine" (Amos 9:13). Wine is a symbol of fellowship—in celebration with family, in communion with God at the temple and with the Sacrament, and in the covenant for all who will join in the great marriage supper of the Lord.

And also that a feast of fat things might be prepared for the poor; yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined, that the earth may know that the mouths of the prophets shall not fail; Yea, a supper of the house of the Lord, well prepared, unto which all nations shall be invited. First, the rich and the learned, and the wise and the noble; And after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come. (D&C 58:8-11)

At the Last Supper, the Savior taught the Apostles about their relationship to him, touching on the imagery of the vineyard: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing"

(John 15:5). This statement of Jesus may, perhaps, have been motivated by the great temple decoration of the vine, as well as by Christ's personal love for the land and agriculture of Judea and Galilee. The branches derive their life from the vine, and as disciples they are enjoined to transmit that life into bearing good fruit. The fruit of the vine is a testimony of their lives and bears witness of the only "true vine" (John 15:1).

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Arnold A. Wieder, "Ben Sira and the Praises of Wine," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 61, no. 2 (1970): 155-66.

<sup>2</sup>The blessing over the wine found in the Mishnah, "[Blessed art thou . . .] who createst the fruit of the vine" (Berakoth 6.1), was expanded by certain groups on Passover and on the Sabbath, but the full text of this version was referred to only in Rabbinic writings and was unknown until its discovery in the Cairo Genizah. See Naphtali Wieder, "Birkat Yean 'Asis,'" *Sinai* 10 (1947): 43-48, for the modern publication.

<sup>3</sup>Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.295-97.

<sup>4</sup>Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.404-5.

<sup>5</sup>Yigael Yadin, *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand* (Jerusalem: Steimatzky's Agency, 1966), 96, 100.

<sup>6</sup>Palestine was known for its viticulture, and there is considerable evidence that wine was exported for many centuries, so it is interesting to note the evidence of imported wines. See Magen Broshi, "Wine in Ancient Palestine—Introductory Notes," *Israel Museum Journal* 3 (spring 1984): 21-40, for a summary of importing and exporting wine in ancient Palestine. See also Shemuel Ahituv, "Economic Factors in the Egyptian Conquest of Canaan," *Israel Exploration Journal* 28, nos. 1-2 (1978): 93-105; and Y. Dan, "The Foreign Trade of Palestine in the Byzantine Period" (in Hebrew), *Cathedra* 23 (April 1982): 17-24.

<sup>7</sup>Yadin, *Masada*, 189.

<sup>8</sup>See John A. Tvedtnes, "The Priestly Tithe in the First Century A.D." in this volume for a review of this topic.

<sup>9</sup>Research on towers has shown that temperatures inside could be 11.5 degrees centigrade (20 degrees Fahrenheit) lower than the outdoors during July, and the humidity 24 to 39 percent higher than outside, which helped to prevent spoilage. See Z. Y. D. Ron, *Stone Huts as an Expression of Terrace Agriculture in the Judean and Samaritan Hills* (in Hebrew), 1-2 (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1977), 69-87.

<sup>10</sup>For a lengthy, although not exhaustive list of the terms related to wine and viticulture in Hebrew, see A. van Selms, "The Etymology of *Yayin*, 'Wine,'"

*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 3 (1974): 76-84. Also for a comparison of terms related to wine in the Mediterranean cultures, see John Pairman Brown, "The Mediterranean Vocabulary of the Vine," *Vetus Testamentum* 19, no. 2 (1969): 146-70.

<sup>11</sup>It may be noted, however, that one scholar has recently argued at length that the words for wine in the Bible may refer either to fermented or *unfermented* grape juice. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1989), 30. Bacchiocchi argues that the process of preserving unfermented juice was actually surprisingly simple and that the positive references to wine in the Bible "have to do with unfermented and unintoxicating grape juice" (30-31). He also states that the Bible is "consistent in teaching moderation in the use of wholesome, unfermented beverages and abstinence from the use of intoxicating fermented beverages" (35).

<sup>12</sup>See Brown, "Mediterranean Vocabulary," 147-48; see also van Selms, "Etymology," 76-84, where he suggests a possible Semitic etymology for the term *yayin*.

<sup>13</sup>It has been suggested that *tirosb* in many cases should be translated as "grape," particularly passages speaking of growth and harvesting of the *tirosb*. See S. Naeh and M. P. Weitzman, "*Tirosb*—Wine or Grape? A Case of Metonymy," *Vetus Testamentum* 44, no. 1 (1994): 115-19.

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of wine making in the ancient Near East, see R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, 9 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 3:70-83. For a survey of wine in ancient Palestine, see Broshi, "Wine in Ancient Palestine," 21-40.

<sup>15</sup>W. Dommershausen, "*Yayin*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 6:61.

<sup>16</sup>Everett Ferguson, "Wine as a Table-Drink in the Ancient World," *Restoration Quarterly* 13 (1970): 144-45; see also Forbes, *Ancient Technology*, 3:60 and following, and 3:70-83.

<sup>17</sup>Broshi, "Wine in Ancient Palestine," 26.

<sup>18</sup>Forbes, *Ancient Technology*, 3:118.

<sup>19</sup>N. Avigad suggested this term, *yayin cchl*, referred to the place where the wine was produced. N. Avigad, "Two Hebrew Inscriptions on Wine-Jars," *Israel Exploration Journal* 22, no. 1 (1972): 4-5. A. Demsky has argued that the inscription refers to "dark wine" and cites the mention of dark-colored wine in the Mishnah. A. Demsky, "'Dark Wine' from Judah," *Israel Exploration Journal* 22, no. 4 (1972): 233-34.

<sup>20</sup>A reference to smoked wine was discovered at Lachish. See David Ussishkin, "Excavations at Tel Lachish—1973-1977," *Tel Aviv* 5, nos. 1-2 (1978): 83-84.

<sup>21</sup>See Broshi, "Wine in Ancient Palestine," 26-27, where he lists the names and additives of seven different types of wine along with the references from the Talmud for these wines.

<sup>22</sup>Mishnah Tamid 7.3. A wonderful description of this is preserved in the writings of Ben Sira, who lived in the second century B.C., but it is most likely very similar to the ceremony many years later as recorded by the Mishnah. See Sirach 50.1213-21.

<sup>23</sup>For more information on these sacrifices, see the LDS Bible Dictionary, s.v. "sacrifices."

<sup>24</sup>For a discussion of measures used in the Bible, see Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 1:199-203. The measurements for liquids included a hin, which was 1/6 of a bath. De Vaux gives several different possibilities for the capacity of a bath, varying from 4 gallons 7 pints (22 or 23 liters) to 10 gallons (45 liters).

<sup>25</sup>See Numbers 28 and 29 for a list of the sacrifices and offerings given on these occasions.

<sup>26</sup>Mishnah Ma'aseroth 1.1.

<sup>27</sup>A more detailed discussion of the priestly courses and their activities is found in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1979), 2:275-91.

<sup>28</sup>For a discussion of these vessels and their contents, see Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 216-17.

<sup>29</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.395.

<sup>30</sup>Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.210.

<sup>31</sup>"The Hellenes say that . . . in the *adyton* of the temple in Jerusalem from both pillars there were once vines made of gold which held up the hangings of purple and scarlet; and so they concluded that the temple was of Dionysos." J. Lydus, *On Months*, ed. R. Wuensch (Leipzig: n.p., 1898), 4:53, quoted in Brown, "Mediterranean Vocabulary," 170 n.

<sup>32</sup>Broshi, "Wine in Ancient Palestine," 30-31, gives a brief summary of the Dionysos cult and also refers to G. Fuks, *Scythopolis—A Greek City in Eretz Israel* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: n.p., 1983) for the archaeological evidence.

<sup>33</sup>Ferguson, "Wine as a Table-Drink," 141-53.

<sup>34</sup>Mishnah Berakoth 7.5.

<sup>35</sup>Forbes, *Ancient Technology*, 3:148.

<sup>36</sup>Prior to settlement in Canaan (and the tending of vineyards), water may have been used in the Passover service and in the drink offerings. Before proscribing the drink offerings to accompany burnt sacrifices, the Lord specifies the time of implementation as "*when ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you*" (Num. 15:2; italics added; also Lev. 23:10) The Samaritan Passover still does not have wine as part of the ritual.

<sup>37</sup>Babylonian Talmud, Megilah 7b.

<sup>38</sup>See Isaiah 5:11; 28:7; 56:11-12; Habakkuk 2:5; Hosea 4:11; Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:20-21, 31-35.

<sup>39</sup>The Rechabites were first established in the eighth century B.C., separating themselves from Israel and living a nomadic life. Jeremiah records this about them: "We will drink no wine for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents" (Jer. 35:6-7).

<sup>40</sup>Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.133.

<sup>41</sup>For the argument concerning this, see D. Rokeah, "Essene Notes," in *Sbnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 4 (1980): 263-68.

<sup>42</sup>Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 1:88-90.

<sup>43</sup>This must have been based on observation rather than scientific theory as they did not have microscopes. See William L. Coleman, *Today's Handbook of Bible Times and Customs* (Neptune, N.J.: Bethany House, 1984), 68.

<sup>44</sup>Coleman, *Handbook of Bible Times*, 67.

<sup>45</sup>Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham and W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926-65), 23.23, 43.

<sup>46</sup>Pliny, *Natural History* 23.25, 50 and following.

<sup>47</sup>James Wiseman, "To Your Health!" *Archaeology* 49, no. 2 (1996): 27.

<sup>48</sup>Philip Mayerson, "The Use of Ascalon Wine in the Medical Writers of the Fourth to the Seventh Centuries," *Israel Exploration Journal* 43, nos. 2-3 (1993): 169-73.

<sup>49</sup>Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 1:20.

<sup>50</sup>Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:97 and following; see note 70 for references concerning the traditions of the forbidden fruit.

<sup>51</sup>Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:167; see also Pirkei de-R. Eliezer, 23, Targum Yerushalmi to Gen. 9:20.

<sup>52</sup>The word *gat* by itself is translated as winepress. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), s.v. "*gat*" on p. 178 and "*sbemen*" on p. 1032.

<sup>53</sup>See also the description of the winepress in Doctrine and Covenants 133:46-52.