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**WINE IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVES AND  
IN THE BIBLICAL WISDOM LITERATURE**

**- PHD THESIS –  
- SUMMARY -**

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**Keywords:** wine, drinking wine, Old Testament, symbol, Wisdom, wine in Mesopotamia, food and drink, synchronous, analogy.

Drinking wine in the Bible was considered essential to social and cultural life in ancient times and ancient Israeli society. It was used in agricultural celebrations, family meals, ritual ceremonies, agreements and blessings, and everyday life. Drinking wine symbolised abundance, joy, and divine grace. However, it is important to note that the Bible warns against excessive wine drinking and drunkenness, which is a source of trouble, loss of temper and consciousness. The Bible, therefore, teaches moderation and responsibility in everything, including the consumption of wine.

This study sought to reveal the various connections and meanings of drinking wine in biblical literature and parables from wisdom literature. The goal was to assert the ambiguous nature of the motif of drinking wine in the various biblical sources with the help of extra-biblical sources. In doing so, the study examined from a different and new point of view synchronously the motif of drinking wine in an analogical comparison between the literary units according to the different genres.

Wine, an intoxicating, usually alcoholic drink made of grape juice, was common thousands of years ago in Mesopotamia. Anthropological and Archeological studies of wine in the Land of Israel go back to 14<sup>th</sup>-century explorers who were impressed with vine culture in the Land of Israel and compared them to Deut 30:22 and Midrash Sukkot. Later on, Joshua Yelin (19<sup>th</sup> century) detailedly described wine presses in Jericho, in Ein-Gedi and at a site near Nahal Hever. Further research was made based on epigraphy and Biblical texts when archaeological findings were revealed in the 1950s. Due to new technologies, archaeological research on wine has developed further in the past years. This historic research was motivated by the need for vine growers and winemakers to learn more about local grapes to develop their wines, specially adjusted to the region.

The earliest archaeological evidence for wine in Israel was found from the Early Bronze Age (mid-7<sup>th</sup> to mid-4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE). The researchers found winepresses that operated for long periods in the Ta'anakh Region and northern Galilee. Evidence from the Israelite era (1800-500 BCE, from the late Bronze Age to the Iron Age) has been found all over Israel, for example, as a cone that was probably used as strainers for drinking directly from the wine vessel, a funnel in a tavern in Tel-Dan. Also found are wine cups, including goblets adorned with a woman's head, red-coloured wine cups used for worship of the dead and many jars inscribed with the sender's name, place or to the addressee.

Canaanite and Israelite vinegrowers were considered specialists in making wine and wine commerce, which is why wine commerce, so Egypt, Greece and Rome imported wine from Israel until the Second Temple period. Evidence of this can be found throughout Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece in archaeological, epigraphic findings and literature. Also, the names of many settlements mentioned in the Bible were drawn from the semantic field of wine and vines, attesting to the wide popularity of wine and its status among the people.

The Hebrew word for wine, יַיִן (*yēn*), is common in the Bible. The noun's root has not been identified, and scholars have tried to trace its origins through various linguistic contexts. The vine is one of the Seven Species with which the Land of Israel was blessed (Deut 28:38-40). Its fruits, grapes, are used for making wine, a fermented alcoholic drink. The first evidence of wine in the Bible is the story of Noah and his sons (Gen 9:21), which takes place at Mount Ararat in Mesopotamia.

The Bible provides us with partial information about the process of wine production, including the cultivation of vineyards, the harvest and pressing of the grapes in the winepress, its storage in jugs and its trade. But the Bible mentions different mishaps associated with wine growing. As mentioned, the process of fermenting wine is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible. Therefore, scholars still disagree on the composites of wine according to the Bible and the process used for its fermentation. To achieve a complete picture of the entire process, we must rely on the study of the Talmud and epigraphic evidence. Post-Biblical literature describes the process in greater detail, both in Halachic and Haggadic contexts. Storage methods of wine are mentioned only briefly in the Bible. The Old Testament mentions different vessels associated with wine, from large tools like jugs to smaller ones. Also, the manufacturer's name and location were registered at the final stage of wine production. The measuring unit for measuring wine was הֵינָה (hin), which is equivalent to 9.33 lit. The wine was poured into a bowl or YAM to goblet or cup from the funnel. The Bible mentions various kinds of wines, including wine that causes numbness of the senses. Each wine was rated before its use according to its quality, the source of its grapes and its smell. The wine had to be diluted in water, up to one-third of its volume, in its various stages of ageing.

According to the Old Testament and post-Biblical literature, we find many references to the frequent use of wine for everyday needs. In ancient Israel, High-quality wine, especially from the Judah Mountains, was used for libations in religious rituals. It was used for everyday purposes, from drinking at feasts, supplies for times of emergency or supplies for builders, a drink for travellers and people tired on their journey and even a drink for elephants before a

battle. Wine drinking in many Biblical stories reveals various aspects of life, such as political interaction.

In Biblical literature, wine is symbolic of abundance and blessing. However, wine symbolises negative emotions such as sadness and mourning and is associated with suffering as divine punishment. In prophecy, wine is perceived as a symbol of moral blindness.

Although drinking wine was a common practice in the Ancient Near East, and for just that reason, the Bible, in all its literary forms, forbade excess drinking, post-Biblical literature elaborated further on drinking prohibitions in light of drinking customs that had become prevalent in the Land of Israel and the Jewish diaspora. Although the Wisdom Literature notes the consequences of drinking too much wine, it encourages a balanced habit of drinking.

Wine exploration began in the Traumatic Literature, especially in the Middle Ages, with recommendations from the Talmud on how to drink wine. Studies of wine in Biblical stories dealt chiefly with the stories of Noah, Lot, and Esther. Although past studies have not given much consideration to the theme of drunkenness in the Bible, the banquet scenes in the Book of Esther have been extensively studied. Post-Biblical literary studies have partially dealt with wine drinking, focusing on the book of Judith, especially in chapters 12-13. A different reference to wine is a historical one when prophets preach about drinking wine. Studies about wine in Wisdom Literature broaden our picture of wine in the Bible.

In the past twenty years, interdisciplinary studies have shed light on early Israelite society from a historical and social point of view. Anthropological research studies, for example, deal with ancient Israelite society from a socio-historical and economic point of view. Theological studies, too, have indicated a complex attitude toward wine. Most Christian study treats wine as a cultural symbol, distinguishing between drinking wine in a sacred context, as a gift of God, and drinking in a secular social context. Other theological studies present a moderate approach to alcohol. Other studies on wine drinking in the Bible, based on archaeological and epigraphic findings published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, expose ample information on the subject without focusing systematically on specific themes.

Biblical references reveal a complex attitude toward wine drinking, involving social, economic, religious, and medical aspects and shifting notably between negative and positive notions. These shifting notions and their relation in different Biblical texts require a more thorough study.

The study will focus on the complex attitude of the Bible towards the use of wine in texts in which drinking wine appears and will point to the social message that emerges from them. In this connection, an analogy should be made between texts to optimally recreate the

social image from which the story or parable was derived. A comparison should also be made with texts from the ancient Near East and post-biblical texts to illuminate the complexity of wine drinking as a motif and symbol in biblical literature and parables.

The analogical comparison, as presented in the method chapter, is determined by the author of the story and by the reader. The purpose of the analogy is conceptual parallelism to emphasise an interest, illuminate a text through one another, or solve a certain problem, such as a contemporary issue of the author, through explicit, hidden ways or in the existing change or the interpretation of things. However, it is worth remembering that different religious and cultural groups have different attitudes towards drinking wine, from pleasure and joy to complete rejection in modern society. The importance of wine in the Bible and its role in society depends on interpreting the text and the cultural and religious values of individuals and communities brought here.

The study, as mentioned, is a synchronous study based on analogue comparison. In the **first stage**, I chose texts from biblical literature and biblical wisdom, which have a motif of wine drinking. The choice was made by reviewing the Bible and non-biblical books related to the Bible. In the **second stage**, I examined the two genres separately, the narrative texts and the wisdom proverbs. I catalogued the texts to find common themes by genre and by the same functional use of the wine-drinking motif (such as wine used for trickery, murder, and blessing, as exemplified in the section on the purpose of the study). The synchronous approach based on analogue comparison requires that the motif has been used in the same function in at least two stories. I separately analyse each text as a whole unit in the **third stage**. I set the unit's boundaries according to the reading for each story and proverb, examining additional signs and interpretations. Accordingly, I treated each interpretation as a synchronous reading. In the **fourth stage**, I received the stories and parables from the themes created in the typological division. To compare similarities and differences, I looked for distinct analogue signs (linguistic, programmatic, formal, and stylistic). In the **fifth stage**, I attempted to put together a picture of the meaning of drinking wine according to themes in both biblical stories and biblical parables. Each theme was analysed according to the meaning of the wine-drinking motif, with appropriate signs for each text being raised to the level of meaning. I took a different approach. Depending on the interaction between the texts and the reader, I derived the first text versus the second text and created a third text. I analysed the new meaning obtained from the dialogue created between them. In the **sixth stage**, I looked for tangent points in analogy to non-biblical texts to shed a different light regarding the wine-drinking motif or one like the biblical works. In the **last stage**, I wished to summarise the meaning of wine drinking in the

Bible by genre, themes, and extra-biblical texts. I aimed to conclude by using the motif of drinking wine in the Bible and exploring the social significance in ancient Israeli society.

The synchronic approach uses the cultural context of the text, emphasising the dialogue between the reader and the text. Despite this, it is possible to overcome notable difficulties that this research approach invites.

This research focuses on three genres: parable, story, and blessing as a Will with drinking-wine motifs. These kinds of texts are examined separately from other extra-biblical or post-biblical sources. As mentioned, the texts were divided into themes, and I compared themes that expose the meaning of the drinking wine motif in the Bible.

The first chapter discusses five parables from the Book of Proverbs (Prov 9, 20:1, 23:19-21, 25-35, 31:1-9). The chapter is divided into three important sub-themes: drinking wine in the context of the leader, drinking wine in everyday life and drinking wine in the context of women. The book of Proverbs refers to the symbol of drinking wine complexly. On the one hand, it sees drinking as the adoption of wisdom. On the other hand, excessive drinking without balance has fatal consequences for a person personally, his parents, and the society in which he lives. He can also harm all his subjects and the kingdom if he is a leader.

However, compared to Sirach, writing is coherent in the book of Proverbs but in a more down-to-earth and less implied language. In Sirach, Drinking is allowed and joyful, but it also should be balanced. Hence, sometimes drinking wine is positive but also negative, and therefore, the ambivalent attitude toward drinking wine in the wisdom literature in the Bible. From that, it can be understood that the book of Proverbs is written from an educational perspective for the young, while Sirach writes from an educational perspective for experienced adults. The book of Proverbs reflects a sociocultural morbidity that intensified during the Sirach period, with which Israeli society is faced. In exposing the irony in the scriptures and the book of Proverbs against Sirach, the meaning that the book of Proverbs strives for - education for desirable personal and leadership ideals that reflect balance - stands out.

The second chapter deals with four stories: Abram with Melchizedek (Gen 14); The Gieboniets (Josh 9); Abigail and Nabal (1Sam 25), and Ziba and King David (2Sam 16:1-40). This chapter deals with the theme of agreement between rivals made through offering a Minhah that includes wine with bread in biblical fiction. I demonstrated in the stories the use of the term "bread and wine" in the way it has been expressed in agreements with rival groups. Admittedly, the term is not a common combination in the Bible. However, both commodities are valuable for the Israelites because of the investment in agricultural work to produce them, and they also meet two human needs: food and drink. For the people of Israel, these products



are the fruit of God's gift for man, but he is also the choice for challenging work to produce food from the gift, to be worthy of creation. Therefore, wine and bread were brought as a gift to an enemy or an adversary, assuming they intended to make an equal agreement with him. When bread and wine were mentioned in an agreement with the adversary, they brought other food together. Surpluses in bringing bread and wine to the enemy do not necessarily signify an agreement. When they appear in reverse order, wine before bread and the form of mould and dryness, or partially and asymmetrically in quantity, they are a symbol of deception. When there is only 'bread and wine', they deal with contracts that symbolise sacrifice to the gods, symbolise balance and wholeness, and imply a peace agreement between rival groups. In conclusion, wine and bread are not only positive symbols; in certain situations, they are negative symbols, and then the agreement will be violated or false. In the four texts, one can see an ambivalent interpretation of the motif of drinking wine, both positive and negative.

The third part of the study focuses on the biblical story's theme of blessings related to drinking wine. This chapter discusses two biblical texts that maintain a subtype of interpersonal communication that can be seen as a subtype of blessing and testament inherent in biblical fiction. In all the blessings that are part of the will, both from the Bible and extra-biblical sources (the Testament of Judah and the book of Jubilees), the drinking of wine is the focus of interest as a motif on which the blessing-testament is based.

It can be said that the wine motif is used ambivalently in all three sources, perhaps less than that in Jacob's Will to Judah. Drinking wine is a positive symbol that indicates sustenance and perfection when cultivating the vines and the economic ability and control of the tribe of Judah over the brothers. However, it is also a source of challenge to a problem that may arise in the drinker, not only in control that may lead to a lack of morality but also an inability to set a limit to drinking. Because of that, the consequences of drinking wine can be disastrous for an entire tribe. When it comes to personal matters, wine is used to deceive others, provided you have divine approval.

On the other hand, a person may find himself married improperly and lose his family and property. It seems that the message here is that although the tribe of Judah received a gift of sustenance and control over the people, it must also be careful in its actions, set an example of morality and balance between lust and control so that the government is compatible with the laws of God and the laws of social morality. Therefore, drinking wine is a symbol of balance and control for rulers.

In conclusion, this study examined the complex literary and social functions the drinking wine motif fulfils. Therefore, from the examination of the different meanings of

drinking wine in biblical literature and biblical wisdom literature, I referred to the various issues, such as the audience that participates in drinking wine, starting from the family (Isaac and Jacob), at the feast in the extended family (Proverbs, Sirach and Judah's will), to the general audience (Judah's blessing to the whole tribe, and the warnings in the book of Proverbs to people and leaders). Apart from this, drinking wine is important as a symbolic offering when meeting for an agreement between groups or individuals. Therefore, the meaning of drinking wine from the common person to the leader, through a family member, tribe to the entire Israeli society, poses positive and negative consequences. The point of view depends on the biblical author and the messages he wishes to convey to the reader. However, the messages are read differently by the reader, referring to the place, culture, and time in which he is and in dialogue with the biblical text. Even in the same texts, the Bible refers to drinking wine with an ambivalent attitude.

It is worth noting that the consequences of drinking wine in the Bible may teach us about biblical Israeli society and its effects even today. The Ancient Israeli society made a living from growing vines for various needs (such as ritual, medical, and drinking). Therefore, dealing with the dangers of nature and man required the writers of the Bible, as well as the leaders of society, to refer to the drinking of wine both explicitly and metaphorically in the individual's behaviour. Therefore, I believe it is a socio-political manifesto for future rulers to maintain social morality without any connection to religious morality. There is a message of hope for future social correction through learning self-criticism and balance. If we formulate a message to a person today regarding drinking wine, we can say that drinking requires balance and knowing the consequences. A ban on drinking wine leads to deliberate drinking and a reluctance to understand. However, education for balanced drinking and understanding the consequences leads to balanced drinking.

Among the stories, blessings and parables, you can find various connections beyond the appearance of the motif of drinking wine. For example, one of the most prominent connections is the connection to the House of David directly and indirectly. Thus, for example, the blessing to Judah (Gen 49:10), as well as the story with Abigail (1Sam 25:30) and Ziba (2Sam 16:3), speaks directly about it. Whereas in the story of Abram (Gen 14:18-20) and the story of the Gibeonites (Josh 9:27), in the blessing of Isaac, parts of which are found in the blessing to Judah (Gen 27:28-29), the tribal wars over rule are alluded to, as well as the Temple in Jerusalem in connection with the control of the tribe of Judah and David in particular. So is the book of Proverbs, which does not mention the house of David but is evidenced by the

connection of the book's author himself to Solomon or his descendants (Prov 1:1, 10:1, 25:1, 31:1).

In addition to this, other connections were found in repeated terms and combinations, such as "redness of eyes" (כחלילי עיניים), which appears twice and indicates negativity in drinking wine. Conjunctions such as 'blood of grapes' and 'wine and meat (or) bread' (Gen 14:18, 27:28; 1Sam 25:16; 2Sam 16:1; Prov 9:4, 17, 23:20) indicate use in everyday life as food required at a feast or meal in a mostly positive context, and negative as a kind of warning when the wine is not associated with meat and bread (Gen 27:25, 49:8-12; Josh 9:4-5, 12-13). Therefore, the appearance of the expressions creates the impression that drinking wine must be balanced by eating so that the effect of drinking is not destructive. Likewise, the root -שת"ה - *štā* (to drink), which is given in several forms in practice, in the context of wine, such as Gen 27:25; 1Sam 25:36; Prov 9:5, 31:4, 5, 7. The root is used prevalently regarding drinking water and wine at other events. Although this is a basic root, its meaning is not only positive and happy drinking (Sirah 31:39) but also drinking that has a sense of caution. In cases where the verb is not mentioned, as in the case of Abram, the Gibeonites, Abigail or Ziva, there is reason to wonder if the wine is intended for actual drinking or to present a symbol of welcome and warning. In addition, the act of drinking is alluded to in phrases such as "*is raging*", "*is deceived thereby*" (Prov 20:1), *winebibbers* (Prov 23:20), "*They tarry long at the wine*", "*they go to seek mixed wine*" (Prov 23:30); "*thou upon the wine when it is red when it giveth his colour in the cup*" (Prov 23:31). It is possible to understand that the common expressions regarding drinking wine indicate a social confrontation with the phenomenon of drinking in ancient Israeli society.

Another root that has repeated itself is *יִסַּף*-ysf (Prov 9:11; 23:21, 35) in the context of adding and drinking, but also in allusion to Joseph's ability to control drinking in front of Judah, and thus also to the control of the tribes over the people (Gen 48-49) as well as in the Shiloh and Dan context. Therefore, it can be assumed that the biblical writers recorded political traditions of control between the tribe of Ephraim against the tribe of Judah and recorded the customs of the high society that eats and drinks at feasts regularly. When they recorded common people (as in Prov 23:19-35, 31:6), they described them haughtily, like they could not control their drinking.

A difference between the texts is the reference to drinking wine in the amount and nature of the drink. In the stories of the Gibeonites (Josh 9:3-4), Abigail (1Sam 25:18) and Ziba (2Sam 16:1), the amount of wine whos they brought is indicated. However, the amount of drinking was not indicated, compared to the abundance of wine as in the blessing of Judah

(Gen 49:10-12). But in the story of Abram (Gen 14:18), the wine is brought as a gift of peace, the amount not known, like in the story of Jacob drinking wine how brought to confusion Isaac (Gen 27:25). That possible to understand that the amount of wine does not predict everything, and it may be negative or positive. It follows that the Bible does not draw a line on heavy drinking that leads to intoxication and loss of senses, but rather marks a line for drinking that is not for an innocent purpose. In addition, it gives a serious warning against losing one's judgment. A clear expression of this can be seen in the people of Israel who took the wine of the Gibeonites and could not distinguish between a lie and the truth (Josh 9:14), so did Isaac who went blind from drinking that Jacob gave him (Gen 27:25), and so is it better for those who are lost in spirit (Prov 9:6). Judah did well to express it in his will because the wine blinded his judgment at his wedding and at the wedding of his sons with Tamar (T. Jud 14:2-8). Therefore, the Bible's attitude to drinking wine is not dichotomous; sometimes, even in the same text, one can find an ambivalent attitude.

Therefore, the social meaning that emerges from the biblical texts, in the literary analysis of the wine-drinking motif, is that it is a developing symbol: in one circle, it develops from a leadership position (Gen 14:18; 2Sam 16:1; Prov 31:1-9), which over time became a symbol of all the people in ancient Israeli society (Josh 9; Prov 23). In another circle, it is a symbol that develops from the individual, the personal (like Jacob, who is blessed in Gen 27:28), to a large family like that of Nabal and Abigail, Ziba and Mephibosheth to an entire tribe like Judah, and a leader like David, to a group of wise men in Proverbs, or a tribal leadership like in Joshua and to the entire society (Prov 23:19-35). Therefore, drinking wine is a motif that stems not only from the many vines grown in the land of Israel but also from its recognition as an accepted drink and thus, it becomes a national symbol. The social message is an educational message to the collective on which the Bible is based - a warning against drinking with no purpose. Drinking wine requires consideration, balance, and moderation. It is how the Bible intends to balance the lust for power, judgment, and justice as part of the social and divine moral laws, and this is well demonstrated in Gen 49:8-12 and Prov 31:1-9, which correspond to each other. Another social message is that drinking wine indicates status. Moderate drinking is appropriate for high-status tribes (Gen 49:10-12; 1Sam 25:36), and drunken drinking is appropriate for someone who has lost his way and cannot distinguish between good and evil (Prov 23:19-35, 31:6). Another social message is for leadership, who must set an example in drinking (Gen 14:18, 49:11-12; Josh 9:26; 1Sam 25:18; Prov 31:5-4). Therefore, the social and moral message for the individual in connection with drinking wine is

a firm position of the Bible: to drink wine in balance to make important decisions in your private and social life.

In conclusion, the Bible refers equally to drinking wine, meaning its attitude is ambivalent even in the same texts. That is why there is no absolute negative or positive reference here but a reference to discretion when drinking wine, and there is no prohibition in it. Hidden here is a socio-political manifesto for future rulers to maintain social morality without any connection to religious morality. There is a message of hope for future social correction through learning self-criticism and balance, as Prov put it: "drink of the wine ... mingled... and go in the way of understanding" (Prov 9:5-6, tran. NJKV).

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