

## In Vino, Veritas by Bruce Scott Bertram

It is fascinating that Yahshua can say something in the regular language of the time using figures of speech that are particular to His audience also at the time, and still speak directly to someone 2,000 years (or six) after He said it. It seems that each word He utters, in any combination, echo and overflow with infinity, yet allow people to focus on only one concept at a time. So it is with Yahshua's teachings on wine and wineskins in Matthew 9:14-17, which are paralleled in Mark 2:18-22 and Luke 5:33-39.

*And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink." And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days." And He was also telling them a parable: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'" Luke 5:33-39 NASB*

All three accounts are almost identical, and occur in the narration right after comments from the Pharisee's (with sinners) and John's (fasting) disciples on eating habits. There have been a great many attempts to identify the meaning of the wine and the wineskins by various writers and teachers who call themselves Christian over the years. These efforts have mostly centered around the identification of the 'new wine' and 'new garment' as 'grace' (new economy, age, joy, gospel, Church), which was not acceptable to the religious leaders of the time (who were the old wineskins), and the old wine or old garment as 'law' (old economy, age, rituals, Judaism) so Jesus needed to put the new wine (grace) into 'new wineskins' (His disciples). The 'new wine' of Jesus is construed to be the 'gospel,' while the 'old wine' was the supposed teaching of the Law. Some of these comments are quoted here.

The *incongruities* mentioned in Lu 5:36–38 were intended to illustrate the difference between the *genius* of the old and new economies, and the danger of *mixing up* the one with the other. As in the one case supposed, "the rent is made worse," and in the other, "the new wine is spilled," *so by a mongrel mixture of the ascetic ritualism of*

*the old with the spiritual freedom of the new economy, both are disfigured and destroyed.*<sup>1</sup>

At issue is a matter of appropriateness. Routine fasting as the Pharisees did on Mondays and Thursdays was not an adequate reflection of God's grace and generosity toward the world. To Jesus' way of kingdom living there is an aspect of joy and thanksgiving. Weddings and banquets are proper analogies of the kingdom. Of course the Passion of Jesus evoked fasting among his followers, and until the end of days the church recalls the cross as well as Easter. Jesus tells his critics that his disciples can no more join their newfound joy to old rituals than one can tear up a new garment to patch an old, or put new wine in old skins. Christian rituals must be appropriate to the new life.<sup>2</sup>

But of course all these attempts to regenerate heathenism by foreign elements were utterly futile. They were like galvanizing a decaying corpse, or grafting fresh scions on a dead trunk, sowing good seed on a rock, or pouring new wine into old bottles, bursting the bottles and wasting the wine.<sup>3</sup> (Speaking of Julian the Apostate and not about the text under consideration, Schaff nevertheless uses the conventional imagery to describe Julian's efforts.)

Comments on the Matthew section (Jerome Bible Commentary).

The incompatibility of old and new is illustrated with the homely figures of patching with new cloth an old fabric and pouring new wine into used wineskins. The meaning of the figures is that the Gospel is incompatible with the Law. The order Jesus initiates is not a patchwork of elements derived from Judaism and pronouncements of Jesus. It is as new as was the revelation of the Torah through Moses.<sup>4</sup>

Comments on the Mark section (Jerome Bible Commentary).

Two parabolic sayings now stress the incompatibility of the new economy with the old Mosaic economy, Jesus' disciples can no longer adhere to the Baptist's manner of life without compromising their new view of things. **21** . *unshrunk cloth on an old garment*: The garment may be a symbol of the universe, which Jesus does not merely patch up but creates anew (cf. Heb 1:10-12 ; Acts 10:11 ff.; 11:5 ff.). **22** . *new wine into old wineskins*: Wine may be a symbol of a new era (Gn 9:20 ; 49:11-12 , Nm

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A., & and Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (electronic ed.) (Lk 5:33). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>2</sup>Mays, J. L., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1988). *Harper's Bible commentary* (Lk 5:33). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Schaff. *History of the Christian Church*.

<sup>4</sup>Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. (1968). *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (Mt 9:16). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

3:23-24 ); Jesus refers to himself as the one who dispenses the new wine at the Messianic banquet (J. Jeremias, *Parables*, 117-18; C. H. Dodd, *Parables*, 117).<sup>5</sup>

The New Bible Dictionary is slightly better.

On more than one occasion Jesus used wine to illustrate his teaching. Mk. 2:22 points to the current practice of putting new wine into new skins and emphasizes the impracticality of doing otherwise. Commentators differ regarding the interpretation of this parable. For, while the new wine clearly points to the lively and powerful working of Christ's new teaching, the skins which are broken may equally well refer to certain conventional forms or to the whole Judaistic system or to the human heart, all of which need to be recast in accordance with the challenge of the new age which has arrived. Unfortunately the Pharisees were unwilling to face the changes which would have been involved, and obstinately clung to the system upon which their livelihood depended (Lk. 5:39 ).<sup>6</sup>

But the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament just reiterates the normative.

The new wine of the new age demands new skins. At Cana (Jn. 2:1 ff.) Jesus turns a great amount of water into wine. If the nature of Johannine miracles as signs is considered, a deeper meaning must be sought. Thus law and gospel may be contrasted as water and wine, or wine may be equated with Logos (Philo).<sup>7</sup>

The teachings from this interpretation have been used for the justification of everything from new Protestant denominations to para-church organizations, and for sundering fellowship whenever disagreement was offered for 'new teaching.' Usually, when confronted with recalcitrance on the part of an 'old' person by a younger person who would like to see some changes in Church practices or teaching, the comment is made that, "Well, you can't put new wine into old wineskins." The teaching of Yahshua is reduced by the younger person to "one can't teach an old dog new tricks."

This is no great surprise, as there are many individuals down through the centuries who thought permission was given them by the Scriptures to do whatever they wanted by focusing on a narrow range of verses or interpretations of verses. As the reasoning goes these groups feel that since a recognized congregation would not accept the 'new wine' of whatever 'new thing' a person wanted to do, then the answer was to break off and form a new congregation or denomination. While it is acknowledged that on occasion some mild civil disobedience or 'new wine' (in some parlance) is good for the soul of a

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<sup>5</sup>Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. (1968). *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (Mk 2:19-22). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

<sup>6</sup>Douglas, J. (1982). *New Bible Dictionary*. Includes index. (Second edition.). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>7</sup>Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

community, there is entirely too much of this kind of fruit coming from this kind of teaching. Because so many have used these interpretations in so many spurious ways it seemed that further investigation and analysis was a good idea. The mere proliferation of congregations has not improved the average person's (or the group's) testimony.

One of the reasons that the conventional wisdom has developed might be that the process has been approached with little consideration for the perspective and understanding of the Hebrew people. Obviously, Jesus was Jewish, the apostles were Jewish and most of the people Jesus dealt with were Jewish.<sup>8</sup> It would follow that the Jewish understanding is critical to a general apprehension of the meaning and dynamics involved in delivering the message to and through the Hebrews. The Hebrew understanding was conditioned by a study and application of the Tanakh (OT), so it should be used as the foundation for interpreting the New Testament. Indeed, at the time Jesus and the apostles were delivering their message the New Testament hadn't even been written, and so all the references to the Scriptures in the New were referring to the Old<sup>9</sup>. Although the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) was composed by Hebrew writers, almost from the first it was considered a 'Christian' document and avoided by most Jewish scholars, so Christianity has been virtually bereft of the Hebrew perspective when contemplating the meaning for a very long time.

D. Thomas Lancaster is one exception to the failure of including the Hebrew perspective. In his article Yeshua's New Wine<sup>10</sup> he suggests an interpretation based on the immediate context concerning the selection of disciples, along with a consideration of the historical teachings of the Hebrew teachers themselves. In the immediate context, Mr. Lancaster proposes that the comments by Yahshua are simply references to the suitability of a new, relatively uneducated person's (new wineskin) to absorb new teaching (new wine). He sees this coming from the historical context including evidence from the teachings in Pirkei Avot 4.20. Avot 4.20 uses wine and wineskins as similes illustrating the relative unwillingness of a person to absorb new teaching who had already been educated in a particular style. The lack of argument from the disciples of John would tend to support Lancaster's proposal that they understood the metaphors, because similar metaphors or similes were part of their learning programs. Even though written *ex post facto*, the teachings in Avot 4.20 are probably representative of the staples of rabbinic oral teaching at the time of Yahshua.<sup>11</sup>

The strength of Mr. Lancaster's proposal is that he includes the Hebrew perspective in his interpretation. This helps to focus attention on the receptivity of the disciple (old garment/old wineskin) rather than the appropriateness of the teachings (old or new). It also matches up with other teachings of Yahshua on the receptivity of the hearer such as

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<sup>8</sup> Hebrew and Jewish are not necessarily identical terms, but the rough equivalence will suffice here.

<sup>9</sup> It is acknowledged that the New is also Scripture, even though added later.

<sup>10</sup> Yeshua's New Wine, Bikurei Tziyon (magazine), Issue 76, January 2003, published by First Fruits of Zion.

<sup>11</sup> Mr. Lancaster does acknowledge in a footnote to the article that this text was written sometime later.

the parable of the different ground in Matthew 13. In addition he notes correctly that the reading of Church into the text is anachronistic in that the Church as we know it now was not in existence then. However, the weakness is that it doesn't refute well enough the grace/law interpretation, and begs the question why. The grace/law doctrines could still be superimposed over his interpretation because he doesn't deal with the question of why the teachings of Yahshua were incompatible with the 'old wineskins' of the other group's disciples. Is it simply that the disciples of John and the Pharisee's were exposed to a certain method of teaching and were therefore less receptive to a different understanding? Or was it the nature of the teachings that was the problem? We know that Yahshua came to establish the Law (Matthew 5:17-20) so the 'old' was not the 'old testament/age/law.'

If we accept his arguments that the context is the selection of disciples and learning, which is plausible, there are still a number of other questions to be answered. What would the application, or significance, of these passages be? For instance, were these references included by the Gospel writers simply as a resume, a figurative 'slap in the face' for the other religious leaders of the time? Or can there be a broader application, including all disciples everywhere? If the new wine represents the teachings of Yahshua, how are we to understand 'new?' New in relation to character, or new in relation to time? By Yahshua's own admission He only taught what He heard from the Father. The standard Christian interpretation of new wine as grace and old wine as law would still fit under this interpretation. Why is the old wine 'old?' In addition, are we to understand from this interpretation that education is not good, while lack of education is good?

If education (or in the Church's view Torah) was the problem, why would Jesus tell us in Matthew 23:1-3 to 'do and observe' what the Pharisees say?

*Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses ; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe , but do not do according to their deeds ; for they say things and do not do them." (NASB)*

This presentation will proceed from the idea that the Hebrew perspective is usually missing from the standard Church interpretations of this and other Scriptures, and that this perspective is grounded in the Hebrew Tanakh. This does not mean that all things Hebrew are automatically correct, but that a significant portion of daily living was influenced and modified by the Book they claimed to follow. There were also many aspects of daily living, such as the details involved in garment repair or winemaking, that were 'second nature' to Jesus' contemporaries, and if these can be determined they should also help with the Hebrew perspective. The intent will be to define terms from the Tanakh or teachings based on the Tanakh for wine, if available. From there an understanding will be built of the other comparisons such as the garment and bridegroom by working back and forth from the definitions to the immediate context and other teachings of Yahshua. If definitions are properly extracted they should give insight into

the meanings of the other illustrations used also. Perhaps it will be seen that In Vino, Veritas (in wine, truth).

## Wine Words

The first reference for wine is in Genesis 9:21 describing Noah's drunken episode, and the last is the wine press of God's wrath in Revelation 19:15. These make an interesting pair of bookends for the general study of wine in the Word, but the focus here is on sorting out specific meanings if there are any. The English word wine is used in the NASB 274 times by itself or in combination with other words such as wineskin and winepress, but most of the words are interchangeable.

**Hebrew.** The main Hebrew word for wine is *yayin* (yah-yeen 3196). New wine is *tirosh* (tier-ohsh, 8492), and is the next most used term. Scattered other Hebrew or Aramaic words are used a few times each. *Chomets* (2558) is translated 'vinegar' in places such as Numbers 6:3 and Ruth 2:14. This word comes from the root *chamets* (2556a) meaning bitter or leavened. *Chemer* (wine, 2561) is used in Isaiah 27:2 illustrating a 'vineyard' of wine perhaps still in the grape, while the related word *chamar* (either ferment 2560a or Aramaic for wine 2562) is used in places such as Ezra 6:9 and in Daniel 5 (for Belshazzar's wine). The 'blood (dam 1818) of grapes (enab 6025)' is used in Genesis 49:11 along with *yayin* (wine) in a way that suggests both are the same thing. In Deuteronomy 32:14 the blood of grapes (enab dam) is related to wine (chemer – whose root word is *chamar* meaning to ferment), which makes a full circle (*chamar*, or ferment, around to the blood of grapes, and all related to wine).

Aged wine is used to translate the word *shemer* (8105) in Isaiah 25:6 and Jeremiah 48:11. These two comparisons obviously mean that *shemer* is thought of as 'choice' and therefore desirable (to somebody). This is the only term that clearly points to an 'old' wine product that is seemingly desirable. Refined, distilled or purified is the meaning of *zaqaq* (2212) which is used in Isaiah 25:6 to modify *shemer* a second time (refined wine). This 'refined wine' is metaphorically equal in this verse to the very finest blessings in the mountain of the Lord.

*The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined (zaqaq), aged (shemer) wine.* NASB parenthesis added

It's hard to tell exactly what mixed wine is from verses in the Tanach. Mixing (*mimsak* 4469) is used in a derogatory fashion in Isaiah 65:11, speaking of giving mixed wine to Destiny (apparently a form of idolatry that mimics the priestly drink offerings). But *mezeg* (also mixing 4197) is used once in the Song of Solomon 7:2, where it does not sound like a bad thing at all. "Your navel is like a round goblet which never lacks mixed wine; your belly is like a heap of wheat fenced about with lilies." (NASB) It is probably not the mixing itself which is bad, but the offering of it to idols that was bad.

Tools of the trade are wine cellars mentioned in I Chronicles 27:27 (*yayin otsar* 214, wine storehouses), and the wine press (*gath*, 1660). *Gath* is used as a metaphor 4 times, once each in Judges 6:11, Nehemiah 13:15, Isaiah 63:2, and Joel 3:13, but in Isaiah 63:3 wine press is the translation for *purah* (6333b).

Sweet wine (*asis*, 6071) derived from 6072 *asas*, to crush (translated in Malachi 4:3 as ‘tread down’), is mentioned five times, once in Isaiah 49:26 where it is said “they will become drunk on their own blood as with sweet wine” intimating that sweet wine has an alcoholic content; in Joel 1:5 as sweet wine being cut off; Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13 as blessings overflowing, and once as juice in Song of Solomon 8:2. In this verse also spiced wine is apparently identical to sweet wine from pomegranates (*reqach*, 7544), which seems to be another good variation.

*“I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, who used to instruct me; I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranates.”*

NASB

Wine is mentioned indirectly as the “fullness (or full produce) of the wine vat” in Numbers 18:27. *Meleah* (4395 fullness) with *yeqeb* (3342 wine vat or wine press), is reckoned the “tithe of the tithe” to the Levites as if they had grown it themselves. Coupled with Numbers 18:30, where it is called the “product (8393 *tebuah*) of the wine vat” this seems to mean grape juice, which is also called wine. *Yeqeb* is used in Deuteronomy 15:14 (give from the wine vat to a released slave according to how God blesses); in Deuteronomy 16:13 speaking of the timing of the feast of Booths (after gathering from the wine vat); and in a seemingly sarcastic response by the king of Israel to a rather gruesome question by a starving woman during the siege of Jerusalem in II Kings 6:27.

‘Strong drink’ is translated from *shekar* (7941) about 26 times in the Tanach. It is derived from *shakar* (7937), meaning to be drunk or become drunken. It seems to be a different product than wine, apparently something from grain and with more alcohol.

**Greek.** In contrast to the many Hebrew words for wine and related items, there are only three main Greek words: *oinos* (wine), *gleuckos*, and *oxos* (sour wine). There are also a couple of words for wine press or vat. *Oinos* seems to describe all sorts of wine, but *gleuckos* seems to refer to the boiled down (pasteurized) syrup (translated as sweet wine once in Acts 2:13). While these words are even less specific than the Hebrew words, like the Hebrew there is also a wide range of meanings that can be assigned to them depending on the context. Only one of the Greek words (*oinos*) is used in the Septuagint to translate most of the Hebrew words. In the Apostolic Writings *oinos* is likewise almost exclusively used (although *gleuckos* is another word used a couple of times in both the Septuagint and the Apostolic writings).

## Significance of Usage

Only three times in the Apostolic Writings (NT) is *oinos* modified with the Greek word for new (*neos*); all three times in the passages we are considering in Matthew (9), Mark (2), and Luke (5). *Neos* means ‘new’ in relation to time, meaning ‘newly created.’ Given that the Apostolic Scriptures (NT) were not written at the time, it seems most likely that Yahshua desired to direct His listener’s attention back to the meaning of new wine in the Tanach.

In the NASB, the Hebrew *yayin* (3196) is translated wine 136 times, banquet once and grape once according to the NAS Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries. The plain meaning of the word seems to be the juice of the grape, fermented or unfermented. It’s alcoholic properties for making one drunk, merry or glad are highlighted in places such as Judges 19:19; I Samuel 1:14 and 25:36,37; II Samuel 13:28; Esther 1:10; Psalms 78:65 and 104:15; Proverbs 23:30,31; and Ecclesiastes 10:19. Heavy drinkers of wine are grouped with gluttons in Proverbs 23:20 and *yayin* is equivalent to partying in Isaiah 22:13. It is also said to help with “fainting in the wilderness” in II Samuel 16:2. In Genesis 14:18 Melchizedek brings out bread and *yayin* to bless Abraham. There does not seem to be any special significance in the word ‘wine’ apart from the context.

The term for ‘new wine’ on the other hand seems to have more direct significance attached to it. *Tirosh* (8492) is the next most used Hebrew term for wine in the Tanach. It is translated new wine 33 times, fresh wine once, grapes once, and wine thrice in the NASB. Derived from *yarash* (3423), a word which means to take possession of, inherit, dispossess, or drive out (perhaps in one sense referring to the tendency of wine to possess or “drive out” the senses), the plain meaning is simply fresh grape juice. It may be fermented or it may not, but room temperature grape juice quickly begins to ferment, and there are textual indications that new wine is usually fermented (Judges 9:13, for instance, where it is said that new wine cheers “both God and men”).

Parenthetically, as far as alcohol is concerned, there seems to be no difference. If the anti-alcohol people want an excuse to control what others drink they will have to look elsewhere, because the Bible doesn’t seem to make the distinction. Anti-alcohol arguments are summed up in a number of books; see for instance [www.biblicalperspectives.com](http://www.biblicalperspectives.com) for some of the chapters from the book “Wine in the Bible” by Samuele Bacchiocchi, a Seventh Day Adventist. None of the Hebrew or Greek words has an overly particular definition which limits the meaning to alcoholic or non-alcoholic. There is no command to avoid the drinking of wine (alcoholic or not), but there are many admonitions for the abuser of wine, as with many other gifts given by God that have the potential for abuse.

## Yayin as a metaphor

There is quite a range of meanings for *yayin* as a metaphor in the Tanakh. It is a picture of judgment for evil in Psalm 75:8, while Proverbs 4:17 speaks of the “wine of violence.”



Yayin is like Israel as the wine of Lebanon in Hosea 14:7. Proverbs 9:2,5 tells of the mixed wine of wisdom, and Proverbs 21:17 compares wine to pleasure. The lack of yayin is the result of a curse in Isaiah 16:10 and filling jugs with yayin is used by God to picture destroying for not listening in Jeremiah 13:12, which is echoed directly as God's wrath in Jeremiah 25:15. But a man can also be drunk like a man filled with yayin because of God's holy words according to Jeremiah 23:9. In Isaiah 55 God also speaks of coming to the waters, of buying wine (yayin) and milk without money, which is equated in the chapter to Himself. Verse 3 says "incline your ear and come to me," verse 6 says "seek the Lord, call on Him," and verse 7 says "forsake your way and come to God."

*"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David. Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you will call a nation you do not know, and a nation which knows you not will run to you, because of the LORD your God, even the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you. Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.*

The Rechabites are used as a positive example of obedience in Jeremiah 35 because they obey their (long departed) father Rechab and refuse to drink wine, while Israel is upbraided for not listening to and obeying God in a similar manner. In Jeremiah 48:33 God makes yayin to cease from the wine press which is made equivalent to the removal of gladness and joy. Jeremiah also likens yayin to Babylon (51:7) which is probably related to idolatry (see verse 51:17). Maybe this picture gives a little insight into Daniel's refusal to defile himself with the king's yayin in Daniel 1:8.

The first two uses of yayin are after the flood in Genesis 9 (which show bad things happening), then a reference for good in Gen. 14 (Melchizedek brings out yayin and bread), then four uses in Genesis 19 (not good) when Lot's daughters use it to get him drunk enough to have sex with him, which probably goes to show they had been hanging out in Sodom and Gomorrah way too long. No yayin is also the sign of a curse for disobedience in Deuteronomy 28:39. The yayin of Sodom and Gomorrah is also compared to poison in Deuteronomy 32:32,33.

*"For their vine is from the vine of Sodom, and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison, their clusters, bitter. Their wine (yayin) is the venom of serpents, and the deadly poison of cobras." NASB*

There does not appear to be a special meaning for the Hebrew word yayin. Most of the meaning attached to yayin comes from how it is used in the context. As a matter of fact probably the most consistent thing about yayin is its use as a metaphor. So far this doesn't help clear up the meaning of the word that Yahshua used in the texts under consideration. But is 'new wine' more specific?

### **Tirosh as a metaphor**

*Tirosh* as new wine is used about 25 times in the Tanakh (OT). The first place *tirosh* is used is in Genesis 27:28 (and 37), where it is part of Isaac's blessing to Jacob. It is used again in Deuteronomy 7:13 and 11:14, where it is likewise connected to blessings, but this time in direct connection with obedience to God. Psalm 4:7, Proverbs 3:10, and Isaiah 62:8 all refer to new wine in connection with blessings, and in II Kings 18:32 and Isaiah 36 Rabshekah the servant of the Assyrian king Sennacherib promises a land of fruitfulness to the inhabitants of Jerusalem which includes new wine. In II Chronicles 31:5 the Land (Israel) provides abundant tithes where new wine is part of the "increase of the field." New wine as the fruitfulness of the Land is cut off in Joel 1:10 but God will send tirosh in Joel 2:19, while new wine (apparently blessings) overflows in Joel 2:24. New wine (again as the fruitfulness of the land) is withheld in Haggai 1:11 because the house of the Lord is being ignored.

Tirosh is said by God to be found in a cluster (eshkol – 811, remember the valley of Eschol in Numbers 13:23?) and equated to the remnant of God in Isaiah 65:8, and the bounty of the Lord both there and in Jeremiah 31:12. Lo-ruhamah (daughter, no compassion) and Lo-ammi (son, not my people) have blessings (*tirosh*) that were at one time given, removed for punishment in Hosea 2:8,9. God "responds" to the heavens and earth and tirosh is one of the results in Hosea 2:22. In addition, the absence of new wine (*tirosh*) is a continuation of a curse (absence of blessings) for disobedience because another nation consumes it in Deuteronomy 28:51.

Harlotry, yayin and tirosh together in Hosea 4:11 take away understanding, most probably because of offering it (the wine) to idols. Isra'el seeks tirosh without God according to Hosea 7:14, and tirosh will fail (them) in Hosea 9:2. Tirosh will make virgins flourish according to Zechariah 9:17. It is translated as "grapes" in Micah 6:15 – "you will tread the tirosh but will not drink the yayin." This might indicate that tirosh was unfermented while wine was fermented, but other texts blur the distinction that might be drawn from this verse. God has some interesting things to say metaphorically in Isaiah 24:3-11 (NASB).

*The earth will be completely laid waste and completely despoiled, for the LORD has spoken this word. The earth mourns and withers, the world fades and withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held*

*guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left. The new wine (tirosh) mourns, the vine decays, all the merry-hearted sigh. The gaiety of tambourines ceases, the noise of revelers stops, the gaiety of the harp ceases. They do not drink wine (yayin) with song; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. The city of chaos is broken down; every house is shut up so that none may enter. There is an outcry in the streets concerning the wine (yayin); all joy turns to gloom. The gaiety of the earth is banished. (parenthesis mine)*

According to these 25 references, it seems that the primary meaning of *tirosh* in the Tanach is connected to blessings gained through obedience to YHVH. A secondary meaning is associated with the tithe.

### **Wine as an Offering**

**Tithe.** Wine as part of the tithe of the increase of the field is in a number of references, and mostly this was *tirosh* or new wine. *Tirosh* tends to be associated with tithes, probably because it is part of the increase of the fields. The first place in the Tanakh (OT) where wine is mentioned as part of the tithe is in Numbers 18:12, where part of the offerings given to the priests was a portion of the new wine. God says not to drink the tithe of the new wine except in His presence in Deuteronomy 12:17(&18), and 14:23. Part of the tithe is given to the priests again in Deuteronomy 18:2 and 33:28. This last reference along with II Chronicles 32:28 and Nehemiah 13:9 are the three places where *tirosh* is translated as “wine.” Nehemiah 5:11, 10:37,39 and 13:12 also list new wine is part of tithes.

**Drink Offering.** *Yayin* is very often associated with drink offerings to Adonai in a number of references, perhaps because after new wine (*tirosh*) is tithed and sits for a little while it is referred to as *yayin*. Deuteronomy 29:40 tells us to offer a fourth of a hin of *yayin* with the continuous morning and evening lamb offerings. The same item and quantity is also used with a lamb offering on the feast of First fruits (Lev. 23:13). A fourth of a hin of *yayin* is to be offered with a lamb, one third with a ram, and one half with a bull in Numbers 15, which describes various free-will offerings, and in Numbers 28:14 for the monthly offerings. Deuteronomy 32:38 has a question by God on idols that consume *yayin* – ‘drink offerings,’ while Samuel’s mom takes an offering to the priest in I Samuel 1:24 which includes *yayin* as a drink offering.

Other than the possible usage of new wine as a metaphor for blessings through obedience to God’s Word, so far there is not a great deal of help for defining Yahshua’s terms in the passages under consideration. Except maybe to eliminate possibilities. Moving on to a discussion of wine making itself might help, however.

## **Wine making facts**

The grape is perhaps the only perfect base for making wine because it contains in itself all the ingredients naturally.<sup>12</sup> The powdery coating on the skin is natural or wild yeast, there is sugar inside, it has its own flavor, and it usually has the right amount of natural acids including tannin. When crushed, the yeast on the grape starts to consume the sugar, converting it to alcohol. The alcohol content increases until it is sufficient to stop the process by killing off the yeast. Different grape varieties have different amounts of sugar, which affects the amount of alcohol. Wines made with natural yeast can have as little as 6% alcohol and as much as 10%. The juice can be heated or ‘pasteurized,’ which drastically limits the fermenting process and makes the product last a little longer. Otherwise the fermentation process will start immediately upon crushing. Factors that may affect the quality of wine are the amount of tannic acid (gives wine a tart taste), the presence of bacteria in the wine or the container, and excess sugar.

Often overlooked in discussions about wine is that it is made to be consumed. As a matter of fact, according to modern winemakers most wine (98%) is best if used within a year.<sup>13</sup> According to the Jewish Encyclopedia ([www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com)) there are three terms given in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 70a) to describe the age of wine. Fresh unfermented wine is called *yayin mi-gat* (wine of the vat). The wine from last year’s harvest is *yayin yashan* (old wine). Wine from the year before last is referred to as *yayin mayushshan* (very old wine) or *yayin noshan* (old, very old).<sup>14</sup> In the present day, very old wines are an exception, and most are produced only under the most careful and perfect of circumstances. If these things were true at the time Yahshua was speaking then old wine would be no older than perhaps 12 months or so and new wine would be only a few days, weeks, or months out of the grape.

Modern man, similar to the person spoken of in the Luke passage, is inclined to think that ‘old wine is better.’ However, with a little reflection this should be recognized as a cultural preference, not an absolute. Old wine can, on occasion, be preferred over newer wine, but this is usually the attitude of so-called wine connoisseurs, not the average workaday person. The common man, while acknowledging other’s preferences for old wine, would just as soon purchase and imbibe a recent vintage rather than wait a few dozen years for the ‘right’ bottle. The arrogance of a connoisseur is no guide to the desirability of wine. It is humorous to watch some of the modern self-proclaimed sommeliers in vineyard tasting rooms loudly proclaim the benefits of a ‘dry’ wine (less sugar), yet consistently choose sweet wines in taste tests.

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<sup>12</sup> From the Wine Making Home Page by Jack Keller of Pleasanton Texas, article titled “Advanced Wine Making Basics,” [www.winemaking.jackkeller.net/index.asp](http://www.winemaking.jackkeller.net/index.asp)

<sup>13</sup> Phone Interview October 2002 with winemaker Parker at Carlson Vineyards, Grand Junction Colorado, 970-464-5554

<sup>14</sup> The Jewish Encyclopedia, Article title WINE, Emil G. Hirsch and Judah David Eisenstein, pp 532-535, 1901-1906

These passages must be seen apart from the reader's cultural preferences. The emphasis in Luke 5:39 is not on how the wine tastes, but on the age. 'Better' is an extremely subjective term in the absence of standards or qualifiers, and the passage has no such standards to which we can compare. Even if a case could be made for higher quality wine on the basis of age here, how would that translate to a more accurate understanding of Yahshua's words?

**Wineskins.** A wineskin could only be a carry container, not a storage container, because the walls of the skin allow oxygen to pass into the wine. Oxygen causes wines to go bad (sour or just blah). Even wine barrels with inch-thick staves allow in oxygen. The walls of an old wineskin would also absorb some of the old wine, which would contain material necessary to kick start the fermentation process in new wine. A by-product of the fermentation process is gas. So, the most likely reason an old wineskin would not be filled with new wine is that the leftover material in the old skin would resume the fermentation process in the new wine, producing gas and eventually splitting the skin, ruining both. Another reason is that the leftovers would spoil the new wine. New wine goes into new wineskins to avoid the contamination of the new wine from the leftover old wine. If the new wineskin is from a tanned hide, the tannic acid (used for tanning) is also an anti-oxidant, which helps to preserve the wine for a while by nullifying the effects of oxygen. The mundane truth of the examples used by Yahshua here is that they are eminently practical. In other words, He was using a common, everyday occurrence to illustrate the impracticality of mixing two incompatible things together.

Because of evolutionary theories that have been swallowed hook, line and sinker, the tendency of modern man (or woman) is to think that he (or she) is more advanced than people two thousand or more years ago. This is probably not true. Ancient wine makers may have had far more knowledge about grapes and juice than we will ever know. Many things have been forgotten, such as the process used by ancient Egyptians for making beer. Old is not always directly equivalent to lacking in intelligence.

## Summary

After examining the uses of *yayin*, *tirosh* and *oinos*, the first observation is that *tirosh* by itself simply means newly made in regards to time, while *yayin* generally means new wine that has been around for a while, presumably since the last harvest. By the time a new harvest comes around, and the wine making process is started again, then there is both "leftover" wine (*yayin*) and new wine (*tirosh*). By any account new wine is desirable. In fact, new wine would frequently be more desirable than the old stuff that had been sitting around on the shelf for a while, possibly spoiled. Exposure to oxygen, bacteria, contamination from the container and other factors would make the consumption of *yayin* a risky proposition sometimes. Spiced wine may very well have been an attempt to cover up the bad taste of some vintages.

Some 25 of the 33 references using *tirosh* make new wine part of the abundance of the land connected directly and indirectly to obedience to the Lord. The remaining references using *tirosh* include new wine as part of tithes and offerings. But even tithes and offerings are based on the 'increase' or fruitfulness of the Land which is also closely related to obedience to the Lord. This evidence suggests that the significance of *tirosh* is abundance through obedience. While there is not just a single meaning for the use of *tirosh* all throughout the Tanakh, it seems 'abundantly' clear that the main use of the term symbolizes the fruitfulness of the Land, or blessings, due to the presence of God through obedience.

If this is correct, and the wine making facts were also true in Yahshua's day,<sup>15</sup> then the idea Yahshua was trying to get across is not so much that the halacha (application) of the leaders was being replaced, but that the 'leaven of the Pharisees' would leaven the new wine, causing it to ruin the wineskin. This fits better with some of the other teachings of Yahshua concerning leaven.

*Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." (Luke 12:1 NASB, cf. Matthew 6:6,11,12)*

The disciples of John and the Pharisees had trouble accepting the teaching of Yahshua not because of education or abolition of Torah, but because it could only be accepted by obedience to Torah. Instead, they were practicing hypocrisy, which is what would cause teachings and practices to be 'old.' Rules on fasting are not present in Torah, although there are several instances which describe various personal methods. So the rules that were mentioned by John's disciples, in addition to the rules (or halacha) which caused the Pharisee's criticism of Yahshua's disciples' eating habits, are extra-biblical or outside of Torah (they are a fixed, inflexible garment, an empty, old, poor quality wineskin).

Yahshua uses the garment and patch metaphor as a description of the inflexibility of the disciple compared to teaching, to set up the wine and wineskin metaphor which further illuminates the cause of the inflexibility as hypocrisy. This does not mean His disciples were without sin, but that they were apparently without hypocrisy. They were not 'actors on a stage' as many of the other group's disciples were. Even though both types of wine contain 'leaven' there might be two kinds of leaven at work here. The leaven of the Pharisees was 'hardening,' while the leaven of the kingdom would work more positive benefits in time if not corrupted by hypocrisy. Fasting was not condemned by Yahshua, but fasting in a hypocritical fashion was. To be in a public place where eating was taking place and obviously 'not eating' would make the person fasting look that much more obvious.

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<sup>15</sup> A couple of very large 'ifs.'

*“ Whenever you fast , do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full . But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”* (Matthew 6:16-18 NASB)

Likewise, eating with ‘sinners’ was not desired by the disciples of other groups because it didn’t help their public image. If fasting was done in such a way as to paint the fasting person as holy, then eating with so-called sinners would be shunned as well because it would also ruin the public presentation of apparent holiness.

The reason the disciples of Yahshua did not fast was because they were in the presence of the bridegroom. Indeed, the Greek word translated as ‘attendant’ is *huios*, which almost many times is translated as son or sons. There seems to be an implication by Yahshua that verbally backhands the other group’s disciples, implying that His disciples are intimately related to Him, and that if the other disciples were in fact related to Him they would also be celebrating.

Luke’s account, which adds the idea that some people prefer the old wine to the new, can be taken either positively (old wine is better) or negatively (people prefer what they are used to). Given the context it seems to be a negative statement, because of the term “good enough” (Greek *chrestos*, meaning acceptable or serviceable), is not exactly a ringing endorsement. Lancaster’s interpretation can be accommodated here (that the other disciples were happy with previous teaching), or an alternate understanding that would also fit comes from The Jerome Bible commentary if we understand that ‘the past’ relates more to ‘proudly’ than to the Law.

This final saying, found only in Luke, has textual difficulties. The preferred reading is: “no one, after drinking old wine, wants new wine; for he says, ‘The old is good.’” In the present setting, Luke is insisting that anyone rigidly and proudly bound up with the past can scarcely sustain the fresh vitality of the new. Studying these sayings in the apocryphal *Gospel According to Thomas* (§ 47), we find a more general context, stating that the old and the new seldom meet peacefully. Grundmann recognizes here an allusion to the problems between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in the early Church. *The final saying of Luke, however, seems to restrain one from completely rejecting the old; the new, to be palatable, must contain the genuine spirit of the ancient Law* (cf. J. Dupont CBQ<sup>16</sup> 25 [1963] 286-304) (last italics mine).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

<sup>17</sup> Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. (1968). *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (Lk 5:39). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Yahshua was not saying to throw out the Law because it was old, or that He had a 'new way' to go. He was saying that Torah practice had been corrupted by hypocrisy, among other traditions, and that the blessings of Torah obedience needed to go into a container fit to hold them. A container that wasn't made old by the leaven of the Pharisees. This explanation accommodates the other teachings of Yahshua such as 'do what they say' in Matthew 23:1-3 and 'beware of the leaven' in Luke 12:1. It also fits in well with Mr. Lancaster's interpretation because the context is still the selection and suitability of Yahshua's disciples as he pointed out so well. Luke's ending comment on the preference for old wine explains how a person might prefer the comfort of 'play acting' to the reality of obedience. At the same time this interpretation rejects the standard Church view of an 'old' Law being replaced by a 'new' gospel, a view which is patently false given the many teachings upholding the Law in the rest of the Apostolic Scriptures.

The Torah of our God is never 'old,' but always fresh and new and full of blessings if accepted and followed as He intended. His Word does not get outdated, nor is it ever in need of an overhaul due to fading significance. However, the teachings of men frequently become outdated and old due to lack of understanding and outright refusal to do what God requires. When we get 'old' the only thing that can renew us is the breath of His Word restoring, revitalizing, and resurrecting. Praise the Father for giving us His Word from which we gain health, vigor, and life, even eternal life from the dead.

Update 2011 from Bruce Scott Bertram on his 2004 term paper In Vino Veritas

I was updating this page for the new website, and I realized some of my thinking has changed. The new understanding applies to the conclusions drawn from my research here. I think I almost had it in 2004. Maybe that's true of all of us all the time, but in this case I think further reflection on the whole of the Word has made certain understandings more clear. This seems to happen to me on a regular basis as I read and do His living oracles more and more. It just goes to show that even if you think you covered everything, and the teacher gives you an A on your term paper (which is what this was) that doesn't mean you got the point.

Jesus, I think, is simply saying you can't patch things together and have them work very well. The religious leaders of the day were trying to patch their own teachings onto the Word of God. Jesus says that the patches of the religious leaders were never going to work. God's Word is fine as it is. He didn't stutter when He spoke it, and it was clear and plain as the nose on the face or the day or whatever metaphor you want to use. The problem is never with God's Word, the problem is always, always with people.

"The old is better" helps us to understand that tasting of God's Word, uncluttered by patches from alleged spiritual leaders, is good, and preferable to whatever you patched it with. Is new wine good? Of course. God's many blessings are like new wine, overflowing



and fresh and desirable. But the point is not new wine. Is an old garment good? Yes, if you don't patch it with an unshrunk opinion from blind tailors like the rabbis. But again, the point is not the garment. The point is that the patching system of men messes things up.

Given this updated understanding, it is rather hilarious to think of the many ministries that claim to be new wine, thinking that what is needed is something new. Instead, what is needed is to leave something old, that is, God's Word, alone. If anything, we need to cleave to what is ancient, what is true, and what is life, because patching, no matter how well intended, doesn't help at all.

May the new wine of God's blessings flow in your household  
Bruce Scott Bertram