

In 1 Samuel 1:15, we find a moving moment where Hannah, who had been praying fervently before the Lord, is mistaken by Eli the priest for being drunk:

“Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied. “I am a woman deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or strong drink; I was pouring out my soul before the Lord.”

Her response not only clears up the misunderstanding, but also teaches us something deeper: that wine and strong drink were distinct in biblical times, both culturally and spiritually.

Let's explore what that difference is — and what it means for us today as followers of Christ.

1. Wine (Hebrew: *yayin*) – A Symbol of Celebration, Worship, and Blessing

In ancient Israel, wine was made by fermenting grape juice — nothing else. It held a significant cultural and religious role. It wasn't just for drinking — it was symbolic of joy, covenant, and

even the Messianic hope.

► Wine in Social Life

Wine was a normal part of everyday Jewish life, especially during weddings and feasts. At the wedding in Cana (John 2), when the wine ran out, Jesus performed His first miracle by turning water into wine. This wasn't random — it pointed to the abundance and joy of the Kingdom of God.

► Wine in Worship

Wine was used in religious festivals like Passover. Jesus, during the Last Supper, used wine to represent His blood — sealing the New Covenant (Matthew 26:27-29). He was tying His mission to the traditions of Israel, but fulfilling them in a deeper spiritual way.

► Wine as a Blessing

Scripture also connects wine to God's provision and joy:

Psalms 104:15 - "...wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart."

However, wine could also become a stumbling block when misused — leading to spiritual dullness or mockery.

Proverbs 20:1 - “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by them is not wise.”

2. Strong Drink (Hebrew: *shekar*) - Associated with Drunkenness and Lack of Discipline

Unlike wine, strong drink was fermented from grains (like barley or wheat) or other fruits like dates and pomegranates. It had a higher alcohol content, and it was not typically part of religious life.

► Use in Excess and Ungodliness

Strong drink was associated with drunkenness, loss of self-control, and often, pagan practices. It was seen as something that clouded judgment, which is why priests were forbidden to drink it during service:

Leviticus 10:9 - "You and your sons are not to drink wine or strong drink whenever you enter the tent of meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance..."

Its use was linked to revelry, not reverence. In other words, strong drink was more about indulgence than worship.

What Does This Mean for Us Today?

While the physical beverages may differ slightly today, the spiritual principles remain the same. The Bible warns against drunkenness, not because God is against enjoyment — but because drunkenness leads us away from His presence and blurs our spiritual senses.

Ephesians 5:18 - "Do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."

Paul contrasts physical intoxication with spiritual fullness. Where wine dulls, the Holy Spirit awakens. Where strong drink leads to

chaos, the Spirit leads to peace, joy, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

► Hannah's Example

Hannah reminds us that true worship requires clarity, sincerity, and focus. She wasn't drunk — she was pouring out her heart to the Lord. Her prayer was so intense, it looked like drunkenness from the outside — but it was actually Spirit-filled surrender.

A Call to Modern Believers

Today, instead of chasing worldly highs, we're called to seek the infilling of the Holy Spirit, who is our comfort, counselor, and strength.

We don't need wine or strong drink to find peace, boldness, or joy — we have Christ. He is our "new wine" (Luke 5:37-38), and He fills us in a way no drink ever could.

So What Should We Do?

- Pray deeply and often, like Hannah.

- Read and meditate on the Word.
- Worship with sincerity, not just ritual.
- Avoid anything — wine or otherwise — that dulls your spiritual edge.
- Be filled with the Spirit, daily.

Final Thought:

God's desire is not just to cleanse our habits, but to transform our hearts. Whether it's wine, strong drink, or anything else, if it pulls us away from Him, it's not worth it. But what He offers — life in the Spirit — is better than anything this world can offer.

May you be filled — not with the things of this world, but with the

fullness of Christ.

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