

In 1 Samuel 1:15, when the priest Eli thought Hannah was drunk, she replied: "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or strong drink; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord." This verse highlights two types of alcoholic beverages that were known and consumed in ancient Israel: wine and strong drink. Though both could intoxicate, they were quite different in nature, use, and cultural meaning. Let's break this down theologically and practically.

1. Wine - A Symbol of Joy, Culture, and Worship

Wine in Scripture (Hebrew: yayin) was made specifically from fermented grape juice. It was a common beverage in Jewish life and was not inherently sinful. In fact, wine had a respected place in social life and even religious rituals.

Social Use: Wine was present at weddings and feasts. When Jesus attended the wedding at Cana (John 2), He miraculously turned water into wine—not to promote drunkenness, but to honor the celebration and reveal His glory.

Religious Use: Wine was used during sacred ceremonies like Passover. Jesus Himself used wine as a symbol of His blood in the Last Supper (Matthew 26:27-29), connecting it to the New Covenant.

Symbolic Use: In passages like Psalm 104:15, wine is described as something that brings gladness to the human heart. It's a metaphor for joy, blessing, and celebration.

2. Strong Drink - A Warning Against Excess

Strong drink (Hebrew: shekar) was a much more potent alcoholic beverage, often made from grains, dates, pomegranates, or other fruits—not grapes. It had a higher alcohol content than wine and was mostly associated with excess, loss of control, and foolishness.

Because of its intoxicating power, strong drink was often viewed negatively in Scripture:

Priests were forbidden from drinking it while serving in the temple (Leviticus 10:9).

Proverbs warns us:

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

It wasn't just about the drink itself—but how it affected behavior, clarity, and holiness.

Why Hannah's Response Matters

When Hannah told Eli, "I have not drunk wine or strong drink," she wasn't just defending her innocence—she was expressing her deep reverence before God. She understood that intoxication had no place in heartfelt prayer and spiritual communion.

Her example challenges us to approach God with clear minds and sincere hearts.

So, What Does This Mean for Us Today?

In the New Testament, Paul gives a powerful contrast:

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

We're no longer called to seek joy, comfort, or boldness from wine or strong drink—but from the Holy Spirit. He is our true source of life, power, and satisfaction.

Final Thoughts

Wine and strong drink both existed in biblical times, but they carried different meanings and messages. Wine could symbolize celebration, covenant, and joy, while strong drink often warned of excess, danger, and poor judgment.

As believers, we're called to a higher standard—not just in what we consume, but in how we live. Our hearts should be filled not with

earthly intoxication, but with the fullness of God's Spirit.

May we, like Hannah, pour out our souls before God—with clarity, reverence, and full devotion.

God bless you.

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