

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 109:
THE WEDDING AT CANA
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Several subscribers to our ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER have urgently requested me to share my research on “The Wedding at Cana,” which is the major topic of this week Sabbath School Lesson for January 10-16. I accepted this assignment with reluctance, since I am working intensively to prepare myself for the TV taping of my SABBATH and ADVENT seminars that will take place this coming weekend, on January 16, 17, 18, 2004.

A major concern expressed in the messages received regards the nature of the wine produced by Jesus. Simply stated, Was the “good wine” (John 2:10) that Jesus produced at Cana fermented or unfermented? The reason for the concern is the prevailing assumption that Christ not only partook of fermented wine at the Last Supper, but also produced it in abundant quantity at the wedding of Cana.

Did Jesus Drink Alcoholic wine?

For example, in his book *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages*, Kenneth L. Gentry appeals first of all to Christ’s example to defend a moderate partaking of alcoholic beverages: “First, we must again be reminded that the Lord and his apostles partook of [fermented] wine despite the fact that sinful men indulged in it to their own hurt and degradation.”¹

On a similar vein Norman L. Geisler explicitly states in his article “A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking” that “it is false to say that Jesus made unfermented wine. As a matter of fact, He made wine that tasted so good the people at the wedding feast in Cana said it was better than the wine they had just drunk. Surely they would not have said this if it had tasted flat to them. In fact in John 2:9-10 it is called ‘wine’ (oinos) and ‘good wine’ (*kalon oinon*). These are the same words used for fermented wine elsewhere in the New Testament.”²

The popular belief is that Jesus produced and drunk alcoholic wine. Billy Graham states: “I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism . . . Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That

wasn't grape juice as some of them try to claim." (*Miami Herald* (December 26, 1976), section A, p. 18).

The popular view that "Jesus was not a teetotaler," but a moderate drinker of fermented wine who even "miraculously 'manufactured' a high-quality (alcoholic) wine at Cana"³ and instituted the Last Supper with alcoholic wine,⁴ has no doubt influenced the drinking habits of millions of Christians around the world more than anything else that the Bible says about drinking. The reason is simple. The example and teachings of Christ are normative for Christian belief and practice. If Christ made, commended and used fermented wine, then there can hardly be anything intrinsically wrong with a moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages! Simply stated, "If wine was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me!"

The question of the nature of the wine produced by Jesus at Cana is ignored altogether in the Sabbath School Lesson. Instead, the focus is on the symbolic meaning of the wine, "a symbol of His shed blood, the blood that would be poured out for the sins of the world, the only means of salvation" (p. 24). To support the symbolic meaning appeal is made to the time of the wedding "on the third day." The time reference is also interpreted symbolically as "a reference to Jesus' resurrection (*see Matt 16:21; Luke 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor 15:4*)" (p. 25).

The attempt to interpret the chronological statement of the time of the wedding ("on the third day") as a veiled theological reference to the three days of Christ's entombment, reflects a sanctified imagination, that lacks contextual support. If John attributed Christological significance to the time of wedding on the third day, it is surprising that he never quotes Christ's statement regarding the three days in the heart of the earth. The statement is found in Mark (8:31; 9:31; 10:34), Matthew (16:31; 17:23; 20:19), and Luke (9:22), 18:33), but not in John.

The attempt to give a theological interpretation to the time of the wedding on the third day, reminds me of Harold Camping's fanciful attempt to interpret the time reference to Christ's Resurrection found in Matthew 28:1 "At the end of the Sabbath," as a theological statement of the termination of Sabbathkeeping and beginning of Sundaykeeping. In a previous newsletter, I exposed the irrationality of Camping's interpretation. Responsible Adventist scholarship must avoid such fanciful interpretations.

The attempt of the Sabbath School Lesson to interpret the miracle of the wine at Cana, as a veiled allusion to the Cross, can hardly be supported by the Gospel of John. The reason is simple. In John's account of the Last Supper in chapter 13, there is no reference to the "wine." If John attributed special symbolic significance to the miraculous wine that Jesus produced at Cana, as symbol of His shed blood for our salvation, it is surprising that he omitted the Christ's use of wine at the Last Supper, especially since all the Synoptic Gospels do refer to Christ's use of the Passover bread and wine to institute the Lord's Supper.

Summing up, the miracle of the wine at Cana, was indeed a Messianic sign of Christ's power, but to read into it cryptic soteriological meanings, means going beyond the legitimate interpretation of the text.

Aim of My Research

The aim of my investigation of the wedding at Cana, was not to seek for esoteric, spiritual interpretations of details of the story, but to determine whether Christ's miracle sanctions the use of fermented wine. This investigation is of fundamental importance since most Christians appeal to Christ's miraculous transformation of water into wine at the wedding of Cana and to His use of wine at the Last Supper to justify their drinking habits.

The Christian sanctioning of moderate drinking on the basis of the example of Jesus, is contributing to the alarming drinking problems in the world today. In the American society alcohol has become its number-one public enemy, costing over \$117 billion a year, disabling over 1,000,000 persons, and claiming at least 100,000 lives, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined. The real human cost of alcohol transcends these statistical figures of dollars, disabilities and death. No one can count the real cost of alcohol to our society in terms of retarded children, violence in the home, child and spouse abuse, divorce, rape, robberies, murders, sickness and death.

In my our Seventh-day Adventist church, long known as a champion of temperance and abstinence, alcohol consumption is steadily rising. I have been made forcibly aware of this trend by such things as: frequent pleas for help from pastors and members facing drinking problems in their own congregations; published surveys in our church paper, *Adventist Review*, indicating that 58 percent of Adventist youth are experimenting with alcohol

and 17 percent of Adventist College students are habitual drinkers; lectures given on our college campuses on alcohol recovery by visiting non-SDA experts; classes on substance abuse taught on our campuses; counseling centers set up on our campuses specifically to help students with drinking problems; the establishment by our General Conference of two organizations to meet the challenge of the steadily rising drinking of alcohol within the church: (1) a Study Commission on Chemical Dependency and the Church, and (2) the Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency.

The alarming escalation of the drinking problem, especially within the Adventist church, led me to spend a year of my life to research and write my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE: A BIBLICAL STUDY ON THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES*. The book has been favorably reviewed by scholars of different persuasion. You can read a sampling of the comments at my website: www.biblicalpherspectives.com.

During the past few weeks it has been gratifying to receive calls from evangelical ministers requesting copies of *WINE IN THE BIBLE*. Few days ago a Baptist minister ordered 100 copies for his congregation. The *Indiana Council on Alcoholism*, requested copies to distribute to thought leaders in Indiana. If you or your church wishes to order copies of this timely book, feel free to contact us at (269) 471-2915. We offer the book by the case of 30 copies for only \$7.00 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$20.00.

TV TAPING OF THE SABBATH/ADVENT SEMINARS

Many people who have attended my newly revamped PowerPoint seminars on the SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, and CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE, have urged me to produce a fresh VIDEO and DVD recording of my presentations. The aim is to make these timely messages available to TV stations, churches, and institutions around the world.

It took sometime to find a suitable time and place for this recording. I was looking for a cozy sanctuary with a good screen that comes down toward the center of the platform, so that I can stand besides it while delivering each lecture with about 100 PowerPoint slides. After visiting several churches in the proximity of Andrews University, I chose the brand new Michiana Fil-Am SDA Church. The church is located only a mile away

from our Andrews University campus on 8454 Kephart Lane, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

For those coming from out of town to attend the TV taping, Kephart Lane branches off HWY 31 at the corner of the RITE-AID PHARMACY in Berrien Springs. Just drive down one mile on Kephart Lane and you will see the new MICHIANA FIL-AM SDA CHURCH on your left.

The taping will be done by a TV crew, equipped with the latest digital equipment. The trial run we did few days ago, shows an excellent image quality. The taping meets the TV broadcast requirements.

The official taping will take place on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, January 16, 17, and 18, 2004. God willing, during these three days we will tape a total of 8 lectures, 6 of them on the SABBATH and 2 on the SECOND ADVENT. The newly developed PowerPoint CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE seminar will be taped at another date in the near future. I have invested over 3000 hours developing the PowerPoint seminars and I am looking forward to offer them on VIDEO or DVD format to our churches and institutions in America and overseas.

On numerous occasions I have been asked, “When will you present your seminars at Andrews University?” Finally, the time and place has been set. If you live within a driving distance from Andrews University, you are welcome to attend any or all the lectures, which have been warmly received by audiences in many parts of the world. For the sake of those interested to attend the taping sessions, I am posting the schedule of the time, title, and a brief summary of each presentation.

FRIDAY EVENING: January 16, 7:30 to 8:30 p. m.

“My Search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University”

This opening PowerPoint presentation is the human interest story of the Sabbath in my life. With the help of 110 slides, I take the audience in a visual way through my pilgrimage of faith, sharing the providential way the Lord led me to a Vatican university in Rome in my search for a deeper understanding and experience of His Holy Sabbath Day.

The pictures include Pope Paul VI and the gold medal he donated me for earning the *summa cum laude* academic distinction. I will mention briefly

how some religious leaders in different parts of the world are presently responding to the message of the Sabbath. This gripping testimony will warm your heart.

SABBATH MORNING: January 17, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

“The Sabbath and the Savior”

This is Christ-centered meditation presented with 100 PowerPoint slides. The meditation suggests seven ways in which the Sabbath can help us experience the presence, peace and rest of Christ in our lives. The seven points of the sermon are essentially a nutshell summary of the seven chapters of my book DIVINE REST FOR HUMAN RESTLESSNESS.

SABBATH MORNING: January 17, 11:30 to 12:30 a.m.

“The Sabbath as a Time of Service”

This is a practical mediation on how to keep the Sabbath to gain the greatest blessings out of it. With the help of 100 PowerPoint slides, I explain how the Sabbath offers us time and opportunities to serve God, ourselves, and others. Our fellow believers in many parts of the world have appreciated this meditation, because it suggests practical principles and examples on how to make the Sabbath a day of joyful celebration of God’s creative and redemptive love.

SABBATH AFTERNOON: January 17, 4:00 to 6:00 p. m.

**"The Sabbath Under Crossfire:
A Look at Recent Developments"**

This informative lecture on the latest Sabbath/Sunday developments has drawn capacity crowds everywhere. In many ways the lecture summarizes the highlights of my book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE. With the help of 120 PowerPoint slides, I discuss two significant recent developments. First, I examine the unprecedented attacks against the Sabbath by Pope John Paul II, Catholic and Protestant scholars, and former sabbatarians. Second, I give an update report of the unparalleled rediscovery of the Sabbath by scholars, ministers, and various religious organizations. This is a lecture you do not want to miss.

SUNDAY MORNING: January 18 - 10:00 to 11:00 a. m.

“From Sabbath to Sunday: How it Came About?”

In this PowerPoint lecture I present the highlights of the research done in Vatican libraries in Rome on how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity. The research was published in my dissertation FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY—a book which has been translated in several languages and has circulated far and wide around the world. The focus of the lecture is on the role of the Bishop of Rome in leading Christians away from Sabbathkeeping to Sundaykeeping. This lecture provides much valuable information that you do not want to miss.

SUNDAY MORNING: January 18 - 11:30 to 12:30 a. m.

“The Certainty of the Advent Hope”

This PowerPoint lecture is largely drawn from my book THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS. The lecture (100 slides) is divided into two parts. The first identifies five major factors which are causing many Christians to neglect or reject the hope in a soon-coming Savior. The second part articulates five major reasons for believing in the certainty of Christ's imminent Return. Special attention is given to the unprecedented fulfillment of some of the endtime signs given by Christ and clarified by NT writers. This presentation will revive the certainty of the Advent Hope in your heart.

SUNDAY EVENING: January 18 - 7:00 to 8:00 p. m.

“Living the Advent Hope”

This practical meditation delivered with 100 PowerPoints slides, invites us to reflect upon what does it mean to live in the joyful expectancy of our soon-coming Savior. To make the presentation practical, I focus on five distinguishing characteristics of an Adventist lifestyle. The purpose of this study is to help us appreciate more fully how the Blessed Hope should motivate to live goodly and balanced lifestyles.

Please accept my personal invitation to attend any or all of the lectures on January 16, 17, and 18, 2004. I look forward to a blessed time together.

THE WEDDING AT CANA**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,****Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University**

Christ's miraculous transformation of water into wine at the wedding of Cana, is regarded by many Christians as primary evidence of Jesus' sanctioning the use of alcoholic beverages. They argue that if Jesus produced between 120 and 160 gallons of high-quality alcoholic wine for the wedding party and guests at Cana, it is evident that He approved of its use in moderation.

The belief that the wine Christ provided in Cana was alcoholic rests on five major assumptions. First, it is assumed that the word *oinos* "wine" indicates only "fermented-quality grape drink, i.e. wine."⁵ Second, it is assumed that since the word *oinos* "wine" is used in reference both to the wine which ran out and the wine that Christ made, both wines must have been alcoholic. Third, it is assumed that the Jews did not know how to prevent the fermentation of grape juice; and since, as argued by William Hendriksen, the season of the wedding was just before Spring Passover (cf. John 2:13), that is, six months after the grape harvest, the wine used at Cana had ample time to ferment.⁶

Fourth, it is assumed that the description given by the master of the banquet to the wine provided by Christ as "the good wine" means a high-quality alcoholic wine.⁷ Fifth, it is assumed that the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) used by the master of the banquet indicates that the guests were intoxicated because they had been drinking fermented wine. Consequently, the wine Jesus made must also have been fermented.⁸ In view of the importance these assumptions play in determining the nature of the wine provided by Christ, we shall examine each of them briefly in the order given.

The Meaning of *Oinos*. The popular assumption that both in secular and Biblical Greek the word *oinos*—*wine* meant fermented grape juice exclusively is examined at great length in Chapter 2 of my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE*. I submit numerous examples from both pagan and Christian authors who used the Greek word *oinos* referring both to fermented and unfermented grape juice. It is noteworthy that *oinos* is used at least 33 times in the Septuagint to translate *tiros*, the Hebrew word for grape juice.

A better acquaintance with the use of the word “wine,” not only in the Greek language, but also in old English, Latin and Hebrew, would have saved scholars from falling into the mistaken conclusion that *oinos* means only fermented wine. The truth of the matter is, as I have shown, that *oinos* is a generic term, including all kinds of wine, unfermented and fermented, like yayin in Hebrew and vinum in Latin. Thus the fact that the wine made by Christ at Cana is called *oinos*, offers no ground for concluding that it was fermented wine. Its nature must be determined by internal evidence and moral likelihood. The record of the evangelist, as we shall see, affords information for determining this question.

Is Oinos Always Alcoholic? The second assumption, that both the wine that ran out and the wine Jesus made were alcoholic, depends largely upon the first assumption, namely, that the word *oinos* means exclusively alcoholic wine. As stated by Kenneth L. Gentry, “The word *oinos* is used in reference to both wines in question. It has been shown that this word indicates fermented-quality grape drink, i.e. wine.”⁹

This assumption is discredited by two facts. First, as mentioned earlier, the word *oinos* is a generic term referring either to fermented or to unfermented wine. Thus the fact that the same word *oinos* is used for both wines in question does not necessitate that both wines be alcoholic. In his booklet *Christ, the Apostles and Wine*, Ernest Gordon responds in a similar vein to the same assumption, saying: “To the objection that the word *oinos*, wine, is used both for the intoxicating wine of the feast and the wine Christ made, and hence that both must have been intoxicating, one can quote Abbott, *Dictionary of Religious Knowledge*, ‘It is tolerably clear that the word wine does not necessarily imply fermented liquor. It signifies only a production of the vine.’ The eminent Hellenist, Sir Richard Jebb, former Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge, declared *oinos* “a general term which might include all kinds of beverages.”¹⁰

Second, the wine provided by Christ is differentiated from the other by being characterized as *ton kalon*, “the good” wine. This suggests that the two wines were not identical. The nature of the difference between the two wines will be discussed below.

Preservation of Grape Juice. The third assumption, that it would have been impossible to supply unfermented grape juice for a Spring time

wedding about six months after vintage, rests on the assumption that the technology for preserving grape juice unfermented was unknown at the time.

The latter assumption is clearly discredited by numerous testimonies from the Roman world of New Testament times describing various methods for preserving grape juice. I have shown in Chapter 4 of *WINE IN THE BIBLE* that the preservation of grape juice was in some ways a simpler process than the preservation of fermented wine. Thus, the possibility existed at the wedding of Cana to supply unfermented grape juice near the Passover season, since such a beverage could be kept unfermented throughout the year.

“High-Quality Alcoholic Wine.” The fourth assumption is that the wine Jesus provided was pronounced “the good wine” (John 2:10) by the master of the banquet, because it was high in alcoholic content. Such an assumption is based on twentieth-century tastes.

Albert Barnes, a well-known New Testament scholar and commentator, warns in his comment on John 2:10 not to “be deceived by the phrase ‘good wine.’” The reason, he explains, is that “We use the phrase to denote that it is good in proportion to its strength, and its power to intoxicate. But no such sense is to be attached to the word here.”¹¹

In the Roman world of New Testament times, the best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration. Pliny, for example, says that “wines are most beneficial (*utilissimum*) when all their potency has been removed by the strainer.”¹² Similarly, Plutarch points out that wine is “much more pleasant to drink” when it “neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind or passions”¹³ because its strength has been removed through frequent filtering.

Referring to some of the same ancient authors, Barnes says: “Pliny, Plutarch and Horace describe wine as good, or mention that as the best wine which was harmless or innocent—*poculis vini innocentis*. The most useful wine—*utilissimum vinum*—was that which had little strength; and the most wholesome wine—*saluberrimum vinum*—was that which had not been adulterated by ‘the addition of anything to the must or juice.’ Pliny expressly says that a ‘good wine’ was one that was destitute of spirit. Lib iv. c.13. It should not be assumed, therefore, that the ‘good wine’ was stronger than the other. It is rather to be presumed that it was milder. That would be the best

wine certainly. The wine referred to here was doubtless such as was commonly drunk in Palestine. That was the pure juice of the grape. It was not brandied wine; nor drugged wine; nor wine compounded of various substances such as we drink in this land. The common wine drunk in Palestine was that which was the simple juice of the grape.”¹⁴

The wine Christ made was of high quality, not because of its alcohol content, but because, as Henry Morris explains, it was “new wine, freshly created! It was not old, decayed wine, as it would have to be if it were intoxicating. There was no time for the fermentation process to break down the structure of its energy-giving sugars into disintegrative alcohols. It thus was a fitting representation of His glory and was appropriate to serve as the very first of His great miracles (John 2:11).”¹⁵

Rabbinical Witness. The rabbinical witness on the nature of wine is not unanimous. Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz points out in his introduction to his collection of rabbinical statements on wine and strong drink that “it is true that some Talmudic doctors have sanctioned, aye, even recommended the moderate use of wine. But it is equally true that many Talmudic Rabbins have in vigorous words condemned the drinking of wine and strong drinks. Some Rabbins have even ascribed the downfall of Israel to wine.”¹⁶ An example of disapproval is the statement, often repeated with minor variations by different rabbis, which says: “When wine enters into the system of a person, out goes sense, wherever there is wine there is no understanding.”¹⁷

This awareness of the harmful effect of alcoholic wine explains why some rabbis recommended the use of boiled wine. Speaking of the latter, the Mishna says: “Rabbi Yehuda permits it [boiled wine as heave-offering], because it improves it [its quality].”¹⁸ “Such a wine,” notes Kitto’s *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, “was esteemed [among the Jews] the richest and best wine.”¹⁹ Elsewhere the Talmud indicates that drinking was forbidden to the accompaniment of musical instruments in festive occasions such as wedding (Sotah 48a; also Mishna Sotah 9,11). The latter is confirmed by later testimonies of rabbis quoted later in this chapter in the discussion of the Passover wine. In the light of these testimonies and considerations we would conclude that the wine provided by Christ was described as “the good wine” because it was not intoxicating.

Moral Implications. Another reason leading us to reject the assumption that “the good wine” produced by Christ was high in alcoholic content is

the negative reflection such an assumption casts upon the wisdom of the Son of God. If, in addition to the considerable quantity of alleged alcoholic wine already consumed, Christ miraculously produced between 120 and 160 gallons of intoxicating wine for the use of men, women and children gathered together at the wedding feast, then He must be held morally responsible for prolonging and increasing their intoxication. His miracle would only serve to sanction the excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages. If this conclusion is true, it destroys the sinlessness of Christ's nature and teachings.

Joseph P. Free rightly observes that the large amount of wine miraculously produced by Christ toward the end of a wedding feast proves either: "1. Excessive [alcoholic] drinking was allowable, or 2. The oinos in this case was grape juice. In the light of the whole Old Testament condemnation of wine, it certainly would appear that the beverage was grape juice."²⁰

It is against the principle of Scriptural and moral analogy to suppose that Christ, the Creator of good things (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25; Col 1:16), would exert His supernatural energy to bring into existence an intoxicating wine which Scripture condemns as "a mocker" and "a brawler" (Prov 20:1) and which the Holy Spirit has chosen as the symbol of divine wrath.

Scriptural and moral consistency require that "the good wine" produced by Christ was fresh, unfermented grape juice. The very adjective used to describe the wine supports this conclusion. "It must be observed," notes Leon C. Field, "that the adjective used to describe the wine made by Christ is not *agathos*, good, simply, but *kalos*, that which is morally excellent or befitting. The term is suggestive of Theophrastus' characterization of unintoxicating wine as moral (*ethikos*) wine."²¹

Referring to the nature of the wine produced by Christ, Ellen White says: "The wine which Christ provided for the feast, and that which He gave to the disciples as a symbol of His own blood, was the pure juice of the grape. To this the prophet Isaiah refers when he speaks of the new wine 'in the cluster,' and says, 'Destroy it not: for a blessing is in it' . . . The unfermented wine which He provided for the wedding guests was a wholesome and refreshing drink. Its effect was to bring the taste into harmony with a healthful appetite."²²

"Well Drunk." The final assumption to be examined relates to the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) used by the banquet master. The full

statement reads: “Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10, KJV). The assumption is that since the Greek word *methusthosin* “well drunk” indicates drunkenness and since drunkenness is caused, according to the statement of the banquet master, by the “good wine” customarily served first, then “the good wine” provided by Christ must also have been intoxicating, because it is compared with the good wine usually served at the beginning of a feast.

Some view this meaning of the Greek verb *methusko* “to intoxicate” as an incontestable proof of the alcoholic nature of the wine produced by Christ. For example, in a scholarly review of John Ellis’ book, *The Wine Question in the Light of the New Dispensation*, the reviewers say: “There is another incontestable proof [of the alcoholic nature of the wine produced by Christ] contained in the passage itself; the word *methusko* in Greek signifies ‘to make drunk, to intoxicate’; in the passive ‘to be drunk’; now this term is never used for designating the effects from any other than intoxicating drinks.”²³

This reasoning misinterprets and misapplies the comment of the master of the banquet, and overlooks the broader usage of the verb. The comment in question was not made in reference to that particular party, but to the general practice among those who hold feasts: “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine . . .” (John 2:10, RSV). This remark, as many commentators recognize, forms parts of the stock in trade of a hired banquet master, rather than an actual description of the state of intoxication at a particular party.²⁴

Another important consideration is the fact that the Greek verb *methusko* can mean “to drink freely” without any implication of intoxication. In his article on this verb in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Herbert Preisker observes that “*methuo* and *methuskomai* are mostly used literally in the NT for ‘to be drunk’ and ‘to get drunk.’ *Methuskomai* is used with no ethical or religious judgment in John 2:10 in connection with the rule that the poorer wine is served only when the guests have drunk well.”²⁵

The Parkhurst Greek lexicon cites the Septuagint usage of the *methuo* word group in Old Testament passages as illustrative of the meaning “to drink freely”: “*Methuo* . . . denotes in general to drink wine or strong drink more

freely than usual, and that whether to drunkenness or not. Pass[ively] to drink freely and to cheerfulness, though not to drunkenness . . . John 2:10. And in this sense the verb is plainly used by the LXX (i.e. Septuagint), Gen 43:34; Cant 5:1; and also, I think, in Gen 9:21.”²⁶ The latter meaning is respected by the Revised Standard Version which renders it more accurately “when men have drunk freely.”

The verb *methusko* in John 2:10 is used in the sense of satiation. It refers simply to the large quantity of wine generally consumed at a feast, without any reference to intoxicating effects. Those who wish to insist that the wine used at the feast was alcoholic and that Jesus also provided alcoholic wine, though of a better quality, are driven to the conclusion that Jesus provided a large additional quantity of intoxicating wine so that the wedding party could continue its reckless indulgence. Such a conclusion destroys the moral integrity of Christ’s character.

The Object of the Miracle. The stated object of the miracle was for Christ to manifest His glory so that His disciples might believe in Him. This objective was accomplished: “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11). Christ’s presence at a marriage feast was intended to show divine approval of the marriage institution and of the innocent enjoyments of social life. Yet all of these considerations were subservient to the manifestation of Christ’s glory in fulfillment of His Messianic mission. The glory of God is revealed especially in His act of creation (Ps 19:1-2). Likewise, Christ’s “eternal power and deity” (Rom 1:20) were manifested at the beginning of His miracles through an act of creation: “He . . . made the water wine” (John 4:46).

The wine of the miracle must have been identical to the wine found in the grape-clusters, because this is the only wine that God produces. “There is not a hint,” writes R. A. Torrey, “that the wine He [Christ] made was intoxicating. It was fresh-made wine. New-made wine is never intoxicating. It is not intoxicating until some time after the process of fermentation has set in. Fermentation is a process of decay. There is not a hint that our Lord produced alcohol, which is a product of decay and death. He produced a living wine uncontaminated by fermentation.”²⁷

“I am satisfied,” states William Pettingill, “that there was little resemblance in it [wine made by Christ] to the thing described in the Scripture

of God as biting like a serpent and stinging like an adder (Prov 23:29-32). Doubtless rather it was like the heavenly fruit of the vine that He will drink new with His own in His Father's kingdom (Matt 26:29). No wonder the governor of the wedding feast at Cana pronounced it the best wine kept until the last. Never before had he tasted such wine, and never did he taste it again."²⁸

Christ's miracles were always directed to benevolent ends. He "came not to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:56). If it were true that Christ miraculously manufactured an intoxicating wine, then that miracle would be a notable exception among His miracles. It would be a malevolent manifestation of His power. He would have manifested shame rather than glory.

Christ was aware of the powerful influence His example would have on contemporary and future generations. If, with all this knowledge He created an intoxicating wine, He would have revealed diabolic rather than divine power and glory. His disciples could hardly have believed in Him, if they had seen Him do a miracle to encourage drunkenness.

Leon C. Field aptly observes that Christ "was not Mohammed, holding out to men the allurements of sensual paradise, but a 'man of sorrow,' whose stern requirement of all who came after him was, that they should deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him (Matt 16:24). And it was by the personal embodiment and the practical encouragement of self-denial and abstinence, and not by the example or sanction of luxury and self-indulgence, that he won his followers and achieved his victories."²⁹

ENDNOTES

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 108
2. Norman L. Geisler, "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1982): 49.
3. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 50.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 54; see also Howard H. Charles, *Alcohol and the Bible*

(Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1981), p. 19.

5. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 50.

6. William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 115.

7. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 52.

8. For example, Howard H. Charles says: “Even though we may wish it otherwise, honest exegesis compels the candid admission that on this occasion Jesus deliberately added to the stock of wine available for consumption at the wedding feast” (n. 4), p. 19.

9. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 50.

10. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine, An Exegetical Study* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 13.

11. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Luke-John* (London, 1875), vol. 2, p. 197.

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