

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Art in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE USE OF שָׁכָר AND יַיִן: AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS 31:6-7

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This study aimed to explore the biblical stance regarding the endorsement of שָׁכָר (*shekar*) and יַיִן (*yayin*) in Proverbs 31:6-7. Historical evidence suggests that both שָׁכָר and יַיִן were commonly utilized as medicinal remedies in ancient times. In the analysis of the directive in Proverbs 31:6-7, several key conclusions emerge. Firstly, the reference to שָׁכָר and יַיִן in the passage denotes fermented beverages. Secondly, although Proverbs 31:6-7 doesn't explicitly state that strong drink and wine are intended for medicinal use. However, certain aspects of the passage suggest a potential therapeutic purpose. The phrase "give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish" implies offering strong drink and wine as solace for someone in extreme distress or nearing death, potentially to alleviate physical or emotional pain. This aligns with the idea of using strong drink and wine for therapeutic purposes. Likewise, providing "wine unto those that be of heavy hearts" hints at offering wine to

those experiencing profound sadness or distress, possibly as a temporary means of escape or comfort from psychological suffering. Though not explicitly medical, this implies a therapeutic function. Despite the lack of specific medical terms in the passage, the context of offering strong drink and wine to those in distress suggests a possible therapeutic benefit. Nevertheless, it's essential to interpret these verses within the broader context of the Bible and to exercise caution when drawing medical conclusions from ancient texts. Thirdly, historical documentation supports the medicinal utilization of **שָׂרֵי** and **יַיִן**, lending weight to the interpretation of the command as endorsing their medicinal properties. Lastly, while contemporary fermented **שָׂרֵי** and **יַיִן** are not commonly employed for medicinal purposes as in antiquity, there are modern alcohol-containing medications prescribed for specific patients under particular circumstances.

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A thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

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by

Patrick John Muhoko

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First and foremost, I dedicate this work to Almighty God, whose grace, wisdom, and guidance have been my unwavering source of strength throughout this journey. To Him be all glory and honor.

To the cherished memory of my late parents, whose steadfast values, sacrifices, and love laid the foundation for my academic and personal growth. Their enduring legacy continues to inspire me.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Cant.	Canticles
IB	Interpreter's Bible
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
R.V	Revised Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SDABC	Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary
TLOT	Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background of the Problem**

Proverbs 31:6-7 appears to advocate for the use of "strong drink" (שֵׁכָר) and "wine" (יַיִן) as therapeutic remedies for alleviating the distress of individuals facing dire circumstances. Wine, especially, was highly esteemed in ancient medical traditions, often recommended for its perceived effectiveness in treating a wide range of ailments.<sup>1</sup> However, the apparent endorsement of שֵׁכָר and יַיִן in Proverbs 31:6–7 introduces interpretive complexities, particularly when contrasted with passages such as Proverbs 31:4-5; 20:1; 23:29-35, and other related texts within both immediate and broader contexts of the biblical narrative. These passages convey disapproval of the consumption of שֵׁכָר and יַיִן.

The interpretation of Proverbs 31:6-7 has sparked a deep and complex scholarly debate due to its apparent inconsistency with nearby verses that has led to different viewpoints, notably the conditional permissive and abstinence perspectives,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ana María Rosso, "Beer and Wine in Antiquity: Beneficial Remedy or Punishment Imposed by the Gods?" *Acta med-hist Adriat* 10, no. 2 (2012): 237.

<sup>2</sup> Nelson E. Ediom-Ubong, "To Drink or Not to Drink?: Moral Ambiguity of Alcohol in the Pentecostalist Imagination," *African Journal of Drug & Alcohol Studies* 13, no. 2 (2014): 124–27. Nelson's findings highlight diverging viewpoints regarding the consumption of strong drinks and wine. While certain individuals adhere to the belief that alcohol consumption contradicts biblical principles for Christians, others argue that the Bible does not expressly prohibit the consumption of strong drinks and wine, but rather condemns excessive indulgence in them. It is acknowledged that wine and strong drinks possess medicinal properties and can be beneficial for individuals under specific circumstances. These beverages contain therapeutic elements that can be utilized for medicinal purposes, catering to certain conditions. Thus, the debate extends beyond mere theological considerations, encompassing practical applications in healthcare.

which are explored in chapter two. The presence of divergent interpretations underscores the necessity for further research to clarify the aspect of the passage. Proverbs 31:6-7 underscores a gap in our understanding of how strong drink and wine are utilized to cope with individuals in dire situations—those who are perishing and distressed. It prompts questions about the effectiveness of employing strong drink and wine in such challenging circumstances. Central to the discussion is the interpretation of שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן, emphasizing the importance of careful analysis to resolve apparent discrepancies within biblical texts. Achieving clarity requires a comprehensive examination that considers linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts to understand their intended meaning.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The instruction to use "strong drink" (שֶׁכָּר) and "wine" (יַיִן) in Proverbs 31:6-7 has sparked several questions in biblical scholarship. Why does the Bible both condemn and endorse the use of שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן in different contexts, such as in Proverbs 31:4-5 and Proverbs 31:6-7, and what implications does this duality have for the strictness of biblical prohibitions concerning these beverages? Do the interpretations of biblical passages such as Proverbs 31:4-5 and Proverbs 31:6-7 contribute to our comprehension of the level to which the Scriptures advocate strict prohibitions concerning the consumption of שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן? Does the varying endorsement and disapproval of שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן in the Bible imply that their consumption is determined by specific contextual factors, rather than being universally prohibited or permitted?

Can the seeming contradiction between Proverbs 31:4-5 and Proverbs 31:6-7 be reconciled by understanding the former as a prohibition of alcoholic beverages and the latter as an endorsement of non-alcoholic ones? Does the approval of שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן in Proverbs 31:6-7 imply a biblical endorsement for the contemporary medicinal use

of wine? If שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן in Proverbs 31:6-7 are indeed alcoholic beverages, does this suggest biblical endorsement for the use of alcohol-containing medicine in modern times?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this research was to conduct an investigation into the endorsement of "שֶׁכָּר" (*shekar*) and "יַיִן" (*yayin*) in Proverbs 31:6–7. This involves clarifying the specific types of "שֶׁכָּר" and "יַיִן" referred to in this passage, and exploring their relevance in contemporary contexts from a biblical perspective.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The research is focused on exploring various interpretations of Proverbs 31:4-7, understanding its literary context, investigating its cultural and historical background, examining the original Hebrew text for nuanced meanings, comparing it with similar passages in other biblical or ancient Near Eastern texts, exploring its theological implications, and reflecting on its practical application. Notably, the study does not delve into the authorship of the book of Proverbs,<sup>3</sup> as this aspect has already been extensively covered in previous academic literature.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the authorship of the book of Proverbs, see: Daniel J. Estes, *Hand Book on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 213. Tremper Longman III, "Proverbs," *Bakers Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 23–26. Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2008), 26. Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Bakers Books, 2004), 294. Andrew E Steinmann, "Proverbs 1-9 as a Solomonic Composition," *JETS* 43, no. 4 (2000): 659-74. Proverbs and Psalms are distinctive in the Bible for acknowledging multiple authors in their composition. In an insightful article by Steinmann, a clear differentiation emerges between the writings attributed to Solomon, those he borrowed from other sources, and the varied contributions of additional authors based on meticulous scrutiny of linguistic style and usage.

## Methodology and Procedures of the Study

To achieve the research objective, the study analyzed Proverbs 31:6-7 using Roy E. Gane's "Progressive Moral Wisdom" approach. This approach offers a structured framework for applying Old Testament laws to the contemporary Christian life. The model comprises five key steps: (1) analyzing the command by itself; (2) analyzing the command within the context of its ancient life situation; (3) analyzing the command within the system of Old Testament laws; (4) analyzing the command within the process of redemption; and (5) relating findings regarding the function of the law to modern life.<sup>4</sup> I've opted for this model because, despite its poetic nature, Proverbs 31:6-7 bears resemblance to legal directives.

The research is structured into six chapters. Chapter one serves as the introduction, providing an exploration of the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, as well as the delimitations and methodologies employed. Moving forward, chapter two offers a literature review, examining various perspectives put forth by different authors on the subject matter. In chapter three, the focus shifts to the analysis of the uses of strong drinks and wine within the context of the ancient Near East. Chapter four delves into an exegetical analysis of the command in Proverbs 31:6-7, both within the broader framework of Old Testament commands and independently. Chapter five discusses the theological analysis and its application. Finally, chapter six encapsulates the study with a summary and conclusions.

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<sup>4</sup> Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 219–35.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE: AUTHORS VIEWS ON THE USES OF שָׁכַר AND יַיִן IN LIGHT OF PROVERBS 31:6-7

Chapter Two explores a wide range of relevant literature to carefully examine the complex nuances of Proverbs 31:6–7. This analysis delves into numerous scholarly works, uncovering diverse interpretations that offer varying perspectives on the text. Within the scholarly discourse, two prominent viewpoints have emerged: the conditional permissive view and the abstinence view. These perspectives provide contrasting frameworks for interpreting the passage and shed light on differing interpretations of the admonition against consuming שָׁכַר and יַיִן within the context of Proverbs 31:6–7.

#### **The Conditional Permissive View**

The permissive conditional view allows for the use of שָׁכַר and יַיִן in specific contexts. Advocates of this perspective argue that while certain verses in the Bible prohibit their consumption, other passages permit it under particular circumstances. Proverbs 31:6–7 is among the verses often cited to support the occasional use of שָׁכַר and יַיִן. According to the permissive conditional view, these verses advocate for the proper use of שָׁכַר and יַיִן as relief and comfort for the afflicted, as medicine for those in dire conditions, and as acknowledgment of the cultural norms of the ancient world where total abstinence was not always practiced.

## Proper Use of שָׂכָר and יַיִן

Several scholars, including Fritsch and Schloerb, Robert Jamieson, Allen P. Ross, Sean Kealy, and Murray Lichtenstein, contend that Proverbs 31:6–7 offers guidance on the appropriate use of שָׂכָר and יַיִן. Fritsch and Schloerb suggest that while excessive drinking is discouraged by the wise, there are circumstances where a strong drink has its rightful application.<sup>1</sup> Jamieson adds that strong drinks and wine can be beneficial in reviving weak bodies and depressed minds.<sup>2</sup> Ross supports this perspective, emphasizing that the verses indicate alcohol's potential to alleviate physical suffering and emotional distress, providing temporary relief.<sup>3</sup> Kealy similarly interprets Proverbs 31:6-7 as counsel from the queen mother to the king-son, promoting responsible consumption of wine and other alcoholic beverages.<sup>4</sup>

Lichtenstein observes the dichotomy within this literary unit, noting a negative portrayal of the risky use of intoxicants alongside a constructive view of their proper use. He underscores the structural and verbal symmetry between these contrasting aspects, emphasizing the distinction between misuse and appropriate use.<sup>5</sup> While

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<sup>1</sup> Charles T. Fritsch and Rolland Schloerb, “The Book of Proverbs,” *The Interpreter’s Bible (IB)*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), 954.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Jamieson, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1861-1865), 402.

<sup>3</sup> Allen P. Ross, “Proverbs,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1991), 1128.

<sup>4</sup> According to Sean Kealy, verses 6–7 are the queen’s mother’s instructions to her son regarding the proper use of wine and other alcoholic beverages. Proverbs 31:1’s superscription serves as the starting point for this counsel, which is followed by guidelines on what constitutes effective leadership. The issue of retaining control over women in court comes first (vv. 2–3). The queen’s mother cautions her king-son in verses 3–5 that abusing sex and wine can cause him to forget the underprivileged. The suggestion that drinking can help the impoverished forget their poverty appears in verses 7–8. Sean P. Kealy, *The Wisdom Books of the Bible: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon: A Survey of the History of Their Interpretation* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 67.

<sup>5</sup> Murray H. Lichtenstein, “Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31,” *Catholic Biblical Association*, 1982, 204.

Proverbs 31:6–7 may suggest the appropriate use of שָׁכַר and יָן, further clarification is needed regarding the arguments presented. Questions arise regarding the specific circumstances warranting consumption, as well as the quantity required to achieve the desired effect of temporary relief. Additionally, it is important to consider whether שָׁכַר and יָן genuinely enable individuals to momentarily escape their troubles.

### **Relief and a Pain Killer for the Unfortunate and the Poor**

Scholars who subscribe to this interpretation employ שָׁכַר and יָן in nuanced and contextual manners. They argue that drinking offers only temporary relief from distress. Wine and strong drinks can function as palliatives for those enduring profound suffering and poverty.<sup>6</sup> On a similar approach, some scholars suggest that Proverbs 31:6 is advice for giving a potent libation to a dying person but not to a monarch, as alcohol consumption may compromise royal moral judgment. But drinking helps the poor forget their woes.<sup>7</sup> Dentan adds that while alcohol may lead people to neglect their responsibilities, it primarily benefits the wretched.<sup>8</sup>

Roland Murphy notes that this unusual directive has generated a range of interpretations. Some regard it skeptically, viewing it as cynical or an afterthought, while others perceive it as a means of providing solace to those in distress. The directive implies supplying a substantial quantity of what is usually reserved for monarchs to the suffering populace, even though it may only offer temporary relief

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version Expanded Edition Containing the Third and Fourth Books of the Maccabees and Psalm 151: An Ecumenical Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 803.

<sup>7</sup> Watson E. Mills and Richard F. Wilson, eds., *Mercer Commentary on the Old Testament* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 548.

<sup>8</sup> Robert C. Dentan, “The Proverbs,” *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 319.

comparable to ancient and modern painkillers. However, it is vital to emphasize that this directive does not relieve the king of the responsibility to take proactive measures to assist the less fortunate.<sup>9</sup>

While many scholars uphold the belief that *שֶׁכָּר* and *יַיִן* served as sources of solace for the sorrowful and impoverished, Michael Fox presents an alternative perspective. He suggests that beer, or strong drink, was traditionally offered to mourners, whereas wine was reserved for those burdened with embittered souls. Rather than endorsing the provision of wine to the impoverished, a dubious inference made by some translators, the verse depicts a customary practice associated with grief when expressed in the passive voice rather than the imperative.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the approval for the consumption of strong drinks in this passage for individuals facing dire circumstances (31:6, 7) should not be used as a justification for surrendering to despair and hopelessness.<sup>11</sup> There are several variations in how scholars classify the individuals considered appropriate recipients of *שֶׁכָּר* and *יַיִן* to alleviate their distress within this interpretation. Are they specifically impoverished, dying, or mourning? Or do these categories overlap? Consequently, further clarification is necessary to precisely determine who should receive *שֶׁכָּר* and *יַיִן*.

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<sup>9</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary 22, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn Barker (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 241.

<sup>10</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs: An Eclectic Edition with Introduction and Textual Commentary* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 391, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aua/detail.action?docID=3118349>.

<sup>11</sup> *The Learning Bible, New International Version* (American Bible Society, 2003), 1246.

## Medicine for the Dying and the Distressed

In this context, שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן are seen as medicinal remedies, especially for those facing death or grappling with depression. Scholars suggest that historically, these substances were administered to ease the anguish of individuals condemned to crucifixion, serving as a palliative for the terminally ill. Here are some of the arguments supporting this perspective: Michael Fox suggests that rulers ought to refrain from consuming strong drinks and wine to ensure they do not forget their responsibilities and obligations. However, he proposes a different approach for the impoverished, advocating for offering them wine to temporarily ease their suffering and hardships. This suggestion stems from the belief that strong drinks and wine can serve as a means of alleviating the distress of those who are suffering and nearing the end of their lives.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout history, the custom of reserving strong drinks and wine for individuals enduring intense distress, facing death's doorstep, or grappling with profound despair is well-documented.<sup>13</sup> This tradition is reflected in the preparation of a potion administered to condemned criminals, illustrating the wisdom embedded in proverbial sayings.<sup>14</sup> Numerous scholars advocate for the historical medicinal use of strong drinks and wine, shedding light on why those crucified alongside Jesus were offered a mixture of vinegar and gall.<sup>15</sup> Wine was used as an antidepressant for the

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<sup>12</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 887, accessed 12 June 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aua/detail.action?docID=3420503>.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Wintle et al., ed., *South Asia Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Rajasthan, India: Open Door Publication, 2015), 807.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Old Testament Commentaries: Psalm LXXVIII to Isaiah XIV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1970), 902.

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 31:6-7 serve as the cornerstone of the religious tradition of the Jerusalem ladies, who brought medicinal wine to lessen the suffering of those who were to be put to death. J. R. Dummelow, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 390.

despairing and a stimulant for the terminally ill. In extreme circumstances, wine could temporarily alleviate distress and offer a brief respite from suffering.<sup>16</sup> There is a need for careful consideration when offering wine. It should be administered to individuals who have accepted their approaching end. This is a wise utilization of God's blessing, recognizing its capacity to offer comfort to those facing dire circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

In Proverbs 31:4, the mention of "strong drink" and "wine" in reverse order might imply that they were considered remedies for dulling physical pain or soothing intense emotional distress, possibly extending to those facing death. However, verses 6 and 7 suggest that the king was advised against using alcohol as a means of escapism, despite its common usage for such purposes by others.<sup>18</sup> Lemuel's mother shifts from warning her son about what to avoid to advising him on what he should do instead. Initially, her advice emphasizes his responsibility to provide both "strong drink" and "wine" to those on the verge of perishing (31:6a), likely referring to individuals undergoing hardship, possibly the sick and dying. While these substances may not be suitable for rulers, they could be precisely what certain individuals require in times of distress. This perspective is also supported by Roland Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> MacDonald William, *Believer's Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 870.

<sup>17</sup> Edward E. Hindson and Woodrow Michael Kroll, ed., *The K.J.V. Parallel Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 1255.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *Wisdom*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> John W. Miller, *Proverbs: Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Herald Press, 2004), 295. Roland Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler also said that kings and other powerful people are advised not to violate the law lest they do so and thereby deny the rights of the oppressed (cf. Hos. 4:11). The queen's mother's remarks continue with additional recommendations for drinking wine (vv. 6–7). It ought to be made available to individuals who are suffering and perishing so they might forget about their plight. Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 2012), 152–53.

The shift in this perspective becomes evident when we notice Lemuel's mother transitioning from directly addressing Lemuel to providing a broader directive, signaled by her use of the plural form of the verb "give." This change suggests a compassionate concern for individuals enduring suffering, recognizing their need for comfort during difficult times. It underscores her deep understanding of human suffering and the importance of solace in alleviating distress. Her advocacy for the provision of strong drinks and wine to those facing hardship reflects her belief in the potential of these comforts to ease the burdens of affliction and poverty.<sup>20</sup> Throughout history, wine has been utilized to alleviate feelings of sadness and depression. The verse, "Let those in sorrow have wine, and those in agony strong drink," highlights strong drink and wine efficacy as a means of addressing depression, albeit with a caution against excessive indulgence, which can diminish its benefits in specific circumstances. The instruction to provide wine to the depressed suggests an awareness of its potential as a remedy for sadness.<sup>21</sup>

### **Recognition that there was no Total Abstinence in the Ancient World**

This interpretation emphasizes the significant role of ancient cultures and their use of substances like שֵׁכָר and יַיִן. Paul Koptak suggests that verse 6 advises rulers to offer strong drinks and wine to those in immediate danger, including the impoverished. While some may be surprised by this suggestion, especially those firmly against alcohol consumption, complete abstinence from alcohol was

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<sup>20</sup> John E. Hartley, *Proverbs: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas: Nazarene Publishing House, 2015), 325.

<sup>21</sup> Wright J. Robert, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 185.

uncommon in ancient times.<sup>22</sup> While the Bible condemns excessive wine consumption through its teachings and stories, it doesn't universally endorse complete abstinence, despite instances of its practice, whether temporarily as seen in the Nazarite vow, or as a lifelong commitment exemplified by the Rechabites.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Abstinence View**

This viewpoint strongly denounces or objects to the use of שֵׁכָר and יַיִן in any form. It offers the following interpretation of Proverbs 31:6-7: (a) as a royal decree instructing the king to abstain from intoxicants; (b) as a rhetorical statement; and (c) as a sarcastic command.

#### **A Royal Instruction to the King against Intoxicants.**

Leo Perdue argued that Proverbs 31:1–9 serves as a valuable piece of advice given to a young Lemuel, as he prepares to assume the throne. Lemuel is entrusted with the important task of administering fair judgments and ensuring justice for the less fortunate in society. However, he is also warned to be cautious of the temptations posed by immoral women and excessive alcohol consumption.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, verses 31:4–7 highlight the dangers of consuming too much wine, which can impair judgment and hinder a ruler's ability to govern effectively. Therefore, it is emphasized that a king must practice moderation in his drinking habits to maintain clarity of mind and fulfill his responsibilities with wisdom.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul E. Koptak, "Proverbs," *The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 673–74.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Guide to Ideas & Issues of the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 550–51.

<sup>24</sup> Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature. A Theological History* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 45.

<sup>25</sup> *NLT Study Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 1067.

Lemuel shared profound guidance with monarchs, urging them to abstain from alcohol and refrain from engaging in immoral relationships.<sup>26</sup> Archer posits that this verse serves not only as a cautionary story against the perils of intoxication but also as a plea for rulers to maintain honesty and integrity in their governance.<sup>27</sup> Lemuel's mother instructs him to avoid the temptation of strong drink and the seduction of women. Instead, she encourages him to focus on the virtuous endeavor of aiding the disadvantaged.<sup>28</sup> In this reading, there's more emphasis placed on the initial instruction given to the monarch in verses 1–5 compared to the instruction found in verses 6–7.

### **A Rhetoric Command**

Some scholars suggest that Proverbs 31:3–7 delivers a strong rhetorical directive, urging the rejection of carefree living and highlighting the noble duty of a king to protect his subjects. Verses 6 and 7 underscore the importance of leaders maintaining vigilance and diligence, rather than succumbing to self-indulgence or negligence, as they bear the weighty responsibility of safeguarding their people.<sup>29</sup> Although strong drinks and wine may offer temporary relief to the impoverished, it's crucial to understand that these substances do not address the root cause of their suffering. Instead, they only serve to dull the senses of those who are already marginalized. This satirical plea underscores the ineffectiveness of turning to

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<sup>26</sup> Harold L. Willimington, *Willimington's Bible Hand Book* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 342.

<sup>27</sup> Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 438.

<sup>28</sup> J. Daniel Hays and J. Scott Duvall, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 289.

<sup>29</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs. An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1976), 182.

narcotics and calls upon the monarch to prioritize their fundamental duty: ensuring justice for the underprivileged.<sup>30</sup> This oracle staunchly opposes the pull of lust, as verse 3 proclaims. It firmly condemns intoxication, detailed in verses 4 through 7. Additionally, it calls for just governance and fair distribution of justice, with a special emphasis on providing care and assistance to the disadvantaged, as emphasized in verses 5, 8, 9.<sup>31</sup>

### **A Sarcastic Command**

According to Tremper Longman, verses 6–7 sarcastically advise against imitating the behavior of a destitute person who turns to wine to escape the reality of poverty.<sup>32</sup> In verse 6, the directive "let him drink" is further explained. Here, a clear command is given, along with a justification, forming the essence of the subsequent pair of proverbs that caution against the use of intoxicants in verse seven. It suggests that those facing scarcity and hardship might be tempted to seek solace in alcohol, while the wealthy, as noted in verse four have no such inclination. However, the instruction to offer intoxicants to the starving, as a means to permanently dull their senses, is not a sincere call for a public welfare program distributing free beer. Rather, it is a sarcastic remark aimed at exposing the uselessness of intoxicants. Their purpose seems solely to incapacitate the disadvantaged and keep addicts trapped in a cycle of inebriation. To highlight their negative effects, the speaker refrains from advocating alcohol as a solution. Instead, she reminds us of its inability to convey love, its role as

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<sup>30</sup> Christopher B. Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs* (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2010), 177.

<sup>31</sup> D.A. Carson et al., ed., *New Bible Commentary* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010), 607.

<sup>32</sup> Longman III, "Proverbs," 539.

a depressant, and its failure to facilitate meaningful connections or joy in the face of mortality.<sup>33</sup>

Duane Garrett clarifies that the queen's mother is not advocating for a program offering free beer to the poor or using it as a way to pacify them. Her point is straightforward: for good governance, the king must avoid intoxication. The guidance provided in verses 4–7 underscores the necessity of sobriety in ensuring justice within the kingdom. Rather than approving of any kind of drunkenness, the analogy between the struggles of the less fortunate and their dependence on alcohol serves to remind Lemuel of the duties that accompany his position and stature.<sup>34</sup>

Verses 7-8 offer a deeper exploration of the prohibition of alcohol, emphasizing the critical need to safeguard the vulnerable members of society. They warn against the perils of having an intoxicated ruler, who might ignore the laws established for protection (v. 5). The king is urged to consider the needs of the most defenseless individuals, recognizing their vulnerability. These verses also playfully suggest that those who are impoverished and oppressed should steer clear of strong drinks, implying that such indulgence might momentarily ease their hardships (vv. 6-7). However, the sobering reality of the detrimental consequences of alcoholism among the less fortunate serves as a compelling counterargument.<sup>35</sup>

While some readers might perceive verses 6–7 as cynical, a more suitable interpretation suggests sarcasm. It could be somewhat understandable for

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<sup>33</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, “The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31,” *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. Robert L. Hubbard Jr (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 508–9.

<sup>34</sup> Duane A. Garrett, “Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs,” *The New American Commentary An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, ed. Ray E. Clendenen et al. (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1993), 246.

<sup>35</sup> Army Plantinga-Pauw and William C Placher, eds., “Proverbs and Ecclesiastes,” *Belief A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 131–32.

impoverished individuals to turn to excessive drinking to cope with their problems, given their limited means to address challenges. However, it becomes unjustifiable when applied to a king, whose duty involves using authority to solve the issues faced by his people. The use of the plural imperative "give" in verses 6–7 highlights a significant inconsistency. This command appears misplaced as it targets only one individual, suggesting a potential addition to the text at a later time. This discrepancy likely stems from the recurring theme of drinking among the characters, indicated by the presence of "sekar" and "yayin" in both verses 4 and 6. Furthermore, a deeper connection becomes evident when comparing these verses: while verses 6-7 advocate offering strong drink and wine to the poor to help alleviate their troubles, verses 4-5 advise against excessive drinking, specifically directed towards the king. The individual receiving this counsel has the means to provide material assistance to the less fortunate but is discouraged from doing so.<sup>36</sup> Some inconsistencies between this interpretation and previous views of who the dying are can be noticed. While some interpretations suggest they are convicted criminals awaiting crucifixion, proponents of the abstinence interpretation, argue that they are individuals dying of starvation. This calls for further investigation.

### Summary

I have examined a variety of scholarly discussions about Proverbs 31:6–7. Within this discourse, two primary interpretations have emerged: the conditional permissive view and the abstinence view. The conditional permissive view suggests that the caution against giving *שֶׁכָּר* and *יַיִן* to those in distress is not an absolute prohibition but rather a conditional allowance for their medicinal use. Advocates of

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<sup>36</sup> R. Norman Whybray and R Norman Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 108.

this view stress the cultural and contextual factors of ancient Israel, arguing that the consumption of strong drinks and wine was not universally forbidden but permitted under certain circumstances, particularly for medicinal purposes. The conditional permissive view has both strengths and weaknesses. Strengths include its acknowledgment of the importance of interpreting biblical passages within their historical and cultural contexts, recognizing that the use of alcoholic beverages was common in ancient times, citing specific verses in the Bible, such as Proverbs 31:6–7, to argue for the occasional and regulated use of "שִׁכָּר" and "יַיִן" for therapeutic purposes and cultural acknowledgment, and providing a nuanced understanding of the biblical stance on alcohol consumption. However, the weaknesses of the view include its reliance on subjective interpretation leading to differing conclusions among scholars and theologians regarding which contexts permit the use of "שִׁכָּר" and "יַיִן." Allowing for the occasional use of alcoholic beverages under certain conditions could potentially open the door for misuse or abuse of "שִׁכָּר" and "יַיִן." Additionally, determining the precise parameters of when such use is appropriate may remain ambiguous and open to interpretation.

In contrast, the abstinence view takes a stricter stance, asserting that Proverbs 31:6–7 outright condemns alcohol consumption, advocating for complete abstinence. Scholars holding this perspective emphasize the negative associations with שִׁכָּר and יַיִן in the passage, viewing them as inherently harmful substances to be avoided entirely. The abstinence view presents both strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths include Moral clarity. This viewpoint provides clear guidance by advocating for complete abstinence from alcoholic beverages, eliminating the potential risks associated with their consumption. Secondly, by advocating for total abstinence, it helps mitigate the potential for misuse, addiction, and related societal issues. Thirdly, it aligns with

certain ethical and religious traditions that prioritize temperance and self-discipline, promoting virtuous behavior. Its weaknesses include Contextual interpretation. Interpreting Proverbs 31:6-7 as a universal decree for total abstinence may overlook the historical and cultural contexts of the passage, potentially oversimplifying its meaning. Secondly, the strict adherence to abstinence may not account for situations where regulated use of alcoholic beverages is deemed acceptable or culturally appropriate. Lastly, the interpretation of Proverbs 31:6-7 as a royal decree, rhetorical statement, or sarcastic command may lack consensus among scholars and theologians, leading to differing conclusions regarding its intended meaning.

These differing viewpoints arise from distinct theological, cultural, and exegetical frameworks, showcasing the complexity of interpreting biblical texts. While proponents of the conditional permissive view prioritize historical context and linguistic analysis, advocates of the abstinence view prioritize moral and ethical considerations. Furthermore, these interpretations have implications for contemporary debates surrounding alcohol consumption, health, and ethics. Exploring authors' perspectives on the uses of שָׁכַר and יַיִן in Proverbs 31:6–7 reveals a multifaceted dialogue that transcends mere academic discourse. By engaging with these diverse viewpoints, we gain deeper insights into the nuances of biblical interpretation and its relevance to modern-day issues.

## CHAPTER 3

### ANALYSING THE COMMAND OF THE USES OF שֶׁכָּר AND יַיִן WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE ANCIENT NEAR-EAST

This chapter explores how wine and other strong drinks were historically used for both medicinal and cultural purposes in ancient Near Eastern societies. By examining their medicinal applications, we gain insight into the complex relationship between culture, medicine, and tradition in these ancient civilizations. The investigation into the geographic source of wine is crucial for understanding its cultural significance and dissemination throughout history. Wine's origins in the Near East underscore its deep-rooted presence in the region and its subsequent spread to other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Exploring ancient Near Eastern archaeological references to the medicinal use of wine and strong beverages provides valuable insights into the medical practices and beliefs of these societies. References found in texts such as the Sumerian Pharmacopoeia, the Sino-Tibetan Pharmacopoeia, the Egyptian Medical Papyri, the Bible, and the Talmud highlight the diverse ways in which wine and strong drinks were employed for healing purposes. By examining these historical sources, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role of wine and strong drinks in ancient Near Eastern medicine, as well as the cultural and religious contexts in which they were

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Norrie, *The History of Wine as a Medicine: From Its Beginnings in China to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 5–7.

used. This exploration enriches our understanding of the complexities of ancient societies and their approaches to health and well-being.

### **The Origin of Wine**

Philip Norrie underscored the extensive medical history embedded within wine, spanning across various cultures and ancient civilizations. With roots stretching back millennia, wine serves as a testament to humanity's enduring association with healing. Its therapeutic utilization over approximately 5000 years unequivocally establishes it as the oldest medicinal remedy discovered by mankind.<sup>2</sup> The origins of wine are subject to various interpretations. Some scholars believe Armenia to be its birthplace, while others argue for Georgia. Recent research even suggests China as a possible origin. Advocates for Armenia's claim point to Noah as the first to cultivate vineyards, leading to the spread of viticulture across the Middle East. The connection to Armenia is reinforced by traditions surrounding Noah's post-flood vineyard and comparisons between Armenian and Palestinian climates.<sup>3</sup> Supporting this notion, wine historian David J. Jordan suggests Noah may have been the world's first winemaker.<sup>4</sup>

However, there are conflicting views on the origins of wine. According to some sources, the first wine was made in the Balkan regions around 9000 BC, particularly along the eastern coast of the Black Sea, in what is now known as

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Norrie, *Wine and Health through the Ages with Special Reference to Australia* (PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2005), iv.

<sup>3</sup> Lindsey Marie Ross, "Genesis 9: 20-21: Noah's Legacy of the Vine," *Denison Journal of Religion* 3, no. 6 (2003): 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Jordan, *An Offering of Wine*, 17.

Georgia—a region neighboring Armenia.<sup>5</sup> Advocates of this theory argue that viticulture likely began in Georgia and gradually spread to the evolving cultures of the Middle East, each with its own unique story about the beginnings of wine. The grapevine journeyed from Babylon to Persia, tracing the paths of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, before reaching Egypt and Greece. Eventually, both ancient Greek and Roman societies embraced viticulture, leading to its dissemination throughout the Mediterranean region. This expansion continued until grapes were cultivated in the most favorable climates across Europe.<sup>6</sup> Shannon Morgan Anfindsen shares a similar perspective, suggesting that wine originated in Georgia, although there are differences in the proposed timeframe and the specific types of wine produced.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, recent research suggests that wine's origins might be traced back to China. It argues that the first grape wine was produced there a remarkable 500 years before its discovery in Georgia.<sup>8</sup> Patrick McGovern, a scholar from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, USA, collaborated with researchers from renowned institutions such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the University of Science and Technology of China, and the Henan Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. Together, they investigated the dried residues found within fragments of clay storage vessels discovered at a Neolithic site in Jiahu, northern China, located at the core of the Yellow River Valley. Their thorough examination yielded a striking revelation: the residue's age surpasses

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<sup>5</sup> Piareta Nikoloya et al., “Wine as a Medicine in Ancient Times,” *Scripta Scientifica Pharmaceutica* 5, no. 2 (2018): 15.

<sup>6</sup> Norrie, *The History of Wine as a Medicine*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Shannon Morgan Anfindsen, “The Health Benefits of Consuming Red Wine” (Honors thesis, University of South Carolina, 2015), 6. Anfindsen said that around 6000 BC, the first red wine was produced in Georgia (the region between Europe and Asia) and Iran.

<sup>8</sup> Nikoloya et al., “Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times,” 15.

that found in Georgia by an impressive 500 years. Notably, the analysis uncovered a mixture of ancient beverages, including honey mead, hawthorn fruit wine, rice wine, and indigenous Chinese grape wine. This discovery is particularly intriguing given China's distinction as home to the highest diversity of grape species globally, boasting approximately 40 distinct varieties.<sup>9</sup>

Jiahu wine is recognized as the oldest fermented alcoholic beverage known to mankind, with a history that surpasses the earliest evidence of grape wine from the Middle East by more than 500 years. This assertion is substantiated by the discovery of pottery storage vessel fragments, meticulously examined to ascertain both their age and the contents they once held. McGovern's research highlights China's pioneering role in pottery-making, dating back around 15,000 years before the present era, which significantly predates similar developments in the Near East by approximately 5,000 years. This early pottery tradition in China is believed to have laid the groundwork for fermentation practices in the region. In contrast, the archaeological evidence of grape wine production in Georgia is relatively scant. It primarily consists of residual grape pips left behind after fermentation, as there are few pottery fragments available for analysis—a result of Georgia's historical lack of a pottery tradition in winemaking.<sup>10</sup> Although the exact origin of wine is still debated, exploring its origins has been crucial in uncovering its ancient medicinal uses among Near Eastern civilizations. This is primarily because archaeological research has revealed insights into the medicinal practices involving wine within the cultures of its presumed birth regions. Below, you'll find the sources, along with explanations for each.

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<sup>9</sup> Norrie, *The History of Wine as a Medicine*, 5–6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## **The Sumerian Pharmacopoeia**

In the Middle East, wine is said to have been discovered in Persia (now Iran) by the mistress of King Jamshid, who loved grapes so much that she kept them in jars so that she could eat them all year. One year, the grapes fermented in a jar and became no longer sweet, so she labeled the new liquid in the bottom of the jar as poisonous. According to the story, his mistress had such a bad headache that she wanted to die, so she drank the liquid in the "poisonous" jar. The wine made her feel better, relieving her pain and allowing her to fall asleep. When King Jamshid learned of this miraculous cure, he tested the poison himself and enjoyed the wine so much that the wonderful tonic was named the royal medicine. The Persians highly regarded wine at that time for its therapeutic potential.<sup>11</sup>

The introduction of winemaking knowledge into Babylon by Armenian traders was a significant milestone in the history of wine, occurring alongside the rise of Sumerian civilization around 4000 BCE. This ancient beverage, valued for its medicinal qualities, is first documented in a Sumerian pharmacopeia inscribed on a clay tablet around 2200 BCE. In these ancient writings, wine is highlighted as a remedy for various ailments, and its therapeutic benefits are recognized and embraced.<sup>12</sup> To enhance its healing properties, blends were created by combining wine with other medicinal elements; for instance, sweet wine and honey were mixed to alleviate coughs, while wine-based ointments were formulated to treat skin conditions. Thus, the enduring legacy of wine as a healing elixir resonates through the ages of human history.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>13</sup> Nikoloya et al., "Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times," 15–16.

## The Sino-Tibetan Pharmacopoeia

The Sino-Tibetan Pharmacopoeia explores how wine was used for medicinal purposes in ancient China. It contains a total of 87 recipes, 19 of which involve the use of wine. Some notable examples include hash and wine used to induce narcosis, donkey placenta combined with wine for treating alcoholism, black cat liver paired with wine to combat malaria, and a mixture of wine, lizard liver, and locust skin applied topically on the navel to induce abortion.<sup>14</sup>

In ancient China, wine wasn't just a beverage but also a revered medicinal remedy, even being integrated into the practices of the royal court. Bob explained that the medical system in the royal palace consisted of four divisions: dietary doctors, disease specialists, trauma experts, and veterinarians. Notably, the dietary doctors played a crucial role in overseeing the king's daily diet, which included the "six foods, six beverages, and six dishes" regimen, where wine was among the prescribed beverages. Thus, wine became a common prescription within the royal circles, forming a part of what was known as Yao Jiu, or medicinal wine, utilized for both preventive health measures and therapeutic purposes. A remarkable discovery in 1973 shed light on the ancient tradition of brewing medicinal wine. Within King Ma's tomb, researchers found two invaluable manuscripts: Yang Sheng Fang (Formulas for Nourishing Life) and Za Liao Fang (Formulas for Treating Miscellaneous Diseases), which contained some of the earliest recorded recipes for crafting Chinese medicinal wines.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nikoloya et al., "Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times," 16.

<sup>15</sup> Bob Flaws, *Chinese Medicinal Wines & Elixirs* (Boulder, CO: Blue Poppy Press, 1994), 11–14.

Wine had a longstanding role in supporting spleen health and calming stomach troubles. It was commonly advised for easing a wide array of symptoms, including nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, bloating, and digestive issues. Moreover, it was utilized in treating various women's health concerns. Medicinal wine, particularly prevalent in gynecological treatments, was specifically tailored to address urgent conditions. These included threats of miscarriage, painful menstruation (dysmenorrhea), and excessive uterine bleeding. Additionally, wine was employed to treat external injuries resulting from accidents like impacts, falls, or twists, managing cuts, bruises, strains, and ligament tears.<sup>16</sup>

Wine was used to treat herpes zoster and other skin lesions. Herpes zoster, also known as shingles, typically affects older adults, individuals with weakened immune systems, and those with chronic illnesses. This viral infection remains inactive until the immune system is weakened, at which point it becomes active and spreads along nerve pathways to the skin's surface. Since certain skin conditions are caused by stagnant blood flow, the alcohol in wine helps to improve circulation and alleviate stagnation.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Egyptian Medical Papyri**

Over the span of more than a century, researchers have uncovered numerous invaluable medical papyri from ancient Egypt. These documents offer a profound glimpse into the advanced medical and pharmaceutical practices of ancient Egyptian civilization. They showcase a remarkable depth of knowledge across various medical disciplines, meticulously recorded in sophisticated scientific writing. Upon closer

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<sup>16</sup> Flaws, *Chinese Medicinal Wines & Elixirs*, 195.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

examination, it becomes clear that ancient Egyptians had already mastered drug formulation and understood the properties of herbal remedies before making significant advancements in anatomical understanding and surgical techniques. These ancient texts are widely recognized as the pharmacopeias of their time, providing invaluable insights into ancient Egyptian medical practices.<sup>18</sup>

In the Egyptian medical papyri from approximately 2000 BC, wine was referred to as a "menstruum," used to dissolve medicinal substances obtained from plants, animals, and minerals.<sup>19</sup> Chauncey D. Leake highlights eight significant Egyptian medical papyri, including the Kahun papyrus, Edwin Smith papyrus, Ebers papyrus, Hearst papyrus, Erman papyrus, London papyrus, Berlin papyrus, and Chester Beatty papyrus.<sup>20</sup>

These ancient Egyptian papyri offer valuable insights into their medical practices. They meticulously record numerous prescriptions, detailing specific instructions and encompassing various drug combinations, a practice termed polypharmacy. Furthermore, they exhibit remarkable consistency across prescriptions, indicating their derivation from earlier medical texts dating back to 3400 or even 2550 B.C. notably, these documents also mark the earliest recorded instances of wine being prescribed for medicinal purposes.<sup>21</sup> The Kahun papyrus, which dates back to 1900 BC, was discovered in 1889 at Kahun in the Fayyum district of Lower Egypt. It is currently preserved in London. Despite being incomplete, this ancient document

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<sup>18</sup> Samil Yahia El-Gammal, "Egyptian Medical Papyri," *Bulletin of the Indian Institute of History of Medicine* XX (1990): 35.

<sup>19</sup> Nikoloya et al., "Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times," 16.

<sup>20</sup> Chauncey D. Leake, *Logan Clendening Lectures on The History and Philosophy of Medicine Second Series The Old Egyptian Medical Papyri* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1952), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Norrie, "Wine and Health through the Ages with Special Reference to Australia," 56.

offers valuable information. It includes sections that detail 34 gynecologic disorders, frequently associated with symptoms from other organs, as well as a dedicated segment on veterinary medicine.<sup>22</sup>

Alcohol was prescribed as a remedy for hysteria in the Kahum Papyrus. The term "hysteria" is derived from the Greek word for uterus. Historically, it was viewed as a condition exclusively affecting women, attributed to disturbances in the womb.<sup>23</sup> There was a prevalent belief that certain behavioral abnormalities originated from irregularities in reproductive organs, particularly the positioning of the uterus. This understanding lacked alternative explanations. Examples cited include descriptions of women confined to bed, experiencing tremors, vision disturbances, jaw pains hindering mouth opening, and widespread limb discomfort accompanied by eye socket pain. These symptoms were thought to arise from the uterus either starving or shifting upwards, exerting pressure on neighboring organs. Consequently, medical attention focused on nourishing the affected organ or repositioning it.<sup>24</sup> The Kahum Papyrus recommended treatments to realign the uterus, including a mixture of ship's tar and beer dregs. Despite their unpleasant taste, these treatments were presumed to be effective. Additionally, repellent ointments, containing ingredients such as moistened feces mixed with beer, were applied topically to the affected areas.<sup>25</sup>

In 1862, Edwin Smith stumbled upon the Edwin Smith papyrus, which dates back to 1600 BC. It was found in a tomb alongside the Ebers papyrus and other

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<sup>22</sup> Albert Mudry, "Otology in Medical Papyri in Ancient Egypt," *The Mediterranean Journal of Otology* 3 (2006): 138.

<sup>23</sup> Ilza Veith, *Hysteria the History of a Disease* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

documents. Smith kept it safe until he passed away. Then, in 1906, his daughter graciously presented it to the New York Historical Society in New York. The translation of the Edwin Smith papyrus was undertaken by Breasted in 1930, and a portion of it is excerpted below. While its main focus is on the treatment of wounds and fractures, the Smith papyrus also contains medico-magical incantations and prescriptions. Widely recognized as the world's first surgical treatise, the Edwin Smith papyrus holds significant historical importance.<sup>26</sup>

The Ebers papyrus, which was found in relatively good condition in 1862, was purchased by the German scholar George Ebers in 1872 and later named after him. This ancient manuscript is renowned as the most comprehensive, significant, and widely recognized historical and medical document. It is currently housed at Leipzig University.<sup>27</sup> The Ebers Papyrus is commonly considered to be the most complete and wonderful ancient Egyptian medical text to have survived.<sup>28</sup>

Piaretta Nikolova and other scholars have highlighted that the Ebers Papyrus suggests using wine or medicinal substances dissolved in wine to alleviate various conditions such as asthma, constipation, epilepsy, and jaundice. Additionally, wine is recommended as a remedy to improve digestion and detoxify the body from poisons. It's worth noting that wine played a significant role in formulations for cough remedies and treatments for anorexia, as outlined in the Ebers Papyrus (sections 190, 305-325).<sup>29</sup> Rod Phillips adds that the Ebers Papyrus includes remedies for depression

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<sup>26</sup> Mudry, "Otology in Medical Papyri in Ancient Egypt," 136.

<sup>27</sup> El-Gammal, "Egyptian Medical Papyri," 36.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Carpenter, Michel Rigaid, Mary Barile, Tracy J. Priest, Luis Perez, and John B. Ferguson, *An Interlinear Transliteration and English Translation of Portions of The Ebers Papyrus Possibly Having to Do With Diabetes Mellitus* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Bard College, 2006), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Nikolova et al., "Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times," 16.

involving bitter apples, honey, and wine. Additionally, it mentions a peculiar treatment for epileptic seizures, which involves finely powdered ass testicles mixed with wine.<sup>30</sup>

In Ebers 804, wine is suggested as a method "to facilitate childbirth." Additionally, wine was utilized to prevent infection through its incorporation into salves, enemas, and bandages. According to Ebers (162–163), wine lees, which are the grape skins remaining after pressing, were used externally to address fevers and reduce limb swelling.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in Ebers 287, a heart medication prescribes the combination of wine and wheat groats to be left overnight before consumption.<sup>32</sup>

The Hearst papyrus, originating from 1500 B.C., stands as a notable archaeological find. In 1901, it was brought to the attention of the Hearst Egyptian Expedition camp near Deir el-Ballas by an Egyptian peasant. He offered the papyrus as a token of appreciation for being allowed to utilize waste mud bricks from excavation sites for fertilizer. Phoebe Hearst, a key supporter of archaeological efforts in Egypt through her funding of the University of California's endeavors, notably the Hearst Expedition led by George Reisner, lent her name to the papyrus. Its publication in 1905, which featured a hieratic text and a comprehensive summary of its contents, marked an important milestone in archaeological scholarship.<sup>33</sup> In the Hearst papyrus, wine is praised as a crucial ingredient in cough remedies and treatments for anorexia

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<sup>30</sup> Rod Phillips, *Wine: A Social and Cultural History of the Drink That Changed Our Lives* (Oxford, UK: Infinite Ideas, 2018), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Norrie, "Wine and Health through the Ages with Special Reference to Australia," 57.

<sup>32</sup> Rosso, "Beer And Wine in Antiquity: Beneficial Remedy or Punishment Imposed by the Gods?" 251.

<sup>33</sup> Tuva Johanson, "The Significance of Believing in Healing – on the Therapeutic Value of Spoken Words in Ancient Egyptian Medical Papyri," 2019, 16, accessed 23 July 2022, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1329590/FULLTEXT02.pdf>.

(Hearst 61).<sup>34</sup> The Hearst Papyrus also recommends wine as a remedy for urinary problems (Hearst 7) and heart-related conditions (Hearst 4).<sup>35</sup>

The Hearst papyrus proposed remedies that included wine, milk, and beer. Notably, beer infused with coriander and bryony was suggested to address stomach issues. Another remedy involved steeping a mixture of finely chopped coriander and other plants in beer, which was then strained and ingested to treat blood in the feces.<sup>36</sup> Various treatments involving wine were also outlined. For instance, dung powder taken orally for a day was recommended to alleviate shivering in the fingers. Herbal blend containing dill and wine was prescribed to numb pain in the limbs.<sup>37</sup>

The Berlin and Erman papyri, originating from 1550 and 1350 B.C. respectively, were discovered side by side near Memphis in 1825 by the Italian explorer, Gulsepoe Passalacqua. These priceless relics, currently held in the Berlin Museum, were found together and have since become objects of considerable interest. Galen, a distinguished medical author, extensively cited these ancient papyri in his writings.<sup>38</sup> The Berlin Papyrus offers a wide array of remedies, covering everything from pain relief to warding off evil spirits. It addresses common issues like painful urination and hemorrhage, likely linked to Bilharziasis. It provides treatments for intestinal worms like *Ascaris* and tapeworms, as well as remedies for nausea, fever, breast tumors, and various stomach and heart conditions. Notably, it even includes

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<sup>34</sup> Nikoloya et al., “Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times,” 16.

<sup>35</sup> Rosso, “Beer And Wine in Antiquity: Beneficial Remedy or Punishment Imposed by the Gods?” 252.

<sup>36</sup> Phillips, *Wine*, 6–7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> El-Gammal, “Egyptian Medical Papyri,” 40–41.

solutions for more specific problems such as scorpion bites, burns, and ear pain.<sup>39</sup>

What's intriguing is that wine emerges as a significant component in the Berlin Papyrus, recommended not just for cough medicine but also for treating anorexia.<sup>40</sup>

In ancient Egypt, wine wasn't just only used as a means to administer medicines; but it also had healing properties. People valued it as a nutritious part of their diet, whether they drank it alone or mixed it with other remedies. Wine helped make less pleasant ingredients more palatable. Herbalists at the time recognized its potential to calm and induce sleep because of its sedative, narcotic, and sleep-inducing effects. Wine also had strong antiseptic properties, working well when applied to the skin or taken orally. It was used to treat various health issues like swollen legs, blood vessel problems, intestinal parasites, and matters of decay, as recorded by Berlin.<sup>41</sup>

The London Papyrus is an ancient Egyptian medical manuscript dating back to around 1350 B.C. It is one of the earliest recorded medical texts and has been housed in the British Museum since it was acquired in 1860. This document provides valuable insights into ancient medical practices, covering various treatments for conditions like burns, hemorrhaging (often associated with miscarriages), eye disorders, and skin problems.<sup>42</sup> The knowledge found in the London Papyrus likely stems from the extensive array of traditional folk medicine practices deeply embedded within ancient Egyptian society. These practices were honed and perfected over

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>40</sup> Nikoloya et al., "Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times," 16.

<sup>41</sup> Rosso, "Beer And Wine in Antiquity: Beneficial Remedy or Punishment Imposed by the Gods?" 252, 254.

<sup>42</sup> Norrie, "Wine and Health through the Ages with Special Reference to Australia," 16.

generations, passed down through time. They emerged from a blend of experimentation, careful observation of nature, and deeply held cultural beliefs about health and well-being. While some treatments described in the papyrus may seem rooted in superstition or magical beliefs, it's important to acknowledge that certain natural ingredients used in these remedies might indeed have had genuine therapeutic effects. For example, many of the herbs and plant extracts utilized in ancient medicine contained bioactive compounds known for their anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, or analgesic properties. These properties could have provided relief from symptoms or aided the body's natural healing processes.<sup>43</sup> The London Papyrus provides deep insights into ancient Egyptian medical practices and knowledge, revealing how they approached healthcare. It showcases the impressive ingenuity and adaptability of ancient civilizations as they tackled the challenges of comprehending and treating various illnesses.<sup>44</sup>

The Chester Beatty papyrus dates back to approximately 1200 B.C. It contains a section of a detailed guide focusing on treatments for ailments concerning the anus. This implies the existence of specialized medical practitioners in ancient Egypt, highlighting the significance of this document. Recently, the esteemed English Egyptologist Alan H. Gardiner transliterated this papyrus. Additionally, in 1947, F. Jonckheere translated and annotated it. Originally donated to the British Museum by Chester Beatty, this papyrus is notable for its unique compilation of remedies, which are not found in other similar documents.<sup>45</sup> Notably, among its recommendations,

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<sup>43</sup> Norrie, "Wine and Health through the Ages with Special Reference to Australia," 16.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Leake, *Logan Clendening Lectures on The History and Philosophy of Medicine Second Series The Old Egyptian Medical Papyri*, 16.

Chester Beatty suggests the use of wine to address internal heart-related conditions (Chester Beatty IV, 7).<sup>46</sup>

### **The Bible and the Sacred Book of the Jews Talmud**

The Bible is rich with references to wine, highlighting its significant role throughout history. In ancient times, wine was a widely consumed beverage with various uses beyond just drinking. Examining its historical context as portrayed in the Bible reveals several important points worth considering. The first narrative we come across is about Noah and the beginning of vine cultivation. This account is found in Genesis 9:20–21, where it describes Noah planting the first vineyard after the flood. It emphasizes Noah's consumption of fermented grape juice, indicating the early use of wine in biblical times.<sup>47</sup>

The second story explores King Solomon's wisdom as he praises the merits of wine. In the Song of Solomon, wine symbolizes joy and intimacy. King Solomon's comparison of wine to the gentle caress of a lover's kiss sheds light on its significant role in biblical literature (Cant. 1:1).<sup>48</sup> The third point underscores the versatile nature of wine, serving not only as a sedative but also as a disinfectant. Throughout ancient times, wine gained renown for its dual functionality, prized both for its calming effects and its ability to sanitize effectively.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, biblical references highlight wine's medicinal properties. Paul advises Timothy to use wine for stomach issues (1 Tim 5:23), while the parable of the

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<sup>46</sup> Rosso, "Beer And Wine in Antiquity: Beneficial Remedy or Punishment Imposed by the Gods?," 252.

<sup>47</sup> Nikoloya et al., "Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times," 17.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Good Samaritan demonstrates wine's efficacy in treating wounds (Luke 10:30–37).<sup>50</sup> The fifth point concerns the use of wine for refreshment. In various biblical stories, wine was used to revive and invigorate those who were tired or weak. One notable example is found in the story of David, who received wine from Ziba while escaping from Absalom (2 Sam 16:1-2).<sup>51</sup> The sixth point discusses the practice of combining wine with drugs for medicinal purposes. According to some biblical scholars and commentators like Alexander Cruden and J.F. Ross, this blending was believed to enhance the therapeutic effects of both substances.<sup>52</sup>

The Bible vividly portrays wine as a significant element of ancient culture, highlighting its various roles from everyday enjoyment to medicinal use and religious rituals. These depictions offer valuable insights into the rich historical fabric surrounding the production, consumption, and cultural significance of wine during biblical times. Various wine mixtures were widely known in ancient Palestine and across the Near East, as documented by rabbinical scholars. These included a combination of aged wine, clear water, and balsam, particularly favored for use after bathing. Additionally, raisin-infused wine and a blend of wine with oil and garum sauce were popular choices. Notably, a beloved concoction consisted of honey and pepper. Rabbis also recommended a specific emetic wine to be consumed before meals.<sup>53</sup> The Talmud emphasized the importance of wine, stating, "Wine is the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., "Wine," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Q-Z* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 1071.

<sup>52</sup> Buttrick et al., "Wine," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible R-Z An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 850–51. According to J. F. Ross, wine was mixed with myrrh or gall and used as a drug; the soldiers offered such a potion to Jesus while he was hanging on the cross as an act of mercy.

<sup>53</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, ed., "Wine," *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Q-Z* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 1084.

greatest of all medicines; where wine is scarce, drugs are required."<sup>54</sup> Moreover, wine held significance in dietetics, highlighting its integral role in ancient cultures.<sup>55</sup> In the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, wine and strong drink are distinguished by different Hebrew words, each carrying unique meanings and implications: Wine, often referred to as "yayin" (יַיִן), signifies fermented grape juice. This beverage holds deep cultural, religious, and symbolic importance within ancient Jewish traditions, symbolizing joy, celebration, and spiritual observances. On the other hand, strong drink, typically denoted by the term "shekhar" (שֵׁכָר), encompasses various alcoholic beverages with higher alcohol content, such as beer or other fermented drinks. Strong drink is frequently associated with intoxication and excess, sometimes viewed with less favor than wine in biblical contexts.

### Summary

In summary, the ancient Near East relied on wine and beer for medicinal purposes, addressing various health issues such as digestive problems, skin conditions, women's health concerns, and psychological disorders. Wine was often mixed with other medications, sometimes combined with honey for added effectiveness.<sup>56</sup> The medicinal use of wine persisted through the Greek and Roman periods, with esteemed physicians like Hippocrates<sup>57</sup> and Galen<sup>58</sup> advocating for its therapeutic properties. Even during the Middle Ages, monks in monasteries utilized

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<sup>54</sup> Bromiley, "The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia," 1071.

<sup>55</sup> Jordan, *An Offering of Wine*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Norrie, "Wine and Health through the Ages with Special Reference to Australia," 102.

<sup>57</sup> Nikoloya et al., "Wine As A Medicine in Ancient Times," 17.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

wine to create remedies.<sup>59</sup> Archaeological evidence supports the use of ancient wines and alcoholic beverages for administering herbal remedies internally and externally. Before modern synthetic medicines, alcoholic beverages were universally recognized as a palliative solution.<sup>60</sup> References to wine's medicinal benefits in religious texts like the Bible and the Jewish Talmud, highlight the ancient Hebrew people's acknowledgment of wine's healing properties.

The examination of the roles of wine and strong drinks in the ancient Near East reveals both strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, historical and archaeological evidence supports their widespread use for medicinal purposes across various ancient societies, including Greek, Roman, and medieval cultures. The endorsement of respected physicians like Hippocrates and Galen lends credibility to the medicinal value of these beverages. References in religious texts such as the Bible and the Jewish Talmud highlight the long-standing recognition of wine's healing properties, emphasizing its cultural and religious importance.

However, the analysis also has its weaknesses. There's a tendency to generalize the recognition of alcoholic beverages' medicinal benefits, ignoring potential variations in beliefs and practices across different cultures and historical periods within the ancient Near East and beyond. The focus solely on wine and beer's medicinal uses may disregard alternative forms of medicine and healing practices that existed alongside or independently of alcoholic remedies. There's a risk of bias towards emphasizing the positive aspects of alcohol's medicinal use, possibly

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<sup>59</sup> Norrie, *The History of Wine as a Medicine*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Patrick E. McGovern, Armen Mirzoian, and Gretchen R. Hall, "Ancient Egyptian Herbal Wines," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 106, no. 18 (2009): 7365.

neglecting to acknowledge its negative consequences or the limitations of ancient medical knowledge and practices.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSING THE COMMAND WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT COMMANDS AND IN PROVERBS 31:6-7

#### Establishing the Text

The MT reads as follows:

6תָּנוּ שִׁכָּר לְאוֹבֵד וְיַיִן לְמִרֵי גַפְשׁ׃ 7יִשְׁתֶּה וְיִשְׁכַּח רִיגָו וְיִצְמָחוּ לֹא יִזְכָּר-עוֹד׃

#### A Translation of the Text

V.6 Give strong drink to one who is perishing and wine to those in bitter soul.

V. 7 Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his misery no more.

#### Literary and Structural Analysis

The thorough exploration and nuanced interpretation of Proverbs 31:6-7 demands a meticulous and all-encompassing analysis that delves deeply into not only its literal significance but also its intricate structural components. This entails a comprehensive scrutiny of multifaceted aspects, including its contextual backdrop, the targeted audience, the literary genre it belongs to, its form, and the overarching organization that shapes its message. Only through such a comprehensive examination can we unravel the full richness and depth of the wisdom encapsulated within these verses.

#### Setting

The setting of Proverbs 31:6-7, like the rest of the Book of Proverbs, is embedded within the broader cultural context of ancient Israelite society. However, the specific setting within Proverbs 31:6-7 is not explicitly mentioned. While scholars

have proposed several theories about the original setting of the book, none are definitive. One possibility is a rural environment, where oral tradition plays a vital role in passing down practical wisdom through generations. Another possibility is a court setting, where literary expression and formal education would have been emphasized.<sup>1</sup> In the ancient Near East, wisdom literature emerged from various sources such as familial teachings, royal courts, and scribal schools. The mention of a mother's guidance highlights the significant role of the household in transmitting wisdom within Israelite culture. The repeated use of "my son" suggests a mentor-student relationship, emphasizing the importance of mentorship and guidance in passing on wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

### **Audience**

The audience for Proverbs 31:6-7 can be understood in two main ways. First, within the broader context of the Book of Proverbs, it likely addresses the readers or listeners of the wisdom sayings contained within the text. These individuals would be seeking guidance and instruction in practical living.<sup>3</sup> Second, focusing on the specific command in Proverbs 31:6-7 regarding providing *שֶׁקֶר* and *יָי* to those in distress, the immediate audience could be those in positions of authority or influence responsible for addressing the needs of the marginalized or suffering within society.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Estes, *Hand Book on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, 217–18.

<sup>2</sup> Estes, 217–18.

<sup>3</sup> Gareth Crossley, *The Old Testament Explained and Applied* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 469.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology an Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 906.

## Genre

The Book of Proverbs is revered as wisdom literature, renowned for its practical insights into human behavior, relationships, and moral principles. It encompasses a variety of writing styles, including proverbial sayings, instructional passages, and numerical wisdom like numerical sayings or acrostic poems.<sup>5</sup>

Proverbs 31:6-7 stands out as a prime example of proverbial instruction, offering clear and concise guidance for navigating specific situations. In this instance, it addresses the appropriate use of שֶׁכָּר (strong drink) and יַיִן (wine) in response to distress or suffering.<sup>6</sup>

## Form

The form of Proverbs 31:6-7 is concise straightforward and typical of proverbial wisdom. It consists of two parallel lines, each presenting a directive on the provision of שֶׁכָּר (strong drink) and יַיִן (wine) for those in need. In Hebrew poetry, particularly in the book of Proverbs, two common types of parallelism are utilized: synonymous and antithetical. These parallelisms play a significant role in highlighting wisdom and emphasizing the intended message.<sup>7</sup> In Proverbs 31:6-7, we encounter a striking demonstration of parallelism, a hallmark of Hebrew poetry. Synonymous parallelism is evident as the text advises, "Give strong drink to the one who is perishing," paralleled by "wine to those in bitter distress." Despite using different words, both lines convey similar ideas, amplifying the poetic effect.

The passage also employs antithetical parallelism, where the second line contrasts with the first. While the initial directive suggests providing a strong drink to

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<sup>5</sup> Estes, *Hand Book on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, 219.

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Bergen, ed., *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 438.

<sup>7</sup> Ross, "Proverbs," 2008, 28.

those in dire situations, the subsequent line recommends offering wine to alleviate their troubles, implying a shift from hardship to comfort. This parallel structure serves a significant purpose beyond mere decoration; it emphasizes the central message of the passage with poetic rhythm. The juxtaposition or comparison between "strong drink" and "wine" in the first line mirrors the contrast between "forgetting their poverty" and "remembering their misery" in the second, enriching the text with depth and resonance.

### **Structure**

Proverbs 31:6-7 offers the wisdom passed down from King Lemuel's mother to him. However, the exact identity of King Lemuel remains uncertain in the biblical text, leading to various interpretations and traditions about who he was. Some Jewish traditions link King Lemuel with King Solomon, proposing connections with Bathsheba and implying that the advice was given during a particular period of Solomon's life. Nevertheless, these claims lack solid evidence and are still open to debate.<sup>8</sup> Within the extensive collection of wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs, this is a notable passage that directly speaks to kings. What distinguishes this guidance is its depth—it goes beyond practical matters to encompass profound religious significance. This reflects a common theme in wisdom literature from ancient times, where rulers were often counseled with moral and ethical wisdom that went beyond mere political considerations and guidance.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ross, 243.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

The passage in Proverbs 31:6-7 offers profound teachings and warnings from King Lemuel's mother, set within a broader discourse. Here's a breakdown of its structure:

1. Introduction of the Subject (31:1):
  - It introduces the teachings passed down to Lemuel by his mother.
2. First Caution (31:2-3):
  - Lemuel's mother earnestly warns him against the dangers of indulging in sensual lust, emphasizing the seriousness of her advice.
3. Second Caution (31:4–7):
  - Continuing her counsel, Lemuel's mother cautions him against excessive consumption of wine and strong drink. This section not only advises moderation but also outlines the proper use of these substances.
4. Instruction to Safeguard the Vulnerable (31:8–9):
  - Lemuel is urged to take up the honorable responsibility of speaking up for and protecting the rights of the vulnerable, impoverished, and marginalized in society.

In this passage, Lemuel's mother imparts invaluable advice to her son, covering essential aspects of life where caution and compassion are paramount. Firstly, she warns him about the dangers posed by certain women who may lead him astray, stressing the importance of discernment and vigilance in relationships (31:3). Secondly, she emphasizes the necessity of avoiding consuming wine and strong drinks, acknowledging their potential to impair judgment and decision-making (31:4-5). However, alongside this caution, she emphasizes the importance of providing solace and support to those in distress. She suggests that offering wine and strong

drink can serve as a means of alleviating suffering and comforting the afflicted (31:6-7). Moreover, Lemuel is urged to utilize his authority and influence to safeguard the legal rights of the weak and impoverished, advocating for justice and fairness for all members of society who are marginalized or vulnerable (31:8–9).<sup>10</sup>

In summary, Proverbs 31:6-7 offers timeless wisdom rooted in Israelite tradition. This passage advises on the responsible consumption of strong drinks and wine during tough times. It highlights the significance of temperance and discernment when facing life's trials. As a classic example of proverbial wisdom, these verses provide practical guidance for maintaining clarity and balance amidst adversity.

## Grammatical Analysis

### Word Study

Upon delving into Proverbs 31:6-7, one can readily perceive the abundance of crucial terms, chief among them being "שֶׁכָּר" (*shekar*), "יַיִן" (*yayin*), "לְאֹבֵד" (*le'ovayd*), and "לְמַרְי" (*le'marei*). These terms are integral to the passage, embodying nuances that are indispensable for a thorough comprehension of its message. Therefore, a thorough examination of these terms is imperative, not only for uncovering their original meanings but also for unraveling their complexities as evidenced in various linguistic references, including dictionaries, lexicons, and numerous Bible translations. Such a meticulous exploration holds the promise of shedding light on profound insights into the essence and communicated wisdom within the verses, thereby enhancing our understanding and appreciation of the Proverbs.

**The Term שֶׁכָּר.** In Hebrew, the word "שֶׁכָּר" (*skr*) has various related meanings: Qal: "שֶׁכָּר" (*skr*) - to be or become drunk. Piel: "שִׁכָּר" (*sikkor*) - drunken.

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<sup>10</sup> William McKane, "Proverbs: A New Approach," *The Old Testament Library*, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970), 408.

Noun: "שֶׁכָּר" (*sekar*) – beer Adjective: "שָׁכוּר" (*sakur*) - drunk. Noun: "שִׁכְרוֹן" (*sikkaron*) - drunkenness. These terms encompass different aspects of intoxication and alcoholic beverages in Hebrew.<sup>11</sup> The term שֶׁכָּר, predominantly linked to the concept of wine, appears twenty-three times in the Hebrew Bible. Strikingly, except for two occurrences (Numbers 28:7 and Psalms 69:12), שֶׁכָּר is consistently associated with or compared to יַיִן. Across its various contexts, שֶׁכָּר consistently conveys wine-related imagery, ranging from causing trembling (Isaiah 29:9) to prompting boisterousness or noise (Proverbs 20:1), and even leading to wayward behavior (Isaiah 28:7). Thus, it is apparent that שֶׁכָּר most likely refers to an alcoholic beverage.<sup>12</sup>

שֶׁכָּר is a term used to describe an “intoxicating drink”<sup>13</sup> that induces drowsiness, encompassing strong wines or beers.<sup>14</sup> It acts as a general label for all fermented beverages, regardless of their production methods, with its essence implying deep consumption or inebriation. In Numbers 28:7, strong wine is referred to as a "strong drink" (R.V.). Instances that differentiate it from wine, are shown in Leviticus 10:9, where both wine [יַיִן] and strong drink [שֶׁכָּר] are cautioned against. Texts referring to "strong drink" include Numbers 6:3, Judges 13:4, 7, Isaiah 5:11, 24:9, 28:7, 29:9, 56:12, Proverbs 20:1–31:6, and Micah 2–11.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren et al., ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 113.

<sup>12</sup> David J. Jordan, *An Offering of Wine: An Introductory Exploration of the Role of Wine in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism through the Examination of the Semantics of Some Keywords* (Sydney, Australia: University of Sydney, 2002), 120–21.

<sup>13</sup> Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 1576. See also William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), s.v. "shekar."

<sup>14</sup> James Strong et al., "shekar," *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 851.

<sup>15</sup> M.G. Easton, ed., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 692–93.

The Hebrew term שֵׁכָר has different translations across Bible versions. In the KJV, its "strong drink," while in others like the NIV, it's "fermented drink or beer." It comes from the Hebrew verb יִשְׁכַּר, "yīškār," meaning "to be or become drunk," found in Genesis 9:21. In the Septuagint (LXX), it's σίκερα "sikera." Originally, it referred to any alcoholic beverage made from fruit or grain, including wine, as shown in passages like Numbers 28:7 and 28:14.<sup>16</sup> In the New Testament, the term "σίκερα" or "sekira" is only mentioned once. Luke 1:15 describes a scene where God informs John the Baptist's parents that their son will be highly regarded by the Lord and will refrain from consuming both "σίκερα" (strong drink, the heavy stuff) and "οἶνος" (wine at any stage of fermentation).<sup>17</sup>

In Akkadian, שֵׁכָר is identified as *Sakaru*, denoting "become intoxicated," while *sikaru* represents "beer." In Aramaic, *skr* refers to "intoxicating drink" or "beer." In Arabic, *sakira* signifies "be intoxicated," whereas *sakar* refers to "intoxicating drink" or "wine."<sup>18</sup> Both שֵׁכָר and יַיִן are referenced in various passages throughout the scriptures: Leviticus 10:9, Numbers 6:3, Deuteronomy 14:26, 29:5, Judges 13:4-7, 14, 1 Samuel 1:15, Isaiah 5:11-22, 24:9, 28:7, 29:9, 56:12, Micah 2:11, and Prov 20, 31:6-7.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Kelly and John D. Barry, ed., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Scott Hedge, "The Issue Alcohol: A Biblical Survey and Word Study with Some Devotional Thoughts," 2011, 9, accessed 28 June 2022, <https://files.logoscdn.com/v1/files/38218877/assets/9344839/content.pdf?signature=HzjGU00u-tgkBMvnbzMb8aBVzKE>.

<sup>18</sup> Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Fabry Heinz-Josef, ed., "*shekar*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. XV, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2001), s.v. "*shekar*, *yayin*."

Some academics argue that the term שֶׁכָּר, commonly translated as "strong drink," is ambiguous regarding whether it refers to wine or beer. In Akkadian, beer is defined as a beverage made from barley, which enjoyed popularity in Mesopotamia and Egypt due to their fertile lands and abundant water supply from annual flooding. However, in Palestine, where the soil favored vineyards over cereals, water was scarce, posing challenges to beer production. Wine, on the other hand, was derived from grapes, which thrived in the region's conditions. Historically, wine had a higher alcohol content than beer before sweeteners were added. Walsh suggests that while the verbal form of שֶׁכָּר indicates drunkenness, the nominal form implies a beverage more strongly fermented than beer, possibly date palm wine. Despite viticulture being more common in the Old Testament and better suited to Palestine's environment, there is still debate over the exact nature of שֶׁכָּר.<sup>20</sup>

In the Peshitta, the term שֶׁכָּר most often appears as "strong drink," as seen in various passages such as Leviticus 10:9, Numbers 6:3 (twice), Deuteronomy 14:26, 29:5, Judges 13:4, 7, 14, 1 Samuel 1:15, Isaiah 5:11, 22, 24:9, 28:7 (three times), 29:9, 56:12, Psalms 69:13, and Proverbs 31:4, 6.<sup>21</sup> In the Vulgate, שֶׁכָּר is translated in different ways depending on its context, capturing its various shades of meaning. It is depicted as a "scream" in passages like Deuteronomy 14.26, 29.6, Judges 13.4, 7, 14, and Proverbs 31.6. In other instances, it is understood as "*omne quod inebriare*," meaning "all that inebriates," found in Leviticus 10.9, Numbers 6.3 (the first occurrence, Vg Nu 6.2), and 1 Samuel 1.15. The term is also translated as "*ebrietas*," conveying "drunkenness," appearing in Isaiah 5.11, 5.22, 28.7 (three times), 29.9, 56.12, Micah 2.11, Proverbs 20.1, and Proverbs 31.4. Additionally, it is understood

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<sup>20</sup> Kelly and Barry, "Shekar," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

<sup>21</sup> Jordan, *An Offering of Wine*, 119.

simply as "vinum," meaning "wine," in Numbers 28.7 and Psalms 69.13, and as "potio," signifying "drink," in Numbers 6.3 and Isaiah 24.9. Lastly, it is expressed as "forte bibat," referring to "strong drink," found in Proverbs 31.4.<sup>22</sup>

The word שָׁכַר appears around 103 times in the Babylonian Talmud as a noun. It's used in diverse contexts, particularly in discussions related to property disputes, medicine, and medical care. Furthermore, there are instances where its usage doesn't specify its exact meaning or nature.<sup>23</sup> The Semitic languages contain numerous cognates of שָׁכַר, including both verbs and nouns. Although Greek and Latin have similar terms, they are often borrowed from the Hebrew Bible's usage of שָׁכַר. In the Hebrew Bible, שָׁכַר is used as a verb 19 times in the qal form (10x), meaning "to become drunk," while its hiphil (4x) and piel (4x) forms imply "to behave like someone drunk." The cognate noun in the Hebrew Bible signifies "drunkenness," with the corresponding adjective being "drunken."<sup>24</sup>

Stuart's argument regarding the translation of שָׁכַר as "strong drink" and its potential misinterpretation is fascinating. He highlights how the term "strong drink" in English often conjures images of highly potent alcoholic beverages like whisky or vodka, commonly associated with modern distilled liquors. However, Stuart contends that such connotations may not accurately convey the original Hebrew text's intended meaning. During the era when the Hebrew Bible was authored, distillation was not yet known. Consequently, the alcoholic beverages mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures were likely fermented drinks crafted from ingredients such as dates, fruits, barley, or millet, often infused with honey and aromatic spices. While these beverages certainly

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<sup>22</sup> Jordan, *An Offering of Wine*, 120.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

contained alcohol due to fermentation, they likely lacked the potency of contemporary distilled spirits.<sup>25</sup>

It is crucial to recognize that שֵׁכָר in the Hebrew Bible does not always refer strictly to alcoholic drinks. This term encompasses a wider range, including any beverage that can induce either intoxication or vigor, whether alcoholic or non-alcoholic. In certain contexts, it may even encompass fresh or unfermented drinks that lack significant intoxicating effects.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, simply translating שֵׁכָר as "strong drink" without considering its historical and cultural context could lead to misunderstandings about the nature of the beverages mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. Instead, a translation that explores the nuanced spectrum of meanings and connotations of the term would provide contemporary readers with a clearer comprehension.<sup>27</sup>

In summary, the term שֵׁכָר refers to strong, fermented, or intoxicating drinks, as consistently portrayed throughout the Hebrew Bible, especially in discussions about alcoholic beverages. It typically signifies the consumption of wine or similar drinks, reflecting the ancient Hebrew view on such libations and their impacts. To grasp its meaning fully, one must analyze its usage within its context, examine its occurrences in ancient texts, and compare it with similar terms in related languages and cultures. Scholars widely concur that שֵׁכָר is associated with intoxicating beverages, a conclusion supported by its repeated appearances across biblical

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<sup>25</sup> William Patton, *Bible Wines or the Laws of Fermentation and the Wines of the Ancients* (New York: National Temperance Society, 1891), 45.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

passages. In Proverbs 31:6, the term "שֵׁכָר" denotes strong drink or intoxicating drink, often interpreted as "beer" or "alcohol" in various translations of the Bible.

**The Term יַיִן.** In both the Hebrew Bible and other writings, the most common term for wine is "יַיִן" (*yayin*), occurring 141 times throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>28</sup> When translated into Greek in the LXX, "יַיִן" is rendered as "οἶνος" (*oinos*). This Greek term specifically denotes fresh grape juice that has undergone fermentation.<sup>29</sup> Notably, both the KJV and the RSV interpret the Hebrew word "יַיִן" as "wine."<sup>30</sup>

יַיִן is the most often occurring term for wine in the Hebrew Bible and other writings. The origins of wine, as recounted in Genesis 9:20-21, can be traced to the Ararat region, where the cultivation of grapes for יַיִן began. Noah, after pressing these grapes into juice, indulged in the resulting libation, leading to his intoxication. The intricate process of winemaking is vividly depicted in tomb reliefs and paintings dating back to approximately 2250 B.C., notably seen in the tomb of Mereruka from the Sixth Dynasty at Saqqarah (Memphis). Similarly, around 1400 B.C., the tomb of Nakht from Thebes also features detailed illustrations portraying the various stages involved in the production of this ancient beverage.<sup>31</sup>

M. G. Easton suggests that the Hebrew term יַיִן carries the meaning of "boiling up" or "being in ferment," along with related ideas such as "trampled out." In addition to these common Hebrew and Greek words for wine, such as יַיִן and οἶνος, there are

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<sup>28</sup> Jordan, *An Offering of Wine*, 90–91.

<sup>29</sup> Jeff A. Benner, "Yayin, Oinos," *New Testament Greek to Hebrew Dictionary* (Virtualbook.com, 2010), 81.

<sup>30</sup> George Arthur Buttrick et al., ed., "Yayin," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible R-Z An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 849.

<sup>31</sup> Edward M. Blaiklock and R.K. Harrison, eds., "Yayin," *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 475.

several other terms also used.<sup>32</sup> These terms include, תִּירוֹשׁ (*Tīrōš*), עֲטִיס (*asis*), and חָמַר (*chamar*), hold significance in biblical context. תִּירוֹשׁ is often translated as "new wine" in the NIV and NASB, conveying a sense of freshness and novelty. It appears first in Genesis 27:27–28, during Isaac's blessing of Jacob, and again in Numbers 18. While the NASB opts for "fresh wine" in one instance, the NIV and NKJV prefer "new wine." Intriguingly, in Deuteronomy 12:17, all three translations agree on "new wine."<sup>33</sup>

However, תִּירוֹשׁ also encompasses a broader range of vineyard products, from a single grape to potent libations or strong beverages (Isaiah 65:8; Micah 6:15; Hosea 4:11).<sup>34</sup> Thus, תִּירוֹשׁ and יַיִן denote not two distinct types of wine, but rather the same wine at different stages, before and after fermentation.<sup>35</sup> עֲטִיס (*asis*) is occasionally translated as "sweet wine," appearing in passages such as Isaiah 49:26, Joel 1:5, Amos 9:13, and Song of Songs 8:2. According to Song of Songs 8:2, fruits other than grapes may be used to produce this wine. חָמַר (*chamar*) is the Aramaic term for wine, found in passages such as Daniel 5:1-2, 4, 23, Ezra 6:9, and 7:22. Its Hebrew cognate, חָמֵר (*chmr*), is seen in Deuteronomy 32:14.<sup>36</sup>

The ancient Israelites preferred יַיִן or οἶνος as their beverages. In the early church, wine came to symbolize the blood of Christ. This symbolism originates from Christ's first miracle, where he turned water into οἶνος, or "wine," as described in

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<sup>32</sup> Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature*, 692.

<sup>33</sup> Hedge, "The Issue Alcohol," 8.

<sup>34</sup> Kelly and Barry, "Tīrōš," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

<sup>35</sup> Hinckley G. Mitchell, "Tirosh and Yayin," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 10, no. 1, (1891): 72.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly and Barry, "chamar," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

John 2:1–12.<sup>37</sup> The Hebrew term יַיִן and the Greek word οἶνος are indeed both translated as "wine" in English Bible translations. In ancient contexts, the term "wine" could refer to either fermented or unfermented grape juice, depending on the context and the practices of the time. In many cases, particularly in religious contexts, it's understood that the wine mentioned could be either fermented or unfermented.<sup>38</sup> However, contemporary readers might mistakenly interpret "wine" as exclusively referring to fermented grape juice, considering the prevalent usage of the term in modern times. Such interpretation can result in misunderstandings of particular passages, particularly those addressing topics such as temperance or alcohol consumption.<sup>39</sup>

Certain modern translations strive to clarify this issue by using terms like "fermented wine" or "unfermented wine" when necessary. They may also include footnotes explaining the possible meanings of the original terms. Some translations use more specific terms such as "grape juice" or "new wine" to distinguish between unfermented and fermented wine.<sup>40</sup> The goal of Bible translators is to faithfully convey the meaning of the original text to modern readers, taking into account changes in language and culture over time. Providing clarification on the nature of the wine mentioned in the Bible is certainly one aspect of this endeavor.<sup>41</sup>

Based on the word study the Hebrew term יַיִן is used in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to grape juice in various forms, including both alcoholic and non-alcoholic

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<sup>37</sup> Kelly and Barry.(PAGE)

<sup>38</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001), 45.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

states. The context in which the term appears often determines whether it refers to fresh grape juice or fermented wine. In ancient times, the process of fermentation was not always as controlled as it is today, so even grape juice could naturally ferment if not consumed immediately.<sup>42</sup> In some instances, יַיִן may refer to fermented wine, which could be alcoholic. This is evident in passages that discuss drunkenness or the effects of wine on individuals. However, in other contexts, it may simply refer to grape juice or fresh wine, especially when it's used in ceremonial or religious contexts where intoxication is not the focus. Understanding the cultural and historical context of the Hebrew Scriptures is crucial in interpreting the usage of terms like יַיִן and recognizing the range of meanings they can encompass.<sup>43</sup> In Proverbs 31:6, the Hebrew word "יַיִן" translates to "wine" in English.

**The Term לְאוֹבֵד.** The Hebrew term "לְאוֹבֵד" (*le-oved*) combines the preposition "ל" (*le*), meaning "to" or "for," with the present participle form of the verb "אָבַד" (*avad*), which signifies "to perish" or "to be lost."<sup>44</sup> The verb "אָבַד" (*avad*) inherently carries connotations of destruction or ruin. The word "אָבַד" represents the disappearance of something. In its most emphatic form, "אָבַד" signifies "to perish or to cease to exist."<sup>45</sup> Various lexicons concur that the term אָבַד carries the meaning of

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<sup>42</sup> Patton, *Bible Wines or the Laws of Fermentation and the Wines of the Ancients*, 45.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>44</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. "Avad."

<sup>45</sup> Strong et al., "Avad," *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, 296.

"perish"<sup>46</sup> or "to perish."<sup>47</sup> In this construction, "ל" (*le*) serves as a preposition indicating direction or purpose, specifically highlighting the intended recipient of the action. "אוֹבֵד" (*oved*) is the present participle form of the verb "אָבַד" (*avad*), implying ongoing or continuous action. Thus, "לְאוֹבֵד" can be understood as "to the one perishing." The use of "לְאוֹבֵד" underscores the condition or state of the individual facing hardships.

Some scholars associate the phrase "who is perishing" with various individuals previously described in Proverbs, such as fools (1:32), the wicked (10:28; 11:7, 10), the false witness (19:9; 21:28), and the champion of harlots (29:3).<sup>48</sup> However, in Proverbs 31:6, the Hebrew term "לְאוֹבֵד" (*le-oved*) doesn't specifically point to a particular person but instead refers to a general category encompassing those labeled as "אוֹבֵד" (*oved*), meaning "perishing" or "lost." The verse suggests offering a strong drink to those undergoing distress or hardship, potentially as a form of solace or temporary relief. It doesn't focus on an individual but rather addresses a broader range of people in such circumstances.

**The Term לְמַרְי.** In Proverbs 31:6, the Hebrew term "לְמַרְי" (*le-marei*) is composed of two parts: the preposition "ל" (*le*), meaning "to" or "for," and the noun "מַרְי" (*marei*), which is derived from the root "מָרָה" (*marah*) which means

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<sup>46</sup> Francis Brown et al., "Avad," *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 1. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, Vol. I, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), s.v. "אָבַד." (*Avad*) means "perish" or "be destroyed"; in the Piel and Hiphil conjugations, it denotes "destroy."

<sup>47</sup> Ernest Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (TLOT)*, vol. 1, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), s.v. "Avad."

<sup>48</sup> David R. Tasker, "Proverbs," *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary*, ed. Jacques B. Doukhan et al. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2022), 914.

"bitterness,"<sup>49</sup> "angry, discontented, and heavy."<sup>50</sup> Essentially, "ל" (*le*) indicates direction or purpose, while "מָרִי" (*marei*) signifies "bitterness," originating from the root "מרה" (*marah*) which conveys the idea of bitterness or being embittered. Although both "מרה" and "מרא" convey the idea of bitterness, but "מרה" is more commonly used and can encompass both literal and metaphorical bitterness, while "מרא" emphasizes the harmful or poisonous nature of bitterness. While "מָרָה" and "מָרָה" share similar roots and convey related ideas of bitterness or distress, they have nuanced differences in specific contexts. It's crucial to carefully examine the context of each passage to understand the author's precise intended meaning. In Proverbs 31:6, the focus is on providing comfort or relief to those struggling with bitterness or heaviness of heart, rather than on the literal taste or sensation of bitterness. The term "לְמָרִי" highlights the condition of individuals experiencing bitterness or feeling embittered. The same expression, "bitter heart," is used elsewhere to describe fugitives seeking refuge with David while he was evading capture by King Saul (1 Samuel 22:2), as well as to illustrate the profound anguish experienced by Job (Job 7:11; 10:1).<sup>51</sup>

### Syntactical Analysis

Proverbs 31:6-7 artfully uses imperative verbs, sentences with direct objects, modifiers, coordination, independent clauses, and dependent clauses to command the provision of strong drink and wine to those in need, while also explaining the intended effect. The verb תִּנּוּ ("Give") is expressed in imperative form while יִשְׂתֶּה

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<sup>49</sup> David J.A. Clines, ed., "marah," *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 481-482.

<sup>50</sup> Strong et al., "marah," *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, 631.

<sup>51</sup> Tasker, "Proverbs," 914.

("Let them drink") is expressed in imperfect form. "תִּנּוּ" (*t'nu*) - is the imperative form of the verb נתן (*natan*), which means "to give."<sup>52</sup> In this form, it commands or requests the action of giving. So, syntactically, "תִּנּוּ" (*t'nu*) functions as the main verb in the imperative mood, indicating the action of giving. The subject of the imperative verb תִּנּוּ ("Give") is implied, typically understood by the reader as "You give." The "you" here is likely an indefinite plural imperative, addressing a general audience rather than any specific group. The term "indefinite" suggests that it's not directed at any particular group but rather to a broad audience. This interpretation is essential to distinguish it from second-person singular imperative commands found in specific verses (vv. 3, 4, and 8), which could be crucial for maintaining clarity and precision in translation or textual analysis.<sup>53</sup> "יִשְׁתֶּה" (*yishte*) - is the imperfect form of the verb שתה (*shatah*), which means "to drink."<sup>54</sup> In the context of Proverbs 31:6-7, the verb is conjugated in the third person singular masculine, indicating that the subject, implicitly understood, is a singular masculine entity. So, syntactically, "יִשְׁתֶּה" (*yishte*) functions as the main verb in the imperfect tense, describing the action of drinking.

תִּנּוּ יַיִן לְאֹהֲבָיִם "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish," - is an imperative sentence where the subject is implied ("you") and the verb is תִּנּוּ "give." "לְאֹהֲבָיִם" (*le'oved*) functions as a prepositional phrase modifying the verb "Give" (תִּנּוּ - *t'nu*) in the sentence. It specifies the recipients of the action, indicating that the strong drink should be given to those who are perishing. וַיִּיָּן לְמַרְיָאֵי בִּיטָר "and wine to those in bitter soul/ distress." - is another imperative sentence, continuing from the previous one. "לְמַרְיָאֵי" (*le'marei*) functions as a prepositional phrase modifying the verb "Give"

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<sup>52</sup> Strong et al., "natan," *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*, 677.

<sup>53</sup> Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31," 505.

<sup>54</sup> Jenni and Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. "shatah."

(תָּנוּ - *t'nu*) in the sentence, indicating the recipients of the action, suggesting that wine should be given to those whose hearts are bitter. The verb תָּנוּ "Give" is followed by the direct objects שָׁכָר "strong drink" and יַיִן "wine." Meanwhile, the verb יִשְׁתּוּהוּ "let them drink" implies its direct object from the context, referring to those who receive the strong drink and wine.

In Proverbs 31:6-7, the word וַיִּשְׁכַּח (ve-yishkakh) consists of two elements: וַ (ve) and יִשְׁכַּח (yishkakh). וַ (ve) - is a conjunction meaning "and" or "then," while יִשְׁכַּח (yishkakh) - is a verb derived from the root שָׁכַח (*shakhah*), meaning "to forget."<sup>55</sup> The form יִשְׁכַּח is a third-person masculine singular, qal imperfect verb with a vav consecutive prefix.<sup>56</sup> This form indicates a future action that is consecutive to a preceding action. In the context of Proverbs 31:6-7, the verb וַיִּשְׁכַּח (ve-yishkakh) can be translated as "and forget" or "then he will forget." This is part of the command given in these verses to give strong drink to those who are perishing and wine to those in distress to forget. Syntactically, וַיִּשְׁכַּח is a future action indicated by the qal imperfect verb form, connected to the preceding action through the vav consecutive prefix, and it functions as the main action of the clause within the overall sentence structure.

The clause וַיִּשְׁכַּח רֵישׁוֹ "and forget his poverty" and לֹא יִזְכֶּר-עֹד "remember his misery no more" are dependent clauses further explains the purpose or result of giving strong drink and wine. The conjunction וַ "and" is used to coordinate the actions of giving strong drinks and letting them drink. The clauses לְאִיִּבֶד "to the one who is

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<sup>55</sup> Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature*, 1572.

<sup>56</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, ed., "*shakhah*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. II, (TWOT) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 922. The Hebrew word "שָׁכַח" means "forget, ignore, and wither."

perishing" and לְמַרֵּי גַפְשׁ "to those in bitter distress" are dependent clauses modifying the action of giving, providing additional context about the recipients. The conjunction "וְ" connects the verbs "forget" and "remember," forming a parallel structure. This structure emphasizes the contrasting effects of strong drink and wine.

## Literary Context

### Wider Context

In Leviticus 10:9-11, there's a clear prohibition against priests and their sons partaking in שְׁכָר (strong drink) and יַיִן (wine) while on duty. This prohibition is serious, as those who disobey it face death as a consequence. It's not just about ritual purity; it signifies a deep disrespect for their sacred responsibilities. The use of שְׁכָר and יַיִן is depicted as impairing judgment, blurring moral distinctions. Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, illustrate this tragically. Under the influence of these substances, they entered the sanctuary with common fire, oblivious to the severity of their actions, and paid with their lives. This understanding is supported by scholars like Arthur J. Wolak, who highlights how שְׁכָר and יַיִן hinder one's ability to discern and follow divine guidance.<sup>57</sup>

In Numbers 6:3, it's clear that Nazarites were prohibited from consuming intoxicating drinks and wine. This restriction extended to all forms of intoxicants.

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<sup>57</sup> Arthur J. Wolak, "Alcohol and the Fate of Nadab and Abihu: A Biblical Cautionary Tale against Inebriation," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 41 (2013): 222–25. According to Arthur J. Wolak, the prohibition of יַיִן and שְׁכָר on the priests assigned to duty in Lev. 10: 8-11 take place almost immediately following the death of Nadab and Abihu. This indicates that since Nadab and Abihu had already broken the law, the warning needed to be expressed clearly. It is also important to remember that God gave Aaron the prohibition directly, bypassing Moses, which suggests that God wanted to explain to Aaron why his sons has died. The Midrash in Leviticus Rabbah makes several references to Leviticus 10:1-3, where it is said that "wine caused a separation between Aaron and his sons in the matter of the death penalty, just as an adder separates life from death." Here, it is evident that wine was the primary factor in the deaths of Aaron's two sons. R. Shim'on clarified: The two sons of Aaron perished solely as a result of their inebriation when they entered the tent of meeting. According to R. Pinhas, acting on behalf of R. Levi, Aaron's sons' primary offence was, in fact, intoxication.

Likewise, in Deuteronomy 29:5-6, when the Israelites were journeying through the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land, God did not include intoxicating drinks or wine as part of their provisions. In Isaiah 5:11–22, the prophet Isaiah strongly warns against the consumption of שֵׁכָר (*shekar*) and יַיִן (*yayin*), condemning them for their role in leading people into sin through addiction. Using the word "woe" repeatedly, Isaiah expresses deep sorrow and concern towards those who eagerly indulge in שֵׁכָר and יַיִן, getting up early to drink and staying up late to revel, as well as towards those who are skilled at drinking and mixing these intoxicants.<sup>58</sup>

Drunkenness leads the drinker down a path of instability, causing them to waver and stumble (Ps 107:27; Job 12:25). It triggers feelings of nausea and prompts vomiting (Isa 28:7-8; Jer 48:26), creating an environment ripe for frivolous talk and careless gossip (Ps 69:13[12]). Drunkenness can also impair one's mental faculties, as demonstrated by Eli's suspicions regarding Hannah (1 Sam 1:13-15). The intoxicated person becomes a striking symbol of foolishness and disarray, embodying one lost in a maze of confusion and lacking in wisdom (Job 12:25; Isa 19:13-14; Nah 3:11).<sup>59</sup>

Wine serves as a powerful symbol across various texts, embodying both joy and devastation and transcending spiritual and earthly realms. Its symbolism encompasses blessings, wisdom, and victories. In Isaiah 55:1, divine favor is depicted through the ability to acquire wine and milk without monetary limitations, portraying a realm of abundance. Proverbs 9:2, 5 associates wine with the essence of life, reflecting the strength gained from wisdom. In Zechariah 9:15, "drinking blood like wine" symbolizes triumph over adversaries, illustrating victory amidst conflict. Psalm 78:6f portrays God as a resolute warrior, akin to one awakening from a wine-induced

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<sup>58</sup> "Wine," *SDABC*, 4:121,124.

<sup>59</sup> Botterweck, Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 3.

slumber. The Song of Songs portrays the intimacy between bride and groom as sweeter than wine, transcending earthly pleasures. Deuteronomy 32:32 extends the metaphor, representing wine as a symbol of salvation and peace for the gentle world. Isaiah 25:6 depicts Yahweh's hospitality through a grand banquet for all nations, abundant with the finest wines, symbolizing a future of provision and communal celebration.<sup>60</sup>

The image of a cup of wine in Yahweh's hand serves as a powerful symbol of His judgment and wrath, not limited to Israel but extending to all nations. Those who have transgressed are required to drink from this cup until it's completely drained, as Psalm 75:9 emphasizes. Guided by Yahweh, nations face a calamity as a consequence of indulging in the luxurious lifestyle epitomized by Babylon's golden cup, a theme found in Jeremiah 51:7 and Zechariah 12:2, which draws a parallel with Jerusalem.

Partaking of God's cup signifies inviting misfortune upon oneself, as highlighted in Jeremiah 49:12, Lamentations 4:21, Ezekiel 23:31 onwards, and Habakkuk 2:16. When God permits His people to drink wine, it signifies either harsh treatment or destruction, as depicted in Psalms 60:5 and Jeremiah 13:12 onwards. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the term "*yayin*" is metaphorically used only four times. For example, in Deuteronomy 32:33, the "wine of the wicked" is likened to the serpent's poison, allegorically representing the sinful path leading those who are distant from God astray.<sup>61</sup>

Upon closer examination, the difference between Proverbs 31:6-7 and its broader context becomes clear. These verses present an instruction that might seem

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<sup>60</sup> Johannes G. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., "*Yayin*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. VI, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 64.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

unconventional and unsupported within the wider scope of the text. However, it's important to note that this directive is not isolated within the Bible's teachings. Throughout the New Testament, there are instances where wine is mentioned for medicinal purposes. Therefore, interpreting the instruction to offer wine to those who are perishing shouldn't be seen as conflicting with the overall biblical stance on alcohol. Instead, as suggested by Samuelle Bacciochi, it should be understood as a conditional directive intended to address specific circumstances.<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere in the Bible, there isn't a direct endorsement of strong drink as a medicinal remedy akin to Proverbs 31:6-7. However, other biblical passages do imply the utilization of wine or alcohol for specific purposes, such as for medicinal or soothing effects.

### **Immediate Context**

In the immediate context, the use of שֶׁכָּר (strong drink) and יַיִן (wine) is explicitly prohibited. This prohibition against alcohol is reiterated in Proverbs 31:4-5, specifically cautioning kings, rulers, or princes against indulging in such beverages. Proverbs 31:4 directly advises against the consumption of יַיִן and שֶׁכָּר by those in positions of authority. The rationale behind this prohibition, as outlined in Proverbs 31:5, is the potential impairment of judgment that excessive drinking may cause, leading to a disregard for laws and a distortion of justice, particularly concerning the welfare of the poor. The harmful effects of alcohol abuse extend beyond rulers; even ordinary individuals can suffer from its negative consequences. However, for rulers,

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<sup>62</sup> Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible*, 202.

the personal harm resulting from their alcohol consumption is compounded by the damage inflicted upon their subjects due to their negligent governance.<sup>63</sup>

The lessons drawn from these accounts echo throughout ancient texts, vividly illustrating the dire consequences of intoxication. Nabal's impulsive behavior led to his demise when David intervened (1 Samuel 25:36). King Elah's vulnerability during drunkenness paved the path to his assassination by Zimri (1 Kings 16:9-10). Similarly, Ben-hadad's overconfidence, fueled by intoxication, led to his defeat in battle (1 Kings 20:16-21). These narratives stand as stark reminders of the dangers inherent in recklessness and lack of restraint.<sup>64</sup>

In Proverbs 23:19-21, 29-35, the message is clear: excessive wine consumption is strongly discouraged. These verses highlight the risks associated with overindulgence in wine, warning against its potential to lead to poverty and a host of other negative consequences. From bloodshot eyes to physical altercations, from deep sorrow to profound distress, the harmful effects of excessive wine are vividly depicted. It's likened to a venomous serpent, capable of causing pain and confusion. Moreover, it's portrayed as a destabilizing force that dulls the senses and cultivates destructive habits.<sup>65</sup>

Proverbs 21:17 reinforces this message by cautioning against the love of wine. It emphasizes how this affection can ultimately result in destitution and ruin, serving as a stark reminder of the dangers inherent in seeking pleasure through excessive wine consumption. Proverbs 20:1 warns that שֵׁכָר "strong drink" leads to aggression, while

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<sup>63</sup> "Lemuel's lesson of temperance" [Proverbs 31:4-5], *The Seventh - day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown MD: Review and Herald, 1976), 3:1051-52.

<sup>64</sup> Botterweck, Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> "Excessive wine consumption is strongly discouraged," *SDABC*, 3: 1023.

יין "wine" prompts mockery. Those who fall for their allure are deemed foolish. This verse vividly illustrates how individuals, influenced by alcohol, mock religious values, and moral integrity, embodying the term "mockers."<sup>66</sup>

### Summary

Chapter 3 provides a thorough analysis of Proverbs 31:6-7, examining its literary, structural, grammatical, syntactical, and contextual elements within the Old Testament context. It takes into account the societal setting of ancient Israel and identifies the target audience as both individuals seeking practical wisdom and authorities responsible for societal welfare. As a part of wisdom literature, Proverbs 31:6-7 offers clear and actionable advice, utilizing parallelism effectively to deliver its message concisely. Structurally, the passage is part of a discourse attributed to King Lemuel's mother, featuring an introduction, admonitions, and a plea to safeguard the vulnerable, all emphasizing themes of discernment and compassion.

The examination of key terms in Proverbs 31:6-7, such as "שֶׁכָּר" (*skr*), "יַיִן" (*yayin*), "לְאוֹבֵד" (*le-oved*), and "לְמַרִּי" (*lemari*), reveals a wide range of meanings. "שֶׁכָּר" (*skr*) covers a spectrum from drunkenness to beer and intoxication in Hebrew. Its translations vary from "strong drink" to "fermented drink or beer" across different Bible versions. Scholars debate whether "שֶׁכָּר" specifically means wine or beer, taking into account historical, geographical, and linguistic contexts. Insights from ancient texts like the Peshitta and Vulgate, as well as references in the Babylonian Talmud, contribute to this ongoing discussion. Stuart advocates for translating "שֶׁכָּר" as "strong drink," highlighting the significance of historical context to prevent misinterpretation, given that it can also refer to non-alcoholic beverages.

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<sup>66</sup> "Wine," *SDABC*, 3: 1013-14.

The term "יַיִן" (*yayin*), meaning wine, has varied meanings in Hebrew Scriptures, referring to both fresh grape juice and fermented wine depending on context. Other terms like תִּירוֹשׁ (*Tirōš*), עָסִיס (*asis*), and חֶמֶר (*chamar*) are also significant. תִּירוֹשׁ often denotes "new wine," while חֶמֶר is the Aramaic term for wine. These nuances offer insight into ancient wine practices and understanding. Proverbs 31:6 also emphasizes "לְאוֹבְדֵי," directing attention to those in dire circumstances, suggesting the provision of strong drink as solace. Similarly, "לְחֶמְרִי" in the same verse indicates strong drink and wine for individuals grappling with bitterness.

The analysis of Proverbs 31:6-7 reveals a sophisticated structure, employing imperative verbs, modifiers, coordination, and clauses to communicate a directive regarding the provision of strong drink and wine to those in need. Imperative verbs like "תִּנוּ" (*t'nu*) and "יִשְׁתֶּה" (*yishte*) command giving and drinking, while modifiers specify recipients as individuals in distress. Conjunctions coordinate actions and offer context. This analysis underscores the deliberate construction of the passage, which seeks to alleviate poverty and misery through the provision of strong drink and wine.

The depiction of strong drinks and wine is complex, representing both prohibition and symbolism of judgment, blessings, and triumph. The prohibition is notably explored in ancient texts like Proverbs, where leaders are cautioned about the risks associated with strong drinks and wine. These risks include the impairment of judgment and the potential for injustice. Such warnings are illustrated in stories such as Nabal's downfall and King Elah's assassination. Moreover, Proverbs 23:19-21, 29-35 elaborates on the dangers of excessive wine consumption, depicting it as a route leading to poverty and suffering.

In the broader biblical context, there is a consistent emphasis on caution regarding excessive strong drink and wine consumption. Leviticus 10:9-11

specifically prohibits priests from drinking while on duty, using the example of Nadab and Abihu to illustrate the dangers of impaired judgment. Isaiah also condemns wine for its potential to lead people astray, symbolizing judgment and wrath.

Metaphorically, the Dead Sea Scrolls use wine to represent the influence of the wicked. Nevertheless, in certain contexts, wine can symbolize blessings and triumph.

Despite these warnings, Proverbs 31:6-7 suggests offering strong drinks and wine to the perishing, which aligns with its medicinal use in the New Testament. This indicates a conditional approach to strong drink and wine rather than conflicting with the overall biblical stance.

## CHAPTER 5

### THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION

The interpretation of the command regarding strong drinks and wine in Proverbs 31:6-7 has been criticized and misused as advocating for the moderate consumption of alcohol for pleasure or as a means of escapism, which seems contradictory to other biblical teachings condemning drunkenness and promoting sobriety. However, understanding the intended application of this command necessitates examining its context within the historical background and potential progression in the New Testament. To grasp the possible application of this command, it is essential to analyze its context by considering two key themes: compassionate outreach and the mysteries of wisdom.

#### **The Contextual Understanding of the Command**

Throughout history, wine has been widely acknowledged for its medicinal properties. The renowned physician Hippocrates emphasized the therapeutic qualities of both oil and wine, specifically mentioning their soothing and antiseptic attributes derived from the alcohol content in wine. He even prescribed a treatment for ulcers, recommending the application of a mixture of wine and oil after binding them with soft wool.<sup>1</sup> Strong drinks and wine were also given to people facing imminent death. "The permission to give strong drink to him that is ready to perish" in Proverbs 31:6

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1960), 606.

does not necessarily imply a recommendation of a strong drink as a beverage. Instead, it likely refers to a cultural practice of offering a stupefying alcoholic drink to individuals facing imminent death, particularly criminals before execution.<sup>2</sup> In ancient times, people often turned to alcoholic beverages and blends of narcotic herbs to alleviate the severe symptoms of illnesses. It's worth noting that their understanding of opiates and their management was notably limited compared to modern standards. The reliance on ancient remedies underscores the resourcefulness of our ancestors in dealing with health challenges, despite the absence of the medical knowledge and technologies we have today.<sup>3</sup> Alcohol in strong drinks and wine has been served and still serves medicinal purposes, but while alcohol has legitimate uses, excessive intake can impair cognitive functions.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Theme of Compassionate Outreach**

The use of a strong drink or wine for those in dire circumstances can be seen as an act of compassion, aiming to alleviate their pain and offer temporary relief from their troubles. When we examine Proverbs 31:6-7 alongside the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), we can see clear similarities between them and the progression of the medicinal uses of strong drinks and wine in New Testament times. In the parable, a Samaritan shows mercy and kindness to a man who has been robbed and injured, going out of his way to provide help and ensure his safety. Similarly, the

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<sup>2</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Hagerstown MD: Review and Herald, 1979), s.v. "wine."

<sup>3</sup> "Wine," *SDABC*, 3:1052–53. (See also what Joseph Exell said: that some people believe that the expression "ready to perish" refers to the practice of giving prisoners a drink of strong blended wine in order to dull their sense of misery. Nonetheless, there are some common circumstances of hardship and anguish where wine may be given with beneficial results. Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 686.

<sup>4</sup> James T. Draper, *Proverbs: Practical Directions for Living* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 1985), 106.

advice in Proverbs 31:6-7 emphasizes the importance of aiding those who are suffering.<sup>5</sup>

The Samaritan's actions exemplify a profound understanding of empathy, as he not only tended to the traveler's physical injuries but also provided solace and care for his emotional well-being. With genuine concern, the Samaritan used wine to alleviate the traveler's pain, demonstrating a deeply empathetic response to his suffering. By doing so, he transcended social barriers and embraced the wounded stranger as a fellow human in need, showcasing empathy in its purest form.

In ancient Palestine, it was a customary practice for people to use oil and wine as household remedies, often blending them to form a soothing salve.<sup>6</sup> This combination served a dual role: the oil provided relief by soothing the wound, while the wine acted as a disinfectant, efficiently cleansing and purifying the affected area.<sup>7</sup> Scholars widely endorse the notion that treating wounds with oil and wine was a widespread tradition in ancient times.<sup>8</sup>

Through this powerful narrative, Jesus emphasized the transformative power of empathy, inspiring generations to cultivate compassion and extend kindness to all,

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Bridges, "Proverbs," *A Geneva Series of Commentary: A Commentary on Proverbs* (Edinburgh: Bath Press, 1998), 618.

<sup>6</sup> "Wine," *SDABC*, 5:784.

<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, "Luke 9:51-24:53," *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 1033.

<sup>8</sup> Craig A. Evans, "Luke," *New International Bible Commentary*, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 179. The oil was used for its soothing properties, as described in Isaiah 1:6, while the wine, because of its acidic and alcoholic content, served as an effective antiseptic. David E. Garland, "Luke," *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 444–45. In the practice described in m. Sabb. 19:2, oil was applied skillfully to provide comfort to the wound, while wine was delicately poured over it to cleanse and disinfect. This passage highlights how oil and wine were combined in ancient times for the treatment of circumcision, serving both soothing and antiseptic purposes. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 208. Oil had dual purposes, serving in both medicinal and cleansing roles, while wine was primarily designated for disinfecting wounds.

irrespective of background or circumstance. Furthermore, Proverbs 31:6-7 prompts individuals to reflect on their capacity for empathy and compassion. They encourage people to consider the difficulty of others, especially those who are in dire circumstances. By extending kindness and support to those in need, individuals can play a role in fostering understanding and healing within their communities. In the context of redemption, the theme of compassion is crucial. Redemption involves not only personal transformation and forgiveness but also reaching out to others with empathy and understanding. Acknowledging the pain and struggles of others is essential in the process of redemption, as it allows individuals to connect on a deeper level and work towards healing and reconciliation.

### **The Profound Mysteries of Wisdom**

Proverbs 31:6-7 introduces a paradox within the broader themes of wisdom and folly in the book of Proverbs. Although these verses might appear contradictory to the warnings against excessive drinking in other parts of Proverbs (such as Proverbs 20:1, 23:20-21), a deeper look reveals a nuanced understanding of human suffering and the function of strong drink and wine in alleviating distress. The paradox arises from the juxtaposition of wisdom and the seemingly imprudent action of providing strong drinks to those facing severe circumstances. While Proverbs consistently condemns drunkenness and excess, it portrays strong drink as offering temporary relief amidst extreme suffering and misery. This unconventional perspective challenges conventional wisdom, implying that under certain conditions, the use of strong drinks may serve a pragmatic purpose.

Aligned with this concept, some scholars have highlighted that what may seem inappropriate in normal circumstances can become essential during emergencies. Actions usually considered unwise or even illegal can become wise or necessary

choices when urgency arises. For instance, offering a strong drink to someone facing imminent danger highlights the relevance of this principle. Similarly, giving revitalizing tonics to individuals on the verge of death due to factors like exposure, sudden injuries, malnutrition, or other causes emphasizes the critical importance of such interventions.<sup>9</sup>

Paul's advice to Timothy to use a small amount of wine for stomach discomfort aligns with the wisdom found in Proverbs 31:6-7. While this may seem contradictory to Paul's warnings against wine in other passages, like Ephesians 5:18, it's important to understand the specific situation that led Paul to give this recommendation. It should not be interpreted as an overall endorsement for the consumption of strong drinks and wine in every circumstance.<sup>10</sup>

In Paul's time, water throughout the eastern regions was contaminated and unsafe for drinking,<sup>11</sup> leading to widespread health risks such as dysentery.<sup>12</sup> Understanding Timothy's enduring health challenges, particularly his susceptibility to stomach issues, Paul was acutely aware of the potential harm caused by the polluted water. As a result, he recommended a direct remedy: administering a small quantity of wine as a medicinal solution.<sup>13</sup> The meaning of the Greek word οἶνος, translated as "wine," in 1 Timothy 5:23 is a subject of debate among scholars. Some argue that Paul was advocating for the consumption of a little fermented wine for medicinal

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<sup>9</sup> W. J. Deane et al., "Proverbs," *The Pulpit Commentary Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 608.

<sup>10</sup> Bridges, "Proverbs," 618.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Leggett, "1, 2 Timothy, Titus," *The Complete Biblical Library: The New Testament Study Bible: Galatians through Philemon*, ed. Ralph W. Harris et al. (Springfield, MO: World Library Press, 1991), 417.

<sup>12</sup> "Wine," *SDABC*, 7:314.

<sup>13</sup> Leggett, "1, 2 Timothy, Titus," 417.

benefits, based on historical evidence. While others suggest that Paul may have been referring to unfermented grape juice, aligning with biblical warnings against intoxication.<sup>14</sup> However, if Timothy was not prohibited from consuming unfermented wine, advising him to use it for his stomach issues would appear less justified.

Multiple commentators suggest that Paul's counsel to Timothy regarding the use of a little wine pertains to medicinal purposes. The suggestion by Paul is rooted in the widespread practice of using wine for medicinal purposes among both Jews and Greeks. The medicinal benefits of wine, especially in treating stomach problems, are evident in various historical sources such as the Talmud (Berakoth 51a; Baba Bathra 58b), writings of Hippocrates (Ancient Medicine 13), insights from Plutarch (Advice about keeping well), and observations made by Pliny (Natural History 2.19). Additionally, Kelly references Proverbs 31:6-7, although the interpretation of this passage may be subject to debate.<sup>15</sup> This instruction implies that Timothy has been limiting himself to water only, signaling his persistent stomach issues and frequent illnesses. Paul's recommendation of wine was typical, but specifying "a little wine" ensures that the remedy remains healthful and protects Timothy from the dangers of alcohol addiction (1 Tim 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7). This precaution could also reflect the ancient tradition of diluting wine significantly with water, as drinking undiluted wine was viewed as excessive.<sup>16</sup>

Proverbs 31:6-7 highlights the complexity of human experience and the limitations of rigid moralizing. They acknowledge that life is often messy and fraught

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<sup>14</sup> "Wine," *SDABC*, 7: 314.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon D. Fee, "1 and 2 Timothy, Titus," *New International Biblical Commentary*, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 135.

<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 845.

with difficult circumstances and that sometimes the most compassionate response may involve actions that appear contradictory to conventional wisdom. In this case, providing strong drinks and wine to those in dire circumstances is portrayed as a means of offering solace and respite from overwhelming hardship. Proverbs 31:6-7 serves as a reminder that wisdom is not always straightforward or easily applied in every situation. It requires discernment and an understanding of context, recognizing that what may seem foolish or unwise on the surface may be a pragmatic and compassionate response to the complexities of human suffering.

### **Summary**

This chapter explores the contextual understanding of the command in Proverbs 31:6-7, shedding light on its historical background. It's fascinating to discover that wine had medicinal uses even during the New Testament era, serving as a disinfectant for wounds and stomach issues. The link becomes clear when comparing Proverbs 31:6-7 with the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:34) and Paul's advice regarding the consumption of little wine in 1 Timothy 5:23. These narratives not only stress the importance of assisting those in need but also offer a nuanced perspective on the role of strong drinks and wine in critical situations. By examining Paul's guidance on wine in 1 Timothy 5:23, we can understand its relevance within the health concerns stemming from contaminated water in ancient times. Moreover, the chapter highlights the intricate nature of human experiences and the necessity for discernment when applying wisdom to various scenarios. It suggests that acts of compassion might sometimes challenge conventional and societal norms, emphasizing the significance of grasping context and embracing empathy when addressing human suffering.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter six is the culmination of our study, bringing together the discoveries from previous chapters. Expanding on the insights we have acquired, this chapter carefully synthesizes the conclusions regarding the medicinal properties linked to "strong drink" (שֶׁכָּר) and "wine" (יַיִן) as described in Proverbs 31:6-7. This synthesis is achieved through an examination of the passage and thoughtful consideration of various perspectives, leading to a nuanced comprehension of the topic.

#### **Summary**

Chapter 1 introduces our research, which examines the endorsement of "strong drink" and "wine" in Proverbs 31:6-7 within the context of biblical teachings on the consumption of strong drinks and wine. We acknowledge the apparent contradiction between this endorsement and other biblical passages that condemn the use of strong drinks and wine, prompting questions about its impact on our understanding of biblical directives. Our study aims to clarify the specific types of "strong drink" and "wine" mentioned in Proverbs 31:6-7 and their relevance in today's context. We outline the scope of our research, primarily focusing on Proverbs 31:6-7, and employ Roy E. Gane's "Progressive Moral Wisdom" approach as our methodology. Additionally, the chapter previews subsequent chapters, including a literature review, exegetical analysis, exploration of historical context, examination of redemption processes, and concluding reflections.

Chapter 2 examines the interpretation of "strong drink" (שֶׁכָּר) and wine (יַיִן) in Proverbs 31:6–7, presenting two contrasting viewpoints: the Conditional Permissive View and the Abstinence View. According to the Conditional Permissive View, Proverbs 31:6–7 allows for the consumption of שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן in specific situations, such as offering temporary relief during distress or acting as a remedy for those in need. Advocates argue that when used responsibly, strong drinks and wine can provide both physical and emotional comfort. In contrast, the Abstinence View opposes the consumption of שֶׁכָּר and יַיִן, interpreting Proverbs 31:6–7 as a directive for leaders to abstain from intoxicating substances. Advocates emphasize the importance of maintaining clear judgment and prioritizing responsibilities over indulgence, rejecting the idea of strong drinks and wine as a solution for those in need due to its detrimental effects, especially on vulnerable individuals.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth exploration of the historical and cultural significance of wine and potent elixirs in ancient Near Eastern societies. It traces the origins of wine in regions like Armenia, Georgia, and China, drawing from archaeological findings and ancient texts such as the Sumerian Pharmacopoeia, the Sino-Tibetan Pharmacopoeia, the Egyptian Medical Papyri, the Bible, and the Talmud. Through these sources, the chapter vividly showcases the diverse ways in which wine was utilized for healing purposes.

The chapter delves into how wine was used for medicinal purposes in ancient societies, demonstrating its effectiveness in treating various ailments such as digestive problems, skin conditions, women's health issues, and psychological disorders. Through an analysis of texts like the Sumerian Pharmacopoeia and the Egyptian Medical Papyri, specific remedies involving wine are uncovered, providing valuable insights into ancient medical practices. Furthermore, the chapter explores the

symbolic significance of wine in biblical stories, where it is depicted as a symbol of joy, intimacy, and renewal. It also presents instances where wine was recommended for health issues, illustrating how spiritual beliefs were integrated with medical practices in ancient times. Moreover, the chapter discusses the cultural and religious contexts surrounding wine in ancient Near Eastern societies. It shows how wine played a role in religious rituals, dietary customs, and social gatherings, highlighting its esteemed status as both a medicinal remedy and a cultural staple that significantly influenced daily life in ancient civilizations.

Chapter 4 focuses on Proverbs 31:6-7, aiming to uncover its literal meaning and broader significance within the Old Testament. The analysis explores its context, audience, genre, form, and structure. Although the exact setting is unspecified, it reflects the societal norms of ancient Israel, potentially in rural or courtly environments where wisdom literature was prevalent. The audience encompasses both common individuals seeking wisdom and those in positions of authority, emphasizing the universal relevance of Proverbs. Positioned as a prime example of wisdom literature, Proverbs 31:6-7 imparts practical wisdom and moral teachings through straightforward language and parallelism. It is presented within the counsel provided by King Lemuel's mother, offering guidance on various aspects of life, including cautioning against harmful behaviors and advocating for the vulnerable.

The chapter examines the meanings of key terms such as "שֶׁכָּר" (strong drink) and "יַיִן" (wine), highlighting their subtle variations across different contexts. It delves into terms like "לְאֹכֵל" (to the one perishing) and "לְמַרְי" (to those in bitter distress), providing insight into the hardships individuals face. Through detailed analysis, the chapter emphasizes the importance of offering solace through strong drinks and wine

to those in dire circumstances, while also cautioning against the risks associated with the misuse of strong drinks and wine.

Chapter 5 investigates the importance of Proverbs 31:6-7 in contemporary society, focusing on its relevance to redemption, compassion, and wisdom. It examines how strong drinks and wine were historically used for medicinal purposes, emphasizing their ability to relieve pain. Drawing parallels with biblical narratives such as the Good Samaritan and 1 Timothy 5:23, the chapter reveals the progression of the medicinal uses of strong drinks and wine even in the New Testament times and also the paradoxical nature of offering strong drinks and wine in times of distress, challenging conventional wisdom. This paradox suggests that actions deemed unwise under normal circumstances may become necessary in emergencies, emphasizing the complexity of moral decision-making.

### **Conclusions**

The examination of the endorsement of "שֶׁכָּר" and "יַיִן" in Proverbs 31:6-7 leads to several conclusions. Firstly, after analyzing the grammatical and historical contexts, it is apparent that "שֶׁכָּר" and "יַיִן" in Proverbs 31:6-7 refer to fermented beverages. Secondly, strong drinks and wine were commonly used for medicinal purposes during the ancient Near East and biblical times. It was customary to give individuals facing imminent death, particularly criminals before their execution, a strong alcoholic drink. Therefore, the directive in Proverbs 31:6-7 imply endorsing the medicinal use of strong drinks and wine, especially for those facing dire situations.

Thirdly, the directive found in Proverbs 31:6-7 concerning the consumption of strong drinks and wine does not promote the casual, recreational, or moderate use of strong drinks and wine. Instead, it advocates for a thoughtful consideration of when

and why such beverages should be provided. The command does not suggest that those in distress should independently turn to strong drinks and wine; rather, it implies that certain individuals are to administer them in response to specific circumstances. This action potentially signifies the provision of a medicinal remedy.

The use of fermented strong drinks and wine for medicinal purposes, as seen in ancient times, has significantly diminished in modern times. However, it's important to note that some modern medications contain alcohol in their formulations. These medications should be strictly avoided due to their well-established potential for addiction, making them among the most dangerous substances.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there are extremely rare circumstances in which such medications may be administered under the guidance of a qualified physician. These exceptional situations include cases of severe illness, traumatic injuries such as those resulting from major surgery or car accidents, and medical procedures requiring sedation or anesthesia. Additionally, certain psychiatric conditions require medication treatments falling under this category, as do drugs used for substance abuse detoxification.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Talbott Recovery Campus, *Medication Guide for a Safe Recovery: A Guide to Maintaining Sobriety While Receiving Treatment for Other Health Problems* (Atlanta, GA: Talbott Recovery Campus, 2014), 3, accessed 26 January 2024, <https://dopl.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/talbot-medication-guide.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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### **Education**

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies, Adventist University of Africa (AUA), Nairobi, Kenya. Degree conferred on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

Bachelor of Arts in Theology, University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (UEAB), studied at the Malawi Adventist University Campus (affiliated with UEAB). Degree conferred on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE). Awarded: December 2002.

### **Work Experience**

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