

JESUS, WINE, AND THE CROSS

The “Professor” with whom I corresponded with so long, made a big play on the language of Jesus and what was said about Him in the accounts where “wine” and “vinegar” were involved by the enemies of the Lord in His hour of agony. After much correspondence, the Professor, having rejected the ten (10) points wherein I pleaded with him to answer, said he would answer if I would deal with the matter of Jesus drinking alcohol on the cross. My reply did not please him. At one point I pointed out that Jesus refused to drink wine that was offered. Later, I replied that it was true that there was a second offer (this time of “vinegar,” Gr. *oxos*, a different word than *oinos* that was first offered Him), as in Matt. 27:29-34, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:35-36.

Only John clearly distinguishes between the vinegar offered Jesus at one point, in contrast with the times He was offered wine. First, we shall examine the passages where “wine” was offered Him, of which He refused to drink.

(1) **Matt. 27:28-34.** Matthew points out that Jesus had been “mocked,” “spit upon,” and “smote.” He was then taken to Golgotha where He was offered “vinegar” (KJV, or *oinos*.) “They gave him vinegar (KJV) to drink, mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.” I stated that I was with Jesus on this matter, and was chided and asked if I was still with Jesus when he “received” vinegar (*oxos*), which was a cheap drink of “sour wine” that the common people used.

(2) **Mark 15:26.** Mark simply says “And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.” Bear in mind that while Matthew says Jesus “refused to drink,” while Mark says “he received it not.”

(3) **Luke 23:35-36.** Luke says they “derided” Jesus, and “mocked” Him, while “offering him vinegar.” He does not say that Jesus tasted it, refused to drink, or received it not.

(4) **John 19:28-30.** This account appears to be separate from what the other writers said, as it is the only time Jesus actually said “I thirst”, and when a different drink (*oxos*) was offered. John states a few things that are pertinent to our understanding the occasion. He stated that this occurred while Jesus “knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.” The Professor maintains that this was a natural thirst, which was satisfied with the vinegar given Him, and that it contained a small amount of “alcohol,” meant that Jesus DID drink alcohol (at least this time) and this justifies our use of a drink or two of alcoholic beverages today. John states that there was a vessel full of vinegar, and that “they filled a sponge with vinegar and put it on hyssop, and put it to his mouth.” Verse 30 says Jesus “received the vinegar.” To put a sponge to the mouth of Jesus would hardly be classified as “drinking” such for pleasure, to set us an example to imbibe in alcoholic beverages. Remember, in Matthew’s account He **tasted** the wine, probably a few drops on His mouth and tongue, enough for Him to know what it was, and then rejected it, for He did not drink it. Now, this account in John simply says that Jesus **received** the vinegar. That is not to indicate that this time He actually **consumed it by drinking it**, but likely in the same manner the wine had been given him before, Who, upon “tasting” it this time to fulfill the scripture relating to the occasion. All the actions surrounding both accounts are so similar, that I would not want to be guilty of drawing a different conclusion on John’s statement, so as to use Jesus our Lord as an example of drinking alcohol today for pleasure. Shame on the man who would do so.

The Professor argues that Jesus having “received” the vinegar means He drank it because of His “thirst”. What about Jesus having “tasted” the wine before, but did “**not drink**” it? Mark records that they “gave him wine to drink, but he received it not” (meaning he did not drink it), while John says “they put it to his mouth” having “received the vinegar.” Let’s get the context of this occasion.

A quote from Ellicott’s Commentary explains it well.

“Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar—This vessel of the ordinary sour wine drunk by the Roman soldiers, was placed near in order to be given to those who were crucified. Thirst was always an accompaniment of death by crucifixion, and that the vessel of wine was prepared for this purpose is made probable by the mention of the sponge and hyssop.”

Before we leave these verses, we need to pay attention to what the “scripture” had said, that Jesus is **now** saying must be fulfilled. This scripture is in Psalms 69:19-21, which reads as follows, with emphasis given to highlight certain words.

“Thou hast known my **reproach**, and my shame, and my dishonor: mine **adversaries** are all before me. **Reproach** hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none. They gave me also **gall** for my meat, and in my **thirst** they gave me **vinegar** to drink.”

Please note that these were His enemies who reproached him, and gave him “gall” for food, and “vinegar” for His thirst—just as recorded in the New Testament. He refused both the gall and the vinegar (or wine). Vinegar from a sponge touching Jesus’ lips could hardly be considered as “drinking” it to satisfy His thirst. No doubt He **was** thirsty, but He actually said it to “fulfill the scripture” and what they “offered” Him was also part of the fulfillment. Part of the fulfillment about the drink as recorded by Matthew was only a part of the prophecy’s fulfillment. The scripture had said that Jesus would “thirst,” so in order to fulfill **everything** ABOUT the prophecy, Jesus had to SAY “I thirst.” David used the word “thirst” in his prophecy, and Jesus used the word “thirst” in its fulfillment. Then, Jesus obviously “received” the vinegar for its intended purpose, and only THEN could He say, “It is finished,” referring to the completion of the prophecies relating to His suffering.

Had Jesus wanted and received (drank) wine, He would have been violating Hab. 2:15 and Prov. 20:1, unless we establish that He **did** drink something on the cross as a means of deadening the pain. Barnes, in his commentary, wrote: “The meaning is that he was near death; or was ready to die. Who can show that the Redeemer when on the cross was not in his own meditations have gone over these very expressions in the Psalms as applicable to himself.”

Again, “They gave him wine to drink mingled with gall. This a clear reference to the LXX version of Ps. 69:21: ‘They gave me also gall [*chole*, Heb. *Rosh*] for my food; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.’ In Mk. 15:23, it says ‘wine mingled with myrrh.’ It is well known that the Romans gave wine with frankincense to criminals before their execution to alleviate their sufferings; here the *chole* or bitter substance used was myrrh.” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, II, p. 1167). Jesus had already suffered to this point, and now the vinegar was there at the **end** of His suffering, and Jesus could say, “it is finished.”

A point of interest is found in the writings of Alvah Hovey in Sept. 1886 in "*Sheker And Leaven In Mosaic Offerings*", page 16, when he wrote:

"Oxos is formed when vinous fermentation is not well regulated. Wine is converted into vinegar. It was **neither exhilarating nor intoxicating.**"

This being true, means that what Jesus may have consumed on the cross would in no way compare to intoxicating drinks of today, as their oxos (vinegar) was a drink that was soured and had lost it's fermentation. Burton Easton, in *International Bible Encyclopedia*, IV, p. 3051, confirms the above quotation. He states:

"Undeluted vinegar is of course undrinkable, and to offer it to a thirsty man is mockery (Ps. 69;21), but a mixture of water and vinegar makes a beverage that was very popular among the poor (Gr. oxos, oxukraton, Lat. posca—names also applied to diluted sour wine). It is mentioned in Nu. 6:3 (forbidden to the Nazarite) and again in the Gospels in the account of the Crucifixion. The executioners had brought it in a vessel (Jn. 19:29) for their own use and at first 'offered' it to Christ, while keeping it out of reach (Lk. 23:36);. But at the end the drink was given Him on a sponge (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48; Jn. 19:29-30)"

In summation, we observe that the word for vinegar here is different from the oinos Jesus had refused. This oxos could be only a cheap imitation of oinos, used at this point to relieve the suffering of one being crucified. The fact that John mentions the vessel that was there, illustrates the very **purpose** of it's presence, for Jesus to fulfill the prophecies about the occasion, in order to say, "It is finished." Just how much actually went into His mouth is not stated, but it surely had it's deadening effect as intended.

Jesus was **not** a "social drinker" as we observed in our previous article. No one was drinking with Jesus on the cross, for He was the One suffering so as to be given the vinegar by the soldiers, as a part of a prophetic utterance by David of old. If we choose to imbibe in alcohol for pleasure because Jesus "received" "vinegar" on the cross, we are vainly trying to justify a sinful practice by looking to a special occasion where Jesus obviously knew the vinegar was there, as John brings out. If we are ever at that point nearing the end of our lives, to do what Jesus did would not be sinful.