

# "Drinking In The Apostolic Church"

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## **Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:**

What's happened? You may be wondering! Has Dr. Bacchiocchi reneged on his promise to post his research on the 1260 days prophecy? Was he intimidated by some nasty allegations of apostasy and decided for the sake of survival to leave this subject alone? The answer is: ABSOLUTELY NOT.

For the past 10 days I have used every spare moment to read the valuable research of respected Adventist scholars dealing with the unique prophecy of the 1260 days. Surprisingly, some of them present similar interpretations to the one I have been formulating in my mind. It was humbling for me to discover that my "fresh" interpretation of this prophecy, is not that "fresh" after all. Other Adventist and non-Adventist scholars have reached similar conclusions before me.

Rest assured that I look forward with eagerness and anticipation to share with you this timely Bible study. I have been overwhelmed by the rich message of this prophecy for God's people. It is the only prophecy in the Bible that is repeated seven times with three equivalent time designations: three and a half years, 42 months, and 1260 days. It is a prophecy with a marvelous message of reassurance for God's people. It is a message of divine protection and preservation for believers called to witness amidst the persecution and opposition of various Antichrist powers and forces.

You will see that this sevenfold prophecy extends beyond the supremacy of the Papacy from 538 to 1798, to encompass other Antichrist powers as well as the witness of the church from the First to the Second Advent. This is truly a fascinating prophecy with a reassuring message for today.

The problem that I am facing in this moment is the lack of time to complete this timely study, because of so many speaking engagements in North America and overseas. I am leaving tomorrow, Friday, September 6, to speak at a rally sponsored by the Mount Sinai SDA Church, in Queens Village, New York. Upon my return I will be leaving for a 12 days lecture tour of Singapore and Malaysia from September 12 to 23. This means I do not have any free time to finish reading several valuable studies dealing with the prophecy under consideration.

To remedy the problem, I decided to post the third installment of our study on "THE BIBLE AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES." As you recall we interrupted this timely study with ENDTIME ISSUES No. 82, in order to address the current issues of Islam and Ellen White. At this time we continue our study on the biblical teachings on the use of alcoholic beverages, by focusing on "DRINKING IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH." This essay is excerpted from my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE: A BIBLICAL STUDY ON THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES*. This book has been favorably reviewed by scholars of different persuasions. If you do not have a copy, feel free to contact us at (616) 471-2915.

## RELEVANT STUDY

In many ways the drinking problem is far more serious inside and outside our Adventist church, than the interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy—a prophecy unknown to most Adventists. In the last college Bible class that I taught at Andrews University in the Spring quarter 2000, out of 60 students only 3 three of them had ever heard or studied the 1260 or the 2300 days prophecies. But all of them were aware or affected by the drinking problem. In fact, some of them shared their testimony with the class of how the Lord brought conviction to their hearts through our Bible study, and how they decided to pour down the drain their cans of beer or bottles of wine.

A study published in *ADVENTIST REVIEW*, October 29, 1987, indicates that 58 percent of our Adventist youth are experimenting with alcohol (pp.6-7). The drinking problem affects adults as well. The same paper indicates that 15 percent of Adventists between the ages of 30 and 40 find it acceptable to drink alcohol on social occasions.

A major factor contributing to the escalating drinking problem in the Adventist church, is the popular assumption that the Bible allows for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. A text frequently quoted to support this view, is 1 Timothy 5:23, where Paul counsels Timothy saying: “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” On countless occasions I have been asked to explain this text during my seminars. You will be pleased to know that this and other significant texts are examined in this newsletter.

You should find this newsletter helpful when dealing with church members or friends who appeal to certain Bible texts to justify their moderate drinking. Be sure to read the last part of this newsletter, entitled “ADMONITION TO ABSTINENCE.” It was a pleasant surprise for me to discover that both Peter and Paul admonish believers to be totally abstinent in preparation for Christ’s coming. Unfortunately, few people are aware of these admonitions, because the translators loved drinking too much, and they chose to translate figuratively as “be sober” or “be temperate” the Greek verb *nepho*, which is a compound of two words, *ne + pino*, that is, “do not drink” or “be abstinent.”

## RADIO INTERVIEW

It seems that the subject of “THE CHRISTIAN AND ALCOHOL” is gaining considerable attention. In recent months several Christian Radio stations have interviewed me on this subject. One live phone interview was conducted by a popular Christian radio station in Sydney, Australia. Today, September 4, I was interviewed for the second time in a month by Marty Stacy, the host of a popular radio talk-show in the station KCRO in Omaha, Nebraska.

It was fun responding to questions from listeners who were desperately trying to find a justification for drinking alcoholic beverages. One of them identified himself as a former Adventist. He argued that fermentation is a natural process established by God, so it cannot be bad. What a silly argument! Decay and death are also natural processes, but they are hardly good.

Marty has received the Sabbath books I mailed him and is reading them. He told me today that when I return from Singapore, he wants me to talk about the Sabbath in at least two of his radio talk shows. I appreciate this opportunity to share the Sabbath message with the listening audience of Omaha, Nebraska.

## THE RESPONSES TO MY LAST NEWSLETTER

The last newsletter No. 88 generated over 1000 responses from all over the world. Over 90% of them were very favorable. Many readers expressed appreciation for helping them to understand the limitations of Ellen White while at the same time affirming the validity of her prophetic gift. I will cite below a few of them as an example.

But, several fellow-believers were sorely disappointed with me. They interpreted by plea for a balanced understanding of Ellen White as a veiled attempt to discredit her authority in our church. This allegation is totally untrue. I firmly believe that Ellen White has been and remains a constant source of spiritual guidance for millions of Adventists around the world. All what our church stands for in terms of her message and mission is largely due to the prophetic guidance of Ellen White.

Accepting the prophetic leadership of Ellen White, does not mean that we must cover up her limitations, in order to make her the final infallible authority on all doctrinal or historical questions. This policy of concealment has caused many Adventists to become bitter against Ellen White and our church.

What I wrote in the last newsletter about the nature of Ellen White's inspiration and the limitation of her authority on historical and doctrinal question, is essentially what our Adventist church has been trying to communicate during the past 20 years. Our Adventist church has invested over half a million dollars to sponsor the scientific research conducted by Fred Veltman, Ph.D., a NT professor from PUC. The research was designed to establish the extent of the literary dependency of THE DESIRES OF AGES. The results were rather disconcerting. Ellen White borrowed far more than most Adventists had ever imagined. The whole research is documented in four volumes that you can consult in our libraries.

Since Veltman's research, several Adventists have written books and articles designed to explain the limitations and inaccuracies found in Ellen White's writings. Herbert Douglas, former President of Pacific Press and a respected conservative scholar who subscribes to my newsletter, responded by informing me that his book THE LORD'S MESSENGER discusses at length the same problems I presented in my newsletter. In fact, he went as far as to say that had I read his book, I could have saved the time and effort of writing the newsletter. I plan to read this book.

Other readers have informed me that George Knight, Ph. D., a professor at our Andrews University Theological seminary, also has written a couple of books addressing the problems of EGW's writings. I have not had the chance to read these books, partly because this subject has never been an issue for me.

The most compelling manuscript I read is written by Graeme Bradford, a theology Professor at Avondale, Australia. His book MORE THAN A PROPHET will soon be published with the endorsement of our church leaders by one of our publishing houses. This book will help our people develop a balanced view of Ellen White more than any other study available at this time. This view is shared by the Seminary professors who have reviewed the manuscript.

Besides the books mentioned, many articles have been published in our church papers, dealing with the nature of Ellen White's inspiration, her use of sources, and the inaccuracies in her writings. Since to prepare a complete bibliographic listing is time consuming, I mentioned only the following titles in my newsletter: Arthur White, "Toward an Adventist Concept of Revelation," (4 parts series, Adventist Review 155, January 12, 19, 26, Feb 2, 1978; and "E. G. White Historical Writings," (a 7 part series), Adventist Review 156, July 12, 19, 26, August 2, 9, 16, 23; Neal Wilson, "The Ellen G. White Writings and the Church," Adventist Review 158, July 9, 1981; Warren H. Johns, "Ellen White: Prophet or Plagiarist?" Ministry 55, June 1982, pp. 5-19; Robert W. Olsen, "Ellen G. White's Use of Historical Sources in The Great Controversy," Adventist Review 161, February 23, 1984; Fred Veltman, "The Desires of Ages Project: The Data," Ministry 62,

October 1990, pp. 4-7; and "The Desires of Ages Project: The Conclusions," Ministry 63, February 1991, pp. 15-18; and Full Report of the Life of Christ Research Project, 4 volumes, Washington, D. C., 1988.

I hope that I made my point clear. Those who accuse me of discrediting Ellen White, in reality they are rejecting the ongoing efforts our Adventist church to tell the truth about Ellen White. Covering up the limitations and inaccuracies of Ellen White, only plays in the hands of our critics who are only too glad to capitalize on such policy to defame our church and our prophet.

Some readers wrote me saying that they do not know of a single Adventist who agrees with what I wrote about the limitations of Ellen White. They question the credibility of my report about the hundreds of positive responses I have received from Adventists of all walks of life. The best way for me to respond to this allegation, is to post below a few responses without giving the name of the writers. Incidentally, I spent this whole week trying to acknowledge with a short sentence my appreciation for the over 1000 messages of appreciation received. These testimonies speak for themselves. Please take time to read them.

#### **A RECENTLY RETIRED ADVENTIST NAD UNION PRESIDENT WROTE:**

Dear Dr. Bacchiocchi,

I have disagreed with your stance on some church issues, particularly women in ministry, but my past disagreements pale compared to my admiration of your latest treatment of Ellen G. White as a prophet. I find it courageous and very timely. Only a theologian with your conservative credentials could explain the topic as you have without incurring fatal professional and personal damage. You remind me of Richard Nixon opening China for American acceptance.

I grew up in a home and a culture that practically worshiped Sr. White as a saint. She settled arguments and often cut off debate. I thought the analogy to the infallibility of the pope was both clever and correct. I have no personal doubt about her divine prophetic gift, but it must be balanced by reason and research. You have started the church along the road that has every possibility of leading to Spirit-filled reason and Godly research

I had read the *Spectrum* article, so was not surprised by your material, but the difference in the information coming from that "liberal, rebellious journal" and coming from a "traditional, one-of-our-kind conservative" is the difference between night and day. Or some might say between Lucifer and Gabriel. You speak effectively to the constituency that most needs to hear the message you presented.

I know from past observation that you will not back down from what you think is right. You need to know that many of us middle-of-the-road Adventists are backing you this time.

#### **AN ADVENTIST LADY WITH A DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY DEGREE WROTE:**

"I just read your newsletter and I am in total agreement with what you said about Mrs. White. . . . The Lord has called you to provide some special insights and as tired of being taken to task as you might be, know that there are many people who are blessed by your studies and thank the Lord for what He is sharing through you."

#### **AN ADVENTIST SCIENTIST FROM A LEADING AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WROTE:**

The fear that telling the truth about Ellen White might unsettle the faith of the laity, is based on the assumption that many of our church members are not mature enough to accept a more human, realistic view of her prophetic gift. This assumption is only partly

true, because the vast majority of Adventists are already bombarded with negative propaganda about Ellen White. They are sensible enough to distinguish between truth and error. Amen to that!

Thanks for all the hard work you have put into this research. It has improved my understanding of our Church's history and given me new insight into the less than straightforward relationship between our beliefs and EGW's writings. As a former Baptist drawn to the Adventist Church 15 years ago I was never completely comfortable with the dependence of EGW on our Church's outlook on so many issues. Couple that with the negative inputs I have received from my parents for so many years who left the Church in my youth for many of the reasons you have discussed in your emails (I've been sending these letters to them too - They are shocked that these emails are coming from an Adventist scholar).

Your view on the prophetic role of EGW's writings are new and refreshing to me. In fact, I'm feeling inspired to begin reading her books, that up to now I have been less than committed to doing due to my reservations about her "authority" of the scripture that has been shouted from the Adventist roof tops for as long as I can remember. Also, I've been sharing this news letter with several non-Adventist friends who always viewed the Adventist doctrine with a great bit of skepticism. We've had a good many discussions of late, and I feel that we are all learning a great deal and coming closer to God in the process.

#### **A RETIRED ADVENTIST PASTOR WROTE:**

I just finished reading the ENDTIME ISSUES No. 88 and I feel moved to respond. To introduce myself, I am a retired SDA pastor approaching 90 years of age. I have received all my education in Adventist schools. Through the years I have believed and preached that Ellen White is the inspired prophet to the remnant church.

For the first time I have learned through your newsletter that there was a Bible Conference in 1919 when our church leaders discussed and struggled over the fact that there inaccuracies in EGW's writings. This fact is totally unknown to most of our people and if brought to their attention, it will cause great distress. What is our church to do? Apparently our church leaders in the past did not know what to do and so they "swept the problem under the rug." I am very sorry that they did that.

Your 41 page document impressed me greatly. I appreciate the beautiful spirit expressed in it. I stand with you in the solid belief that Sister White is the Lord's messenger to our movement and that our doctrines are all supported by scripture. I believe that the Lord is using you to bring into view a more correct concept of the relationship of her writings to the Bible. I am enlightened but unshaken in my faith.

Don't be discouraged, dear brother, in the least. God's hand is over His work and the truth is going to triumph! I am praying for you.

#### **AN ADVENTIST PROFESSIONAL WROTE:**

Thank you for having the intestinal fortitude to tell the truth about Ellen White; it's refreshing coming from a member and a scholar of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

#### **A LOCAL ADVENTIST ELDER WROTE:**

I appreciate very much the attitude you have taken toward the writings of Ellen White vis-a-vis scriptural prophecy. It is encouraging to know that such a respected Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholar as yourself is not afraid to pursue certain lines of study, simply because they disagree with Ellen White's interpretation.

It may be that some folks will be disconcerted a bit by certain facts regarding Ellen White's ministry and the Church's choice not to be completely candid about her. If that is

to happen, however, the sooner the better: If we have areas of vulnerability in our positions or understanding, it is wise to rectify them now while there is time. It is far better to be disillusioned now and have time to regroup than to wait until the coming of a severe trial. In helping to bring such things to light, Dr. Bacchiocchi, I consider you are performing a valuable and important service for our church; and I applaud you for it.

**AN ADVENTIST FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA WROTE:**

I have been reading your newsletters with much interest. It is refreshing to see a respected Adventist theologian speaking candidly and with authority about Ellen White's writings. You have made every attempt in your newsletters to be positive about her work while pointing out the possibilities of inaccuracies.

Unfortunately there will always be people who are unable to accept that she was inspired by God and was truly a prophet, while also being subject to the failings and limitations of humanity. For them, any attempt to place limitations on her work will be seen as an attempt to defame and negate her work. Obviously you have made no such attempt, but rather you to encourage people to test her writings by scripture and reliable historical records.

Please, continue with your research and continue to tell us of your findings. There will be some who will reject the very thought of any new study. There will be many more who will study your work against the Scriptures for themselves to see if your work has merit. May you richly receive God's blessings as you continue to freely pass on the results of your many hours of study.

**THE LOCAL ELDER OF ONE OF OUR LARGEST SDA CHURCHES WROTE:**

Thank you for ENDTIME ISSUES No. 88. At last a window is opening and I hope the entering fresh air of the 21st century will revitalize our beloved denomination.

I will continue to pray for you, the church, the leadership and those whose names were used in your last essay. If we do not clean house and become relevant in this century, I am afraid our denomination will not be involved in the last message.

**AN OLD TIME MEDICAL DOCTOR WROTE:**

What a breath of fresh air! For years I have struggled with the accepted interpretations that did not seem to fit how I read Scripture.

I know you will receive heavy flack for your position, for I've seen how the enemy can distort, lie, accuse, ostracize, isolate and discourage. But I've also felt the uplifting hand of the Lord. The air's been stale long enough. Its time to let in some fresh air. And if we continue to trust the Lord, He WILL lead. Victory is not far ahead!

**AN ADVENTIST LAWYER WROTE:**

Count me as your friend and ally in this latest controversy, which has caused the uproar. Those who would make Ellen White a straitjacket are doing her and the Church a disservice.

Highest regards,

The sampling of responses represent only a fraction of the 1000 plus messages received. Yet, they should suffice to show that Adventists from all walks of life welcome the opportunity to learn the truth about Ellen White. They appreciate the opportunity to learn the truth from a committed Adventist scholar whose desire, is not to defame her, but to enhance her legitimate contributions to our Adventist church and personal lives.

## **SPECIAL OFFERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END**

At the end of this newsletter you will find the special offers on my publications, the calendar of my weekend seminars, and some important announcements. You will find some valuable information that you do not want to miss, especially the forthcoming appearance of the famous Adventist Artist Nathan Greene on the QVC Network.

## **“DRINKING IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH”**

The importance of the Apostolic Church as a model for Christian beliefs and practices extends to her teachings on the use of alcoholic beverages. The way the apostles understood, preached and practiced the teachings of Jesus and of the Old Testament regarding alcoholic beverages is fundamental to determine whether we as Christians today should take our stand on the side of moderation or on the side of abstinence.

The specific New Testament references to “wine”(oinos) outside the four Gospels are thirteen,<sup>1</sup> eight of which occur in the book of Revelation, where “wine” is used mostly symbolically to represent either human depravity or divine retribution. In addition to the texts mentioning “wine” specifically, there are in the New Testament over twenty passages admonishing Christians to be “sober” or “temperate.” In most cases, as we shall see, these admonitions are directly related to drinking practices. We shall briefly examine first some of the wine-texts and then some of the admonitions to abstinence.

### **ACTS 2:13: “FILLED WITH NEW WINE”**

The apostles had scarcely begun their messianic proclamation when they were accused of drunkenness. On the day of Pentecost the first company of believers received the gift of tongues, enabling them to preach the Gospel in the languages of the people gathered for the feast at Jerusalem. While thousands believed in Christ as a result of the miracle, others began mocking the disciples, saying: “They are filled with new wine” (Acts 2:13).

Some assume that the mockers would not have accused Christians of being drunk unless they had seen some Christians drinking alcoholic wine on previous occasions. The weakness of this reasoning is that it assumes that the accusation of the mockers was based on factual observation of Christian drinking. Mockers, however, do not necessarily base their slander on factual observation. Moreover, if the mockers really wished to charge the disciples with drunkenness, they would have accused them of being filled with “wine” (*oinos*) and not with “grape-juice” (*gleukos*).

**The Irony of the Charge.** In view of the established meaning of *gleukos* as unintoxicating grape juice, the irony of the charge is self-evident. What the mockers meant is “These men, too abstemious to touch anything fermented, have made themselves drunk on grape juice.” Or as Ernest Gordon puts it in modern speech, “These drys are drunk on soft drink.”<sup>2</sup>

One can hardly fail to see in the irony of the charge that the apostles were drunk on grape juice (their usual beverage) an indirect but very important proof of their abstinent lifestyle and inferentially of the abstemious life-style of their Teacher.

Historical confirmation of this practice is provided by the testimony of Hegesippus, who lived immediately after the apostles. Writing regarding “James, the brother of the Lord, [who] succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles,” Hegesippus says: “He was holy from his mother’s womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh.”<sup>3</sup> We can assume that the strict abstinent life-style of James, who for a time served as the presiding officer of the Jerusalem Church, served as an example for Apostolic Christians to follow.<sup>4</sup>

### **EPHESIANS 5:18: “DO NOT GET DRUNK WITH WINE”**

A powerful Biblical indictment against intoxicating wine is found in Ephesians 5:18, where Paul admonishes the Ephesians, saying: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). The passage consists of two major statements placed in contrast (antithesis) to each other: “drunk with wine” *versus* “filled with the Spirit.”

The antithesis suggests that the contrast is not between moderation and excess, but between fullness of wine and fullness of the Spirit. The two statements point to an inherent incompatibility of nature and operation between the *sources* of such fullness, namely, inebriating wine and the Holy Spirit. Such a mutual incompatibility precludes the sanction for a moderate use of intoxicating wine.

**What is Debauchery?** Paul's admonition "Do not get drunk with wine" is followed by a warning which in the RSV is rendered "for that is debauchery." A literal translation of the Greek text would read: "And do not get drunk with wine, in which [*en ho*] is debauchery [*asotia*—literally, 'unsavableness']." The RSV rendering of "*en ho*—in which" with "for that" makes the condition of being drunk with wine, rather than wine itself, the subject of "debauchery." This construction of the sentence is based not on any exegetical necessity of the text, but on the assumption that the moderate use of fermented wine was allowed in New Testament times.

Historically, numerous translators and commentators have seen "wine" rather than the state of drunkenness as the cause of debauchery. The reason is the position of *oino* ("with wine"), which in Greek comes immediately before the relative "in which." Support for this is provided also by the fact that the words "do not get drunk with wine," as *The Interpreter's Bible* commentary points out, "are cited from Prov. 23:31 (the LXX according to Codex A),"<sup>5</sup> where the text condemns the use of intoxicating wine ("Do not look at wine when it is red"), rather than its abuse.

Among the ancient translations which render Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation of intoxicating wine itself, mention can be made of the famous Latin Vulgate (about A. D. 400), which reads: "*et nolite inebriari vino, in quo est luxuria*" ("And be not inebriated with wine, in which is voluptuousness"). The connection between *vino* "wine" and *quo* "which" is unmistakable in this Latin translation, because the relative *quo* has the same neuter gender of *vino*, upon which it depends.

**Modern Translations.** Numerous modern translations follow the Vulgate in its faithful literalness. For example, the French Synodal Version reads: "Ne vous enivrez pas de vin: car le vin porte à la dissolution" ("Do not inebriate yourselves with wine, for wine leads to dissoluteness"). To remove any possibility for misunderstanding, the translators have repeated the word "wine" in the relative clause. The same clear connection is found in the French translation of David Martin, in the French Version d'Ostervald, in the margin of the New American Standard Bible, in the Robert Young translation, in the Good News German Bible ("Die Gute Nachricht"), in the Italian Protestant version Riveduta by Giovanni Luzzi, as well as in the Italian Catholic Version produced by the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

In the light of the numerous ancient and modern translations which have rendered the relative clause of Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation not of drunkenness but of wine itself, it would appear that on account of their predilection for wine some English translators have chosen, as Ernest Gordon puts it, to "save the face of wine while condemning drunkenness."<sup>6</sup>

## **1 TIMOTHY 5:23: "USE A LITTLE WINE FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR STOMACH"**

When the subject of wine in the Bible is brought up, the first text which seems to come to mind to most people is 1 Timothy 5:23, where Paul counsels Timothy saying: "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" This text has been used during the past nineteen centuries by countless people to justify their drinking alcoholic beverages. Thus, it is important for us to establish the nature of Paul's counsel and its application for us today.

**The Nature of Paul's Advice.** Paul's advice to Timothy must be regarded first of all as an expression of paternal concern and not as a mandatory injunction. The apostle is not *ordering* his beloved son in the Gospel to drink wine freely; rather he advises him to use a *little* wine "for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."

The prudent caution of the apostle's language is most significant. He does not say, "No longer drink water," but rather, "No longer drink *only* water." He does not say, "Drink wine," but rather "use a little wine with water." He does not say, "for the physical pleasure of your belly," but rather, "for the medical need of your stomach." Even if the "wine" were fermented, this text does not support its regular use in any way. He did not say to Timothy, "Drink . . ." but "Take . . ." The verb "take" is used by a doctor when prescribing the dosage of a medication to a patient. Similarly the adjective "little" implies a *very moderate* use of wine. This sounds more like a doctor's prescription to a patient than a general principle for all people.

**Timothy Had Been an Abstainer.** Another fact often ignored is that the advice "No longer drink *only* water" implies that Timothy, like the priests and Nazirites, had abstained until that time from both fermented and unfermented wines, presumably in accordance with the instructions and example of Paul. Earlier in the same epistle Paul tells him to require of a Christian bishop to be not only abstinent (*nephalion*), but also a non-participant at drinking places and parties (*me paroinon*—1 Tim 3:2-3). It is reasonable to assume that the apostle would not have instructed Timothy to require abstinence of church leaders without first teaching him such a principle. The fact that Timothy had been drinking only water implies then that he had been following his master's counsel very scrupulously.

The abstinence of a Christian minister was presumably based on the Old Testament legislation prohibiting priests to use intoxicating drinks (Lev 10:9-10). The natural feeling would be that a Christian minister should be no less holy than a Jewish priest, especially since the *reason* for the Mosaic law remained the same: "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses" (Lev 10:10-11). The principle of abstinence was not violated by Paul's recommendation, because the use of a little wine was recommended not for the pleasure of the belly but for the medical need of the stomach.

**The Kind of Wine.** It is generally assumed that the wine Paul recommended to Timothy was alcoholic. But this is by no means certain, for two reasons. First, because the term *oinos* ("wine"), as we have shown, was used in a generic way to denote either fermented or unfermented wine. Second, because there are historical testimonies attesting the use of unfermented wine for medical purposes.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) recommends the use of a sweet grape juice, called *glukus* in Greek, because, he says, "though called wine [*oinos*], it has not the effect of wine . . . and does not intoxicate like ordinary wine."<sup>7</sup> Athenaeus, the Grammarian (A.D. 280), specifically counsels the use of unfermented "sweet wine" (*glukon oinon*) for stomach disorders. He writes: "Let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, especially that kind called *protropos*, the sweet Lesbian *glukus*, as being good for the stomach; for sweet wine [*oinos*] does not make the head heavy."<sup>8</sup> Here we have advice which sounds strikingly similar to that of Paul, with the difference that Athenaeus qualifies the kind of wine recommended, namely, the sweet wine, called "lesbian" because its alcoholic potency had been removed.

A similar advice regarding the medical use of wine is given by Pliny (A. D. 79), a contemporary of Paul and author of the celebrated *Natural History*. He recommends using a boiled, unfermented wine called *adynamon* for sick persons "for whom it is feared that wine may be harmful."<sup>9</sup> He also recommends to avoid the side effects of alcohol by using wines whose alcohol content had been removed through filtration: "Wines are most beneficial when all their potency has been overcome by the strainer."<sup>10</sup>

In light of these testimonies, it is reasonable to assume that the wine recommended by Paul to Timothy may well have been unfermented. Ellen White supports this conclusion, saying: "Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake and oft infirmities, but he meant the unfermented juice of the grape. He did not advise Timothy to take what the Lord had prohibited."<sup>11</sup>

## ADMONITIONS TO ABSTINENCE

The apostolic admonitions to abstinence are expressed through the Greek verb *nepho* and the adjective *nephalios* (1 Thess 5:6-8; 1 Pet 1:13; 4:7; 5:8; 2 Tim 4:5; 1 Tim 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2). There is noteworthy unanimity among Greek lexicons on the primary meaning of the verb *nepho* as "to abstain from wine" and of the adjective *nephalios* as "abstinent, without wine."<sup>12</sup>

This meaning is attested in the writing of Josephus and Philo, who were contemporaries of Paul and Peter. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus writes of the priests: "Those who wear the sacerdotal garments are without spot and eminent for their purity and sobriety [*nephalioi*], not being permitted to drink wine as long as they wear those garments."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Philo explains in his *Special Laws* that the priest must officiate as *nephalios*, that is, totally abstinent from wine, because he has to carry out the directions of the law and must be in a position to act as the final earthly court.<sup>14</sup>

If Josephus, Philo and a host of other writers used *nepho/nephalios* with the primary meaning of "abstaining from wine," we have reasons to believe that Paul and Peter also used these terms with the same meaning. This conclusion is supported, as we shall see, by the context in which these terms are used. Yet these words have been usually translated figuratively in the sense of being "temperate, sober, steady." Such inaccurate translation has misled many sincere Christians into believing that the Bible teaches moderation in the use of alcoholic beverages, rather than abstinence from them. Let us examine some of the apostolic admonitions to abstinence.

**1 Thessalonians 5:6-8.** In his letter to the Thessalonians Paul admonishes the believers to "be sober" in view of Christ's sudden and unexpected coming, saying: "So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober [*nephomen*]. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober [*nephomen*], and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thess 5:6-8).

This passage consists of a number of contrasting parallels: light and darkness, day and night, waking and sleeping, to be sober and to be drunk. In light of the contrasts between the sons of the day who are sober and those of the night who are drunk, it is evident that the exhortation to "be sober" means not merely to be mentally vigilant but primarily to be physically abstinent.

This conclusion is supported by the connection between sobriety and wakefulness: "Let us keep awake and be sober" (v. 6). The first verb, *gregoromen*, refers to mental watchfulness and the second, *nephomen*, to physical abstinence. Otherwise it would be a needless repetition (tautology): "Let us keep awake and be awake." It is evident that Paul connects mental watchfulness with physical abstinence, because the two go together. Mental vigilance in the New Testament is often connected, as we shall see, with physical abstinence. This will become clearer as we consider the other passages in question.

**1 Peter 1:13.** The admonition to physical abstinence, expressed through the verb *nepho*, occurs again three times in the first epistle of Peter (1:13; 4:7; 5:8). It is noteworthy that in all the three texts, Peter's exhortation to abstinence is given in the context of readiness for the imminent return of Christ. This implies that Peter, like Paul, grounds his call to a life of abstinence and holiness in the certainty and imminence of Christ's return.

The first usage of *nepho* by Peter occurs in 1 Peter 1:13: “Therefore gird up your minds, be sober [*nephontes*], set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Here Peter, like Paul, correlates mental vigilance (“gird up your minds”) with physical abstinence (“be sober”).

The admonition to “be abstinent” assumes a radical form in 1 Peter 1:13 because it is followed immediately by the adverb “*teleios*,” which means “perfectly” or “completely.” Thus, the correct translation is, “be completely or perfectly abstinent.” Most translators, presumably because of their predilection for drinking, have chosen to make *teleios* a modifier of the following verb *elpisate* (“set your hope”), thus, rendering it “set your hope fully” (RSV) or “hope to the end” (KJV). But the idiom used elsewhere in the New Testament for “to the end” is not *teleios* per se, but a compound such as *mechri telous* or *heos telous* (Heb 3:6, 14; 1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:13).

It is noteworthy that the Vulgate, Jerome’s famous Latin translation which has served as the official Catholic Bible throughout the centuries, translates *teleios* as a modifier of *nephontes*, thus, “*sobrii perfecte*” (“perfectly sober”). In my view Jerome’s translation reflects accurately the intent of Peter, who repeats his call to abstinence twice again in his epistle. Thus, the correct translation should be: “Therefore gird up your minds, being wholly abstinent, set your hope upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

**1 Peter 4:7.** The second usage of *nepho* occurs in 1 Peter 4:7: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane [*sophronesate*] and sober [*nepsate*] for your prayers.” Here again Peter exhorts Christians to keep mentally vigilant and physically abstinent. The meaning of *nepho* as abstinence from wine is suggested also by the context, where Peter contrasts the past lifestyle of “licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing and lawless idolatry” (1 Pet 4:3) with the new lifestyle of temperance and abstinence. The passage may be paraphrased as follows: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be sober in mind and abstemious in life in order that you might be able to maintain a healthy devotional life at this critical time.”

**1 Peter 5:8.** The third usage of *nepho* occurs in 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober [*nepsate*], be watchful [*gregoresate*]. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.” Just as in the previous two instances, here also Peter associates mental vigilance with physical abstinence, because the two are mutually dependent. Intoxicating drinks diminish the power of conscience and reason, thus weakening inhibitions to evil-doing. The ultimate result is that the Devil is better able “to devour,” literally, “drink down” (*katapino*) such persons.

The contrast between *nepsate* (from *ne piein*, “not to drink”) and *katapiein* (from *kata piein* “to drink down”) has been recognized by Adam Clarke, who comments: “It is not every one that he can swallow down. Those who are sober and vigilant are proof against him; these he may not swallow down. Those who are drunk with the cares of this world, and are unwatchful, these he may swallow down. There is a beauty in this verse, and striking apposition between the first and last words, which I think have not been noticed;—Be sober, *nepsate*, from *ne* not, and *piein*, to drink—do not swallow down—and the word *katapien*, from *kata*, down, and *piein*, to drink. If you swallow strong drink down, the devil will swallow you down. Hear this, ye drunkards, toppers, tipplers, or by whatsoever name ye are known in society, or among your fellow-sinners, strong drink is not only your way to the devil, but the devil’s way into you. Ye are such as the devil particularly may swallow down.”<sup>15</sup>

Summing up, the five usages of *nepho*, two by Paul (1 Thess 5:6, 8) and three by Peter (1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8), all show an amazing consistency in urging both mental vigilance and physical abstinence. It is also significant that all five admonitions to abstinence are given in the context of the preparation for the imminent return of Christ.

***Nephalios* as Physical Abstinence.** The adjective *nephalios* is used three times by Paul in his description of the qualifications desired of bishops, women and older men. The first two instances occur in 1 Timothy 3:2, 11: “Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, *temperate* [*nephalion*], sensible [*sophrona*], dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard [*me paroinon*]. .. The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but *temperate* [*nephalious*], faithful in all things.” The third instance is found in Titus 2:2, “Bid the older men be *temperate* [*nephalious*], serious, sensible [*sophronas*], sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness.”

Earlier we noticed that the adjective *nephalios* is used by contemporary authors such as Philo and Josephus to denote abstinence from wine. This literal interpretation is supported by the fact that in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 2:2 the adjective *nephalios* occurs together with *sophron*, the first to denote physical abstinence and the second mental vigilance. The connection between the two requires a literal interpretation of *nephalios*, as abstinence from wine.

**“No Drunkard.”** Some argue that the literal interpretation of *nephalios* as abstinent is contradicted by *me paroinos*, rendered “no drunkard” by the RSV. Their reasoning is that Paul could not have enjoined a bishop first to be abstinent and then “no drunkard,” that is, moderate in the use of wine. This apparent contradiction is resolved by recognizing that the meaning of *paroinos* goes beyond “addicted to wine, drunken”<sup>16</sup> to the complementary idea of being *para* “near” *oinos* “wine,” that is, near a place where wine is consumed. “The ancient *paroinos*,” as Lees and Burns explain, “was a man accustomed to attend drinking parties, and, as a consequence, to become intimately associated with strong drink.”<sup>17</sup>

Albert Barnes, a respected New Testament commentator, explains the meaning of *paroinos*, saying: “The Greek word (*paroinos*) . . . means, properly, *by wine*; that is, spoken of what takes place *by* or *over* wine, as revelry, drinking-songs, etc. Then it denotes, as it does here, one who sits *by* wine; that is, who is in the habit of drinking it. . . . It means that one who is in the *habit* of drinking wine, or who is accustomed to sit with those who indulge in it, should not be admitted to the ministry. The way in which the apostle mentions the subject here would lead us fairly to suppose that he did not mean to commend its use in any sense; that he regarded it as dangerous and that he would wish the ministers of religion to avoid it altogether.”<sup>18</sup>

The meaning of *paroinos* as “near wine,” that is, near a drinking place, is supported by ancient and modern Greek lexicons. The *Lexicon Graeci Testamenti Alfabeticum*, published in 1660, defines *paroinos* in Greek and Latin as “*para to oino, apud vinum*,” which may be translated “near or in the presence of wine.”<sup>19</sup> Liddell and Scott define the related word *paroinios* as “befitting a drinking party.”<sup>20</sup>

Understood in this sense, *me paroinos* does not weaken *nephalios*. On the contrary, it strengthens it. What Paul is saying is that a bishop must be not only abstinent, but he must also withhold his presence and sanction from places and associations which could tempt his abstinence or that of others. This fits well with Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 5:11, “I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, *drunkard*, or robber—not even to eat with such a one.”<sup>21</sup>

The fundamental reason given by Paul for living abstinent and godly lives is eschatological: “For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:11-14). Healthful and holy living is commended in the Scripture not merely for the sake of personal health and goodness, but primarily for the sake of God’s desire to dwell within us in this present life (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:13) and to fellowship with us in the life to come.

It is this hope of being ready to receive Christ, and to be received by Him on the day of His glorious appearing, that should motivate every Christian to “purify himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). It is to this hope that Peter appeals when he urges mental vigilance and physical abstinence in those three texts examined earlier. His admonition to “gird up your minds, be completely abstinent” is followed immediately by the exhortation “set your hope upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13).

For Christians who believe in the certainty and imminence of Christ's Return, the apostolic admonitions to abstain from intoxicating beverages assumes added significance: they represent a tangible response to God's invitation to make concrete preparation for the second coming of Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Biblical teachings regarding the use of alcoholic beverages can be summarized in one sentence: *the Scripture is consistent in teaching moderation in the use of wholesome, unfermented beverages and abstinence from the use of intoxicating fermented beverages.* The practical implication of this conclusion can also be stated in one sentence: *when we accept the Biblical teaching that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically harmful but also morally wrong, we will feel compelled not only to abstain ourselves from intoxicating substances, but also to help others to do likewise.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Rom 14:21; Eph 5:18; 1 Tim 3:8; 5:23; Titus 2:3; Rev 6:6; 14:8; 14:10; 16:19; 17:2; 18:3, 13; 19:15.
2. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine. An Exegetical Study* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 20.
3. As quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* 2, 23, 4, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. 1, p. 125.
4. An investigation into the lifestyle of such Jewish Christian sects as the Ebionites, the Nazarenes, the Elkesiates and the Encratites, might provide considerable support for abstinence from fermented wine in the Apostolic Church. Some information in this regard is provided by G. W. Samson, *The Divine Law as to Wines* (New York, 1880), pp. 197-210. The value of his research, however, is diminished by the lack of accurate references.
5. *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, 1970), vol. 11, p. 714.
6. Ernest Gordon (n. 2), p. 31.
7. Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 387.b. 9-13.
8. Athenaeus, *Banquet* 2, 24.
9. Pliny, *Natural History* 14,18.
10. *Ibid.*, 23, 24.
11. Ellen G. White, "The Marriage in Cana of Galilee," *The Signs of the Times* (September 6, 1899): 6.
12. See, for example, G. W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), s. v. "Nepho"; James Donnegan, *A New Greek and English Lexicon*, 1847 edition, s. v. "Nepho"; Thomas S. Green, *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament*, 1892 edition, s. v. "Nepho"; E. Robinson, *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, 1850), s. v. "Nepho"; G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1937 edition, s. v. "Nepho"; Hesychius of Alexandria, *Hesychii Alexandri Lexicon*, 1858 edition, s. v. "Nephalios"; Demetrios C. S. Byzantios, *Lexicon Epitomou tes Ellenikes Glosses*, 1939 edition, s. v. "Nephalios."
13. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 12, 2, trans. William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 81.
14. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 4, 183.
15. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (New York, 1938), vol. 2, p. 869.
16. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968 edition, s. v. "paroinos."
17. Frederick R. Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (London, 1894), p. 367.
18. Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (New York, 1873), p. 140.
19. *Lexicon Graeci Testamenti Alphabeticum*, 1660 edition, s. v. "Par-oinos."
20. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968 edition, s. v. "Paroinios." The same meaning is given in the modern Greek-English Lexicon by G. Giannakopoulou and E. Siapenou, *Ariston Ellenoaggaikon Lexicon*, 1971 edition, s. v. "Paroinos."
21. Emphasis supplied.

## **UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS**

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of September and October 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special weekend seminar in your area. I still have a three weekends open in the latter part of 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style is now presented with attractive PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

### **SEPTEMBER 6-7: MT. SINAI SDA CHURCH, NEW YORK**

Location: 217-10 93rd Avenue, Queens Village, New York 11428.

For information call Pastor Harris Thompson at (718) 527-0027

### **SEPTEMBER 13-15: SINGAPORE**

Location: Balestier Road SDA Church, 120 Balestier Road, Singapore.

For information contact Pearlyn Ng at <email2pearlyn@yahoo.com>

This rally is organized by the ASI for our churches in Singapore.

### **SEPTEMBER 17-18: MALAYSIA - SABAH MISSION**

For information contact Pastor Nelver Sikul, the President of the Sabah Mission

His email address is: <sdasab@tm.net.my>

### **SEPTEMBER 19-21: MALAYSIA -SARAWAK MISSION**

For information contact Elder Gilbert Tan, the Secretary of the Sarawak Mission.

His email address is: <saksec@tm.net.my>

### **SEPTEMBER 25-26: LOS ANGELES KOREAN CENTRAL CHURCH**

Location: 1666 Michigan Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90033

For information call Pastor Jeong Im at (323) 269-0670 or (626) 291-5455

This rally is organized especially for the Korean churches in Los Angeles.

### **OCTOBER 4-5: CALGARY CENTRAL SDA CHURCH**

Location: 1920 - 13 Avenue NW, Calgary, AB T2N 1L3, Canada

For information call Pastor Randy Barber at (403) 547-6786 or (403) 289-0196

### **OCTOBER 11-12: PARADISE VALLEY SDA CHURCH, PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

Location: 2727 E. Cactus Road, Phoenix, Arizona 85032.

For information call Pastor Paul Gibson at (602) 971-6010 or (602) 493-0818

### **OCTOBER 18-19: HOLLOWAY SDA CHURCH, LONDON, ENGLAND**

Location: 381 Holloway Road, London, N7 0RN, England.

For information call Pastor E. Osei at (020) 8581 8311 or (079) 5634 4085

### **OCTOBER 25-26: SDA CHURCH IN ROME, ITALY**

The location will be announced in the next newsletter.

## **ADVENTIST ARTIST NATHAN GREENE TO BE FEATURED ON QVC HOME SHOPPING NETWORK**

Artist Nathan Greene has been invited to be a guest by retail home shopping giant QVC for a live on-air promotion of his recently released fine art print titled The Lamb of God. The airing is scheduled for September 16th at 11:00 A.M. Eastern (8:00 A.M. Pacific), and will last for 8 minutes. If you are subscribed to either Cable or Satellite television service, you can tune in!

QVC is a leader in the cable television home shopping market, covering 82 million homes throughout North America. This airing provides two unique opportunities.

First, QVC's large customer base allows them to offer a framed fine art print of "The Lamb of God" at an excellent price. Imagine having this beautiful art print in a prominent place in your home as a continual reminder of Jesus' love for you and your family!

Second, it is an opportunity to touch millions of people for Jesus Christ in a very unique way. "I hope that The Lamb of God will convey the idea of Christ as a close companion and a faithful friend to every member of the QVC audience," says Nathan. "I want them to understand that God is not a distant divine deity, but a Saviour who is very interested in the intimate details of our daily life."

For more information about artist Nathan Greene, and to see the painting, "The Lamb of God" for yourself, visit [www.hartclassics.com](http://www.hartclassics.com) on the web or call 800.487.4278.

### **A UNIQUE SABBATH TRAIL**

Washington, New Hampshire is known as the birthplace of the first Sabbathkeeping Adventist Congregation. It was established in the autumn of 1844 by William Farnsworth. The original church still exists and is used during the Summer months.

Pastor Merlin Knowles of the Washington church, in answer to prayer, was impressed to build a Sabbath Trail next to the church, that would beautifully tell the story of the Sabbath to visitors of all denominations who visit the historic church each year.

Dedicated in 1998, this unique one mile long trail is located in the woods surrounding the church with thirty-one sites where visitors can sit on benches and read attractively engraved granite markers that tell the story of the Sabbath from Creation to the New Earth.

May I encourage you to make a visit to the Sabbath Trail either in person or via the Internet at: <http://www.tagnet.org/washington/>. You will find this to be a most pleasant experience.

## **NEWLY RECORDED SABBATH SEMINAR NOW AVAILABLE IN AUDIO CASSETTES, VIDEO TAPES AND DVD DISKS**

The many messages of appreciation for the newly SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR, have led me to extend the special offer until August 31, 2002. The seminar was recorded last March 15-17, 2002, at the First Fort Worth SDA Church in Texas by the TEXAS MEDIA CENTER. We spent a lot of time and efforts preparing this new recording where I use about 100 PowerPoint slides for each presentation. The response has been very gratifying. Church leaders in different parts of the world are expressing appreciation for the blessings of these timely Sabbath messages. Your personal effort to share them with your congregation is much appreciated.

The new SABBATH SEMINAR consists of a total of 8 one-hour lectures covering the following topics: the gripping story of my search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University in Rome; the discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity; practical principles on how to keep the Sabbath to experience Christ's rest and peace in our lives; an update report on the most recent Sabbath/Sunday developments; and a sacred concert with two outstanding tenors entitled THE SABBATH IN SONGS. The concert was recorded in a television studio in South Bend, Indiana.

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