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Genesis 9: 20-21: Noah's Legacy of the Vine

Lindsey Marie Ross

Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent.

–Genesis 9: 20-21

Although the Genesis story of the Flood in Genesis, chapters 6-9, features Noah as the hero of the flood, the story in Genesis 9:20-21 identifies him as the hero of the vine. This second story is not as dramatic as the story of the flood, but it is rich with implications and raises many questions. Is this story an inventor's saga or a cultural myth of the discovery of wine? Is Noah's drunkenness a psychological reaction to a demoralization triggered by the flood? Is the brief story to be a warning against drunkenness? Who was Noah and why should we remember him?

I. The Identity of Noah

A. Noah's Genealogy

Lineage is a prominent theme in the development of any influential character in the Bible. Noah's story really begins in Gen. 5:28 (where he is introduced as the son of Lamech and a tiller of the vine) and not in Genesis chapter 6 as is usually understood.

Tracing the lineage of Noah, son of Lamech, raises interesting questions. Immediately after the story of Cain and Abel (in which Cain murders his brother, Abel), Gen. 4:17-24 lists the descendants of Cain: Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, and finally Lamech. A few verses later in 5:6-29, the lineage of Seth (Cain's brother who was born to take the place of Abel after he was killed) is listed: Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, and, again, Lamech,

who is the father of Noah. It is difficult to know what to make of this name repetition. Did the Biblical writers recognize that Noah was descended from Cain, the source of jealousy and hatred and thus an antihero, and decide to change his lineage to that of Seth or are the two genealogies merely similar? Perhaps. But if we see Genesis as a literary unit then the similarity of genealogies cannot be a mere coincidence. If Cain (to whose descendants are attributed the birth of the city and civilized endeavors) is a tiller of the soil, it is ironic that the last mentioned one in the line of Seth is Noah, also tiller of the soil. The genealogies of Cain and Seth (the latter born to take the place of the murdered Abel) point to a transition from nomadism (represented by Abel, the shepherd) to settled agriculture (originally in Genesis 4 represented by Cain but now represented by Seth's descendant, Noah) and perhaps a resolution of the tension between the two economies.

B. What's in a Name: The Identity of Noah

Scholars have often argued about the dual identities of Noah: Noah the hero of the flood in Gen. 6:1-9:19 and Noah the cultivator of the vine in Gen. 9:20-27. Although some are able to see unity in the stories, most scholars have a difficult time blending together seemingly irreconcilable stories. Could the same man who saved humanity from total annihilation because of its wickedness also have planted the vineyard, drunk to excess, and been disgraced in his drunkenness. J.H. Marks simply says that the stories bear no relation to one another.¹

Marks argues that in the flood story (Gen. 6-9:19) Noah's sons are represented as married men, while in Gen. 9:22-24 they are represented as minors. Confusion, says Marks, also is found with the names of Noah's sons. With such considerations, Marks argues that the two stories of flood and vine belong to different traditions. Furthermore, he believes the confusion of names, was simply a poor attempt by biblical writers to blend together these two stories and to mend the break between the two traditions about Noah.²

Nevertheless, while one must be aware of the inconsistencies, it is also important to examine the story as it appears in the text and not dismiss it because of superficial anomalies.

1. Noah the hero of the flood? Gen. 9:20-27 and Gen. 5:28-29 are the only places in the Bible where Noah was not defined by his role in the flood. Everywhere else in the Bible (e.g. Isa. 54:9, Matt. 24:37-38, and Luke 17:26-27) he is the hero of the flood. When first introduced in Gen. 6:9, Noah was said to be a "righteous man, blameless in his generation" (cf. Ezek. 14:14, 20; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5), chosen to survive the flood because of his obedience to

Yahweh (Heb. 11:7). Only 20 men in the entire Bible, among them Noah, were named for their personal righteousness. Furthermore, he – along with only Job and Daniel – was said to be saved through his own righteousness (Ezek. 14:14).

In light of this association, scholars have attempted to connect the meaning of Noah's name with his role in the flood. For example, one theory of the original biblical etymology connects Noah's name to the Hebrew root *nuah*. Initially the name Noah was thought to be derived from Assyrian *naxu, inux*, "to rest," but this supposition was given up when it was discovered that the Akkadian \underline{x} and Hebrew \underline{h} do not represent the same consonant. Another possible connection with the Old Babylonian *nuhiya* (an Akkadian "diminutive of a name" formed from *nuh*) does not correspond "vocalically" (with respect to the vowels) with "Noah." So Marks lays out more commonly accepted suggestions for this etymology of the name Noah in connection with the flood: "Two suggestions have received scholarly support: (a) Noah is the derivative from a Hebrew stem which in Arabic gives the word *nahahe*, "liberality" "generosity"; and (b) that it is connected with the Akkadian element *nah*." In short, the Akkadian *Nah*, it is argued, was changed to the Canaanite-Hebraic *Noah*. *Nah* is apparently a divine name. The name Noah therefore may be theophoric and the personage represented by the name pre-Israelite in origin.³

If this Akkadian derivation for Noah is correct, many questions arise: Was *Nah* in Mesopotamia originally a god or only a secondarily deified figure? Was he native to Mesopotamia or was he brought there by invaders of the nineteenth-eighteenth centuries B.C.E.? Was he already known in connection with the flood story in the Mari region?⁴ But all these associations seem tenuous and it seems better to associate the etymology of the name "Noah" with his role as tiller of the soil.

2. Noah the farmer? Even within the text it is evident that he is defined by his role as the gardener. One commentator refers to the version, which says, "Noah the husbandman was the first who planted the vineyard." John Skinner said this implies that he is "addicted to (or perhaps the inventor of) agriculture, which now in his hands advances to the more refined stage of vine-growing."⁵

Genesis 5:29 introduces Noah not in connection with the flood story of Genesis 6-9 but as a tiller. Here we read that Lamech fathered a son: "He gave him the name Noah because he said, 'Here is one who will give us, in the midst of our toil and the labouring of our hands, a consolation out of the very soil that Yahweh cursed.'" Many refer to the verse 5:29 as prophecy, which would later be fulfilled in 9:20. Robert Davidson remarks: "Noah provides a palliative for the burdensome life of toil to which he was condemned by God."⁶ Marks, on the other hand, believes that 5:29 was misplaced from 9:20. This is rationalized

by saying that Noah's name and etymology don't correspond at all and Rabbi Johanan and Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish both support this hypothesis.⁷ As noted above, Gen. 5:29 and 9:20-21 are said to belong to a second tradition, the Yahwist tradition, and attached rather clumsily to the dominant flood tradition.

But the idea that the name Noah is associated with agriculture is supported by Poulssen's recognition of the word *adamah*. This word in 5:29 represents the Hebrew word for "ground and man's relationship with it." Furthermore, the *pi'el* stem for the Hebrew verb is significant in 5:29 and 9:20. When combined with Noah's name, it means "to comfort", "to cheer", "to dispel sorrow."⁸

Wenham has a different take on the etymology of Noah's name. He focuses more on the phrase "tiller of the land" and he believes that it really means "master of the earth." This symbolized Noah being the head of the one family on earth. Regarding Noah's name, Wenham suspects that maybe describing Noah in 9:20 as "man of the land" is an ironic reference to 5:29.⁹

Some commentators still try to link the Noah of the flood and the Noah of the vineyard by reference to the stories from Syria-Palestine where such a figure entered the area initially as a gardener.¹⁰ While others believe that the linkage is a forced connection. ("...The passage has nothing to do with the Deluge-tradition; and it is more probable that it is an independent legend, originating amidst Palestinian surroundings"¹¹), most commentators will agree that the etymology of Noah's name refers directly to his farming as opposed to the flood story. In short, we are to recognize Noah "as *the* man of the ground – i.e., *the* farmer – as though he were well known, not as the builder of the ark, but rather as the gardener par excellence." The meaning of Noah's name reflects his cultivation of the vineyard, and Gen. 9:20 resonates as a culture myth describing the discovery of wine.¹²

The Noah story, as we have it in Gen. 5:29 and 9:20-21, reinforces the biblical etymology, for Noah's story begins and ends with his identification with viticulture and this identification brackets, as it were, his identification with the flood. His name itself is not associated with the flood tradition but with the gardener, the father of viticulture, and the discoverer of wine. "With this occupation the suggested biblical etymology of his name would agree; he is no longer a wanderer but is settled, at rest, an agriculturalist."¹³

II. Viticulture in the Ancient World

A. The Nature of Viticulture

The cultivation of vineyards and production of wine is a refined art requiring specific conditions and careful attention to the details of the intricate

process. To fully unpack this story, it is important to know the specifics of viticulture and of the conditions necessary for viticulture as well as the complexity and sophistication of the actual winemaking process.

Even today, to grow good Old World, or European, grapes it must be warm or hot and dry in the summers. The winter temperatures should not get any lower than 10°F or -12°C.¹⁴

The grape growing process required great care. The ground was carefully prepared before the vine was planted. Each vineyard had a stone wall or "hedge" to protect vines from foxes (Song of S. 2:15), boars (Ps. 80: 13), and thieves (Jer. 49:9). A stone watchtower was assembled at each vineyard (Isa. 5:2). During vintage season, vinedressers and guardians of the fruit lived in these towers and the first floor was used for a winepress or stables. The vinedresser had to be more delicate and attentive to his grapes than farmers of other types of crops. Pruning was an important part of vine maintenance. When blossoms became ripened grapes, the vinedresser cut off non-bearing branches (Isa. 18:5; John 15:2). This made the existing branches stronger and allowed them to bear more fruit.¹⁵

Grapes were harvested in August or September. Knowing when to harvest grapes was critical. Grapes that were harvested early, before they were ripe, were sour. When the grapes were harvested, ripe ones were eaten in their natural state, dried into raisins, boiled down to a thick syrup, or made into wine.¹⁶ After the grapes had been harvested they were set in the sun for a time before they were fermented. The vats in which the grapes were pressed were connected by a channel through which the juice flowed.¹⁷

The first stage in the fermentation process took place 6 hours later in one of the vats.¹⁸ For fermentation and storage, wine was transferred to jars (Jer. 13:12; 48:11) or to wineskins. The skins were made of goat hides with the neck and feet tied together. An opening was left for gases to release during fermentation. Freshly made wine was put into new wineskins because old wineskins would burst under pressure (Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38).

In short, viticulture was labor intensive. It required a great deal of care and skill. It required a climate that was warm and dry. And it offered commercial potential. It was a product of and for a more civilized and organized society – one such as was attributed to the descendants of Cain in Gen. 4:17-24.

B. The Geographical origin of wine

Noah, the hero of the flood, is said to be the first to plant the vineyard after the flood waters recede. According to the text, the ark landed on Mount Ararat,

in Armenia. Many believe that Armenia is the place where wine originated, and from there viticulture spread throughout the rest of the Middle East.¹⁹ One commentator remarks: "Since the vine is said to be indigenous to Armenia and Pontus, it has naturally been proposed to connect the story with the landing of the ark in Ararat."²⁰ When one considers the weather in Armenia and Palestine, this makes a great deal of sense: warm and dry, but not too hot and with sufficient enough rainfall.²¹

Again, the weather necessary for growing good grapes indicates that viticulture was a sign of forgiveness and renewal: the flood was over. Cold, wet, rainy, soggy, muddy flood conditions would never serve as a good environment for growing grapes. The conditions necessary for good grapes are the exact opposite of flood conditions. Noah is able to grow grapes and produce wine. The earth was restored, and humanity forgiven and able to move forward, as people on earth and in covenant with God.

C. Non-Israelite vine myths

The Hebrew narrative – "*Noah, a man of the soil, began the planting of vineyards*" – suggests that this was the Hebrew peoples' version of the inventor saga.²² Given the intoxication attributed to wine, other common cultural myths attributed the discovery of wine with a god and intoxication as "divine inspiration." For the Greeks the god Dionysus invented wine, and for the Egyptians it was the god Osiris. The Bible presents the Canaanites as "orgiastic" and one could assume that for them wine was also discovered by a god; some scholars suggest that Noah himself was originally a Canaanite wine god.²³ The Utnapishtim, the Babylonian counterpart to the Deluge, claims that wine antedated the flood with the builders of the ark being supplied with wine.²⁴ References are made to viticulture from the reign of Gudea. The vine was cultivated in pre-dynastic Egypt although Egyptian military inscriptions from the Old Empire referred to the vine in Palestine. Sinuhe also told about the grapes of Syria-Palestine.²⁵

In the context of this literature the Noah myth regarding the discovery of wine is seen as especially important. If Noah's story is a warning against drunkenness, it is also a cultural myth or inventor's saga explaining the discovery of wine.²⁶ Most important, where in other cultures this invention is attributed to a god, in the Noah story it is attributed to a man.²⁷ The Hebrew perspective holds up humanity as created in the image of God and attributes to human agency what other cultures attribute to the gods.

III. The Symbolism of the Vine in Israel

A. The Significance of the VINE

The vine was an essential part of Israelite culture, which makes Gen. 9:20 an important moment in the Hebrew narrative. The vine, along with the fig tree and the olive tree, was one of the three main plants in Palestine (Jg. 9:8-13). It was called the "fruit of the land" in many Biblical passages (Josh. 24:13; 2 Sam. 8:14; 2 Kings 5:26; Jer. 5:17; 40:10; Hos. 2:12-H 2:14). The Torah addresses the uses and operation of vineyards and its central value in Israel. Vinedressers were to reap the vineyard only once so that the poor and oppressed could pick up what was left over or what had been dropped in the harvest (Lev. 19:10; Deut. 24:21). Like other crops, vineyards were to lie fallow during the Sabbath year to replenish and allow the land to rest (Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:3-5). In one text, those who had planted a vineyard were exempt from military service (Deut. 20:6). The vine became a national symbol of Israel because it was a source of wealth and for some their only source of income.²⁸

The Biblical text is rich in vine imagery in both the Hebrew Testament and Christian Testament. In the Hebrew Testament, the vine was a metaphor for Israel, said by the psalmist to have been "brought out of Egypt and planted by Yahweh" (Ps. 80:8-13 – H 80:9-14). Israel, once a "choice vine," had become a "wild vine" (Jer. 2:21; cf. Isa. 5:1-7; Hos. 10:1). Yahweh found Israel "like grapes in the wilderness" (Hos. 9:10). The remnant was also compared to a cluster of grapes (Isa. 65:8). A parable regarding the judgment of God upon a corrupted Jerusalem in Ezekiel points out that the wood of such an unproductive vine is only useful as fuel (Ezek. 15; cf. 19:10-14). The vine was also a metaphor for the individual. Ezekiel proposes an allegory in which the "seed of the land" (Zedekiah) is planted by a "great eagle" (Nebuchadnezzar) and grows up to be a "spreading vine" (Ezek. 17:1-8).²⁹ Furthermore, in Psalms, the wife who fears Yahweh will be like a fruitful vine (Ps. 128:3).

A deficiency in the vines or grapes was taken as a sign of Yahweh's disapproval. This is seen in the vines of Sodom where the grapes were said to be poisonous (Deut. 32:32). An abundance of vines and vineyards was seen as an expression of Yahweh's favor.³⁰ The spies sent by Moses from the wilderness into Palestine-Syria were shown the rich bounty of the Promise Land through the abundance of grapes. This fruitfulness was evident when "they were able to bring back a cluster of grapes so large that it had to be carried on a pole" (Num. 13:21-27). When Israel was forgiven and brought back from exile, they were given vineyards (Hos. 2:15).

In the Christian Testament, Jesus often uses the vine in his parables. He describes himself as the "true vine" in John 15 and his father as the "vinedresser." Jesus uses this metaphor and expands on it to show the relationship between God, Jesus and humans as individuals.

It is clear, then, that the vine, whose discoverer was Noah, became much more to Israel than a plant which produced grapes. It became a cultural symbol holding significance at many levels in the culture of Israel.

B. Significance of WINE³¹

Wine produced in ancient Israel had many uses. It was more necessary and more common during biblical times than it is today because of the scarcity and pollution of water at that time. Wine accompanied everyday meals and also held a place in the sacrificial meal (Deut. 14:26; 1 Sam. 1:19:12-16; Amos 2:8). It gave pleasure and banished sorrow (Judg. 9:13; Ps. 104:15; Prov. 31:6-7). Older wine was preferred in ancient Israel because it was both sweeter and stronger than new wine (Ecclus. 9:10; Luke 5:39). Large amounts of wine were provided at banquets and the Hebrew word for banquet or feast also translates to "drinking." Wine served as a gift to those who were superior (1 Sam. 25:18; 2 Sam 16:1) and as an article of trade (2 Chr. 2:8-10, 15). Wine was used as medicine to revive those who were fainting (2 Sam. 16:2), to settle the stomach and treat "frequent ailments" (1 Tim. 5:23), and for dressing wounds. When mixed with myrrh or gall it was used as a drug and was offered to Jesus by soldiers while he was on the cross (Matt. 27:34; Mark 15:23).

Wine became a very integral part of most ritual offerings. Libations were sometimes made to false gods (Deut. 32:37-38; Isa. 57:6; 65:11; Jer. 7:18; 19:13); however, wine was also used by the orthodox. Whenever worshipers made pilgrimages they would bring a skin of wine to the temple (1 Sam. 1:24; 10:3) and wine may have replaced the custom of offering blood. The wine served to supplement an offering of lamb, fine flour, oil or any combination of these things (Ex. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:7, 10; 28:14). More specifically it was used at the celebration of Passover although not until Hellenistic times (Jub. 49:6). Wine found its way into many uses in ancient Israel, and like the vine yielded rich imagery in the Hebrew and Christian Testaments.

C. Wine Imagery

Much of the wine imagery in the Bible consists of rather morbid, apocalyptic metaphors for Yahweh's judgment of humanity, often expressed in terms

of a cup of wine: Yahweh will force the wicked to drink the "wine of wrath" and they will then "reel and lose their wits" (Ps. 60:3; 60:5; 75:8; Jer. 25:15; 51:7). God commands nations to be agents of his wrath, saying, "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow for their wickedness is great" (Joel 3:13-H 4:13). On the Day of Judgment Yahweh treads the wine press, his people on earth being the grapes (Isa. 53:2-6).

On a lighter note, an abundance of wine, like an abundance of vineyards, is an expression of Yahweh's blessing. This is seen when Isaac asks Yahweh to give Jacob "plenty of grain and wine" (Gen. 27:28). This imagery is also used when Joel looks forward to the time when "the vats shall overflow with wine and oil" (Joel 2:24; cf. 3:18 - H 4:18; Amos 9:13; Zech. 10:7). The gift of wine served as good imagery to communicate the messages of God – both of judgment and of blessing.

D. Attitudes toward wine

Not surprisingly, therefore, the Bible conveys mixed attitudes towards wine, rendering it both praise and criticism in both the Hebrew and Christian Testaments.³²

The Hebrew Testament set an early precedent of negative attitudes towards wine, beginning with Noah's story. Later, wine is described in Ecclesiasticus as "good things...created for good people" (Ecclus. 39:25-26) but the prophets are generally reproachful. Habakkuk says "wine is treacherous" (Hab. 2:5; cf. Hos. 4:11). Micah complains about the people who want a preacher who will speak of wine and strong drink (Mic. 2:11). The Nazirites (among whom was Samson) and Rechabites (ascetic brotherhoods in ancient Israel) all avoided fermented drinks completely,³³ apparently a protest against the debauched luxury of the Canaanite civilization (Num. 6:3).

It is well to differentiate attitudes toward wine from attitudes towards drunkenness. Frequently, of course, the Hebrew Testament viewed drinking and drunkenness as synonymous and both with abhorrence. Much of the Hebrew Testament viewed drinking as disgraceful (Jer. 13:13; Ezek. 23-33; Gen. 9:20-27; Gen. 19:31-38) and the stories of both Noah and Lot were good examples, showing the immorality to which a good man exposes himself when he becomes drunk.³⁴ Drunkenness was associated with licentiousness (Hos. 4:11, 18; 2 Sam. 11:13), wealth (1 Sam. 25:36; 1 Kings 16:9; 20:16; Esth. 1:10), insubordination and gluttony (Deut. 21:30). The prophets condemn it in leaders believing it causes moral blindness (Isa. 5:11-12; 28:7; 56:11-12; Amos 6:6;

Prov. 31:4-5). Trito-Isaiah mocks "shepherds" (kings) who were only interested in procuring wine and filling themselves with strong drink (Isa. 56:11-12 cf. Hos. 7:5).³⁵ Isaiah condemned priests and prophets who would "reel" and "stagger" (Isa. 28:7). Because of this, priests are later forbidden fermented drinks while in the Temple sanctuary (Lev. 10:9; 108-109; Ezek. 44:21).³⁶ People were warned about the illusions of inebriation, which said wine "takes away the understanding" (Hos. 4:11) and men who drank it were "confused with wine... they err in vision" (Isa. 28:7). Immoderation and insobriety were regarded as incompatible with holiness (Isa. 5:22; Prov. 21:17; 23:20-21, 29-35). As in the story of Noah, drunkenness is frowned upon especially when it leads to self-exposure (1 Sam. 1:14; Hab. 2:15; Lam. 4:21).

Wisdom writers, and in particular Proverbs,³⁷ are especially critical of drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; 21:17; 23:20-21, 29-35). Wine is a "mockery" and strong drink a "brawler" (Prov. 20:1). Wine is seductive: "Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly" (Prov. 23:21). Readers are warned that if they grew enamored with wine, they would never be wealthy (Prov. 23:20-21). Drunkenness is also satirized (Prov. 23:32-35).

But the later Hebrew Testament distinguishes drunkenness from enjoyment of wine. The Psalmist praised Yahweh for giving "wine to gladden the heart of man" (Ps. 104:15; cf. Judg. 9:13; Eccl. 10:19). A more complex and accurate understanding of wine is found. Its goodness is recognized as well as its dangerous potential. Ben Sirach says "Wine gives life if wine is drunk in moderation. What is life worth without wine? It came into being to make people happy. Drunk at the right time and in the right amount, wine makes for a glad heart and a cheerful mind. Bitterness of soul comes of wine drunk to excess out of temper or bravado" (Ecclus. 31:27-29).

The Christian Testament echoes many of the negative attitudes towards drunkenness found in the Hebrew Testament. In the Christian Testament the immoderate person is not prepared for the coming of the kingdom of God (Luke 21:34) and the "drunkard" would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:21). As in the Hebrew Testament, the Christian Testament disapproves authority figures drinking in excess. John the Baptist, because he was a Nazirite probably took the oath to abstain from consuming fermented drinks (Luke 1:15). Late in the New Testament period, bishops and deacons were only to drink in moderation (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Tit. 1:7).

Wine is never condemned outright in the New Testament³⁸ although drunkenness is associated with Gentile culture and its wickedness and depravi-

ty [Rom. 13:10; 1 Pet. 4:3]). But if one is a thoughtful Christian, one will not drink wine for fear that it may cause a weaker Christian to slip back into Gentile ways (Rom. 14:21). Sometimes, the Christian Testament is more clearly prescriptive, saying that a Christian should not get drunk on wine but be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Other instructions against drinking are still more negative, suggesting that drinking in excess should not be tolerated in the Christian community (1 Cor. 5:11-13).

All of these perspectives on drunkenness are important because they are all somehow connected to the story of the first drunkenness: Gen. 9:20-21. These views resonate with how people of this time period regarded drunkenness and therefore, help us to reevaluate how these people may have regarded the wine production and drunkenness of Noah.

IV. Noah and the Ambiguous Status of the Vine

A. Noah and the Ambiguity of the Vine

As important as is the Noah story as a cultural myth of invention, therefore, it is also a warning against immoderation. Some writers believe this is the main emphasis of the story. Davidson believes that this story tells of the consequence of overindulgence, a potential outcome which follows the new invention.³⁹ Wenham, on the other hand, has a very mixed response to the Noah story. He points out that when Scripture is brief and gives sparse detail (e.g., in 9:21: "He drank some of the wine, and while he was drunk, he lay uncovered in his tent") it often expresses disapproval.⁴⁰ But even Wenham balances this point, saying that because wine is seen as a gift from God to man (Ps. 104:15), Noah was not denounced for drinking *per se*.⁴¹ Neither drinking nor wine but drunkenness is condemned. In fact, Westermann, like many other commentators, argues that Noah's behavior was "regarded as quite acceptable in biblical times: only Ham's voyeurism and his subsequent recounting of what he had seen is censured."⁴²

Noah's drunkenness thus reveals the mixed sentiments regarding wine held at the time Genesis was written. Skinner comments pointedly on this confusion of meaning:

Noah's discovery is there represented as an advance or refinement on the tillage of the ground to which man was sentenced in consequence of his first transgression. And the oracle of Lamech appears to show that the invention of wine is conceived as a *relief from the curse*. How far it is looked on as a divinely approved mode of alleviating the monotony of toil is hard to decide. The moderate use of wine is not

condemned in the OT: on the other hand, it is impossible to doubt that the light in which Noah is exhibited, and the subsequent behaviour of his youngest son, are meant to convey an emphatic warning against the moral dangers attending this new step in human development and the degeneration to which it may lead."⁴³

B. Noah as transitional figure and Second Adam

There are many reasons why this story represents an advancement of agriculture. First, wine production is a complex process requiring more control of resources and technology than other forms of agriculture. Wenham says "This seems to make a step forward in agriculture. Whereas Noah's ancestors raised only the most basic foodstuffs (cf. 3:18-19; 4:2), Noah introduces the cultivation of luxury items so that he can produce 'wine that maketh glad the heart of man (Ps. 104:15)'. "⁴⁴ Second, wine is a source of consolidated, transportable wealth, and therefore advanced commercialization. Entire cities sometimes were formed around vineyards. Skinner calls the invention attributed to Noah "a fresh advance in human civilization," and a major turning point from the nomadic hunting and shepherding to settled agriculture.⁴⁵ But in Gen. 9:21 Noah is still a tent-dweller. Marks comments that "Noah and his two sons Shem and Japheth are tent dwellers (Gen. 9:21 and 27); but Noah, no longer a nomad, has advanced beyond the simplest forms of agriculture to the more specialized, complicated art of vine cultivation...with this occupation the suggested biblical etymology of his name would agree; he is no longer a wanderer but is settled, at rest, and agriculturalist."⁴⁶

The story in Genesis thus points to Noah as the second Adam. First, according to the genealogy, Noah's birth was the first birth since Adam's death, said to be 126 years earlier.⁴⁷ Noah then became the second father of humanity after all other humanity had been destroyed in the flood.⁴⁸ He fathers the remnant, which is supposed to continue life on Earth (Ecclus. 44:17-18). As noted above, Noah's title as "tiller of the soil" may mean "man of the land" or "master of the earth." This idea connects to him being the father and master of a new generation of humanity. Second, Drewermann notes that Noah's drunkenness seems to parallel Adam's indulgence of the forbidden fruit. Furthermore, the new generation born after the flood is just as bad as the generation that preceded the flood: "the humanity that begins with Noah fully parallels the humanity that preceded the flood." Wenham believes that this condemnation of Noah is a little harsh and unforgiving, but that it is still a fall from grace.⁴⁹

Steinmetz, however, argues that Noah's accomplishments and character are an amending of the previous order and a good description of the post-deluvian world. She, like Drewermann, draws parallels between Noah's fall from grace and those of Adam and Eve on the one hand and Cain and Abel on the other. She sees that common motifs among these three point to a myth of the increasing autonomy of humanity, more responsibility as moral agent and more independence from God. Like Drewermann, Steinmetz sees Noah as being the new representative of humanity and a new father of mankind but, unlike Drewermann, Steinmetz affirms the new relationship between society, nature, and God.⁵⁰

Conclusion:

Because alcohol is so often associated with irresponsible and destructive behavior, people forget that it is a gift from God. Our story in Genesis indicates that wine was a symbol of Yahweh's forgiveness and renewal of the earth after the flood. The Hebrew Bible presents it as given to Israel, a symbol of Yahweh's bounty and blessing upon His people, of God's delight in the comfort and well-being of humanity. Even moderate intoxication can give humanity a glimpse of the euphoric atmosphere of the Kingdom of God. As such, given its association with human civilization, it is an indication that human enterprise and achievement is not in and of itself evil. All this is evident in the language in the Bible: Noah's story suggests that wine is a good thing.

But alcohol has not gained its notoriety without reason. And Vogels says that this story shows the limits of humanity.⁵¹ Perhaps Noah was so demoralized by the flood that the wine gave him a sense of comfort and an escape from painful memories. Perhaps God gave the fruit of the vine, the wine, as a sign of blessing after the long nightmare of the flood. Wine brings an otherworldly bliss to earth. Wine offers a taste of "heaven." But alcohol cannot fully replace the Kingdom of God. One could argue that the Bible suggests that humanity is so tempted to make alcohol an idol that God had to create extreme consequences to overindulgences. Thus, wine is paradoxically a symbol of God's bounty and blessing and of humanity's tendency to debauchery and corruption.

This "inventor's saga" of Noah narrates a myth regarding the transition from nomadic to agricultural life. But if the Cain and Abel story (Gen. 4:1-16) depicts a struggle between Cain (agriculture) and Abel (nomadism) the story of Noah shows the dangers of the ascendant agriculture⁵² – drunkenness and human callousness. Greater advancement provides greater opportunity for corruption and, therefore, calls for greater responsibility.

Noah is often presented as a second Adam – the new father of a new humanity and also of a new “fall” from grace because of his drunkenness. Both positive and negative implications come along with this title. Noah is a righteous progenitor of a more righteous, purified humanity. But, like Adam, he provoked his own fall. Steinmetz remarks “Although you may be seduced to sin, you have the power to rule over that which lures you. This is God’s assertion that human beings are responsible for their own deeds.”⁵³

The Genesis stories are stories about humanity gaining more and more autonomy. Noah can be described as a “bringer of the new age, who rescued mankind from the return of chaos in the deluge, a messianic figure.”⁵⁴ God, it appears throughout the Bible, refines humanity, encouraging it to grow more responsible. Noah represents a significant step in that refinement. As the agent of the cataclysmic flood, he brings one epoch to a close. As cultivator of the vine, he opens a new epoch, a new way of life with greater autonomy and greater blessings, but with greater responsibility and greater consequences for carelessness. Noah is the second Adam, the NEW MAN.

Notes

1. J.H. Marks, “Noah,” *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* (hereafter, I.D.B.), ed. by G. A. Buttrick et.al. (Nashville: Abingdom, 1962) Vol. III, 555.
2. Ibid. In Genesis 5:32-9:19 and from Genesis 10 thereafter the sons are Shem, Ham and Japheth. The son who disgraced his father Noah in 9:22 was Noah’s youngest son, Ham. In 9:25 Canaan is cursed for the disgrace (not Ham) and his brothers are named Shem and Japheth. (Genesis 9:18 seeks to explain that “...Ham (was) the father of Canaan” and vs. 9:22 assigns the shameful behavior to “Ham, the father of Canaan.”)
3. Ibid 555-56.
4. Ibid.
5. John Skinner, *Genesis*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956) 183.
6. Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1973) 95.
7. Marks, 555.
8. Ibid.
9. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987) 198.
10. Marks., 554.

11. Skinner, 183.
12. Ibid 555
13. Ibid.
14. World Book Encyclopedia, s.v. "grapes", 320.
15. J. F. Ross, "Vine," I.D.B., Vol. IV, 785.
16. Ibid.
17. J. F. Ross, "Wine", I.D.B., Vol. IV, 850.
18. Ibid, 851.
19. Ibid.
20. Skinner, 183.
21. Ross, 785.
22. Davidson, 94-95.
23. Skinner, 183.
24. Wenham, 198; GE 11:72-73.
25. Ross, 785.
26. Skinner, 185; Davidson, 94.
27. Davidson, 95.
28. Ross, 785.
29. Ibid., 786.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 851.
32. Ibid.
33. Skinner, 183.
34. M. Greenberg, "Drunkenness," I.D.B. Vol. I, 872.
35. Ross, 851.
36. Greenberg, 872.
37. Ross, 851.
38. Ibid.

39. Davidson, 95. Davidson believes it is not fair to judge Noah for his drunkenness because as the first one to ever drink wine, he was merely testing the wine and did not yet know the potency of his new invention.
40. Wenham, 198.
41. *Ibid.*; Wenham also cites other passages which show that wine was supported, not condemned, in Israel: having a place in peace and burnt offerings, purchase of wine at festivals, and the vine being one of Israel's national symbols.
42. *Ibid.*; Wenham goes on to describe Westermann's interpretation and condemnation of Ham's disrespect of his father as being sexual misconduct. Furthermore, Wenham makes a point to say that sexual misconduct and overindulgence of alcohol go hand in hand. This is important to mention but will not be elaborated on because it gets into the vast interpretations which can possibly be taken from the incident in 9:22. To expand on this subject would be to stray from the focal point of this paper.
43. Skinner, 186.
44. Wenham, 198.
45. Skinner, 182, 185.
46. Marks, 555, 556
47. Marks, 554.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Wenham, 199.
50. Devora Steinmetz, "Vineyard, Farm and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of Primeval History," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 113 (1994) 205
51. Walter Vogels, "Cham découvre les limites de son père Noé," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 104 (1987): 544-573.
52. Marks, 555.
53. Steinmetz, 204.
54. Marks 554.