

Ezekiel 44:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court.

Analysis

Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court—the Hebrew yayin (יַיִן, "wine") was prohibited during active temple service. Leviticus 10:8-11 instituted this rule after Nadab and Abihu's deaths, linking alcohol to impaired judgment and inability to distinguish between holy and common. The restriction applied **when they enter into the inner court** (bevo'am el-chatzer ha-penimit, בְּבוֹאָם אֶל-חֲצֵר הַפְּנִימִית), not as total abstinence but abstinence during service.

This regulation ensured mental clarity for sacred duties—ministering before God demands full faculties, not impairment. The principle extends to all spiritual service: leaders must exercise self-control, avoiding anything that diminishes judgment or testimony (1 Timothy 3:2-3, 8, Titus 1:7, 2:2-3). While the New Testament permits moderate wine use (1 Timothy 5:23), it forbids drunkenness (Ephesians 5:18) and commands vigilance (1 Peter 1:13, 5:8). The contrast: **"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit"** (Ephesians 5:18).

Historical Context

Wine was common in ancient Israel for daily consumption (Psalm 104:15, Proverbs 3:10, John 2:1-11), but excess was condemned (Proverbs 20:1, 23:29-35, Isaiah 5:11-12). The Rechabites practiced total abstinence as testimony (Jeremiah 35), and Nazarites abstained during their vows (Numbers 6:3-4). Priests abstained

during temple service to maintain spiritual alertness. Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu may have been intoxicated when they offered unauthorized fire, leading to their deaths and the subsequent wine prohibition (Leviticus 10:1-2, 8-11). Post-exilic priests carefully observed this rule (Nehemiah 10:37-39). The regulation teaches that approaching God requires sobriety, reverence, and clarity of mind.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the prohibition against wine during priestly service illustrate the need for spiritual alertness in ministry and leadership?
2. What practices or substances might impair our spiritual judgment and effectiveness in serving God today?

Interlinear Text

יִין	לֹא	יִשְׁתֶּה	כֹּל	כֹּהֵן	בְּבוֹאָם	אֵל
wine	H3808	drink	H3605	Neither shall any priest	when they enter	H413
H3196		H8354		H3548	H935	

הַחֲצֵרָה	הַפְּנִימִית:
court	into the inner
H2691	H6442

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 10:9 (Parallel theme): Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations:

