

Proverbs 20:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

Analysis

This proverb warns against alcohol abuse: 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.' Wine (yayin) and strong drink (shekhar—beer or fermented drink) are personified as 'mocker' and 'raging.' They deceive, promising pleasure while delivering foolishness and loss of control. Those 'deceived' by alcohol lack wisdom. The verse doesn't absolutely prohibit alcohol (Scripture permits moderate use) but warns against its deceptive power. Proverbs repeatedly cautions about drunkenness (23:20-21, 29-35; 31:4-5). The warning recognizes alcohol's capacity to impair judgment and lead to destructive behavior.

Historical Context

Wine and beer were common in ancient Near Eastern cultures, consumed with meals and in celebrations. Yet drunkenness was recognized as dangerous, particularly for leaders who needed clear judgment (Proverbs 31:4-5). Biblical teaching permits moderate use while condemning drunkenness (Ephesians 5:18). The principle: don't be controlled by substances that impair wisdom and self-control.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Do you use alcohol (or other substances) wisely and moderately, or do they exercise any controlling influence over you?
2. How can you guard against deception in areas where pleasure promises satisfaction but delivers harm?

Interlinear Text

י ל	ה יין	הִמָּה	שִׁכָּר	וְכָל	שֶׁ הָ	וּ
is a mocker	Wine	is raging	strong drink	H3605	and whosoever is deceived	H0
H3887	H3196	H1993	H7941		H7686	
ל א	יִחְכָּם:					
H3808	thereby is not wise					
	H2449					

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 4:11 (Parallel theme): Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

Ephesians 5:18 (Parallel theme): And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

Isaiah 28:7 (Parallel theme): But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.

Proverbs 31:4 (Parallel theme): It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:

1 Corinthians 6:10 (Parallel theme): Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:21 (Parallel theme): Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

2 Samuel 11:13 (Parallel theme): And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.

Isaiah 5:22 (Parallel theme): Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink:

Isaiah 56:12 (Parallel theme): Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.

Hosea 7:5 (Parallel theme): In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners.