

ONEG SHABBAS



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Did Our Ancestors Only Drink Water in the Desert? Rabbi Drew Kaplan

While in the desert, what did our ancestors drink? Certainly, we are reminded of the stories where we read of the difficulties of securing potable water in various parshiyot, however, was water the only beverage our ancestors consumed? Ostensibly when we read of the following in this week's parashah, it would seem that water was, indeed, the only beverage (Deut. 29:3-5):

The LORD has not given you a mind to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear until this day. (4) I led you through the wilderness forty years; the clothes on your back did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet; (5) you ate no bread and neither wine nor beer to drink—that you might know that I, The LORD, am your God.

וְלֹא־נָתּוֹ ְה' לָכֶם לֵב' לְדְׁעַת וְעִינִים לְרְאַוֹת וְאִזְנִים לִשְׁמְעַ עָד הַּיּוֹם הָזֶּה: (ד) וְאוֹלְךְ אֶתְכֶם אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בַּמִּדְבֵּר לְא־בָלְוּ שַּׁלְמִתִּכֶם מַעַלִּיכֶּם וְנַעַלְךָ לְא־בַלְתָה מעַלַ רְגְלְךָ: (ה) לֶחָם לָא אֲכַלְתָּם וְיִין וְשַׁכֶּר לָא שְׁתִיתָם לְמַעַׁן מִדְעוֹ כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֵם

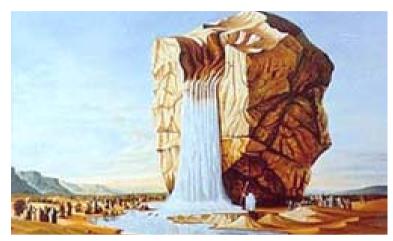
From this verse, it is clear that our ancestors enjoyed neither wine nor beer while making it through the desert for forty years. But is that really so?

According to Rabbi Moses ben Naḥman (1194–1270) (acronymically known as Ramban), no. In his commentary on Deuteronomy 29:5, he begins by explaining "you ate no bread and neither wine nor beer to drink" as saying הטעם לא אכלתם ממנו שתוכלו לחיות ממנו כי עיקר מחיתם במן "The meaning thereof is 'You have not eaten [sufficiently] thereof that you should be able to live by it', for their principal sustenance was the manna." He continues by explaining "that you might know that I, The LORD, am your God" as the one המחיה אתכם במעשה הנס "Who keeps you alive miraculously." In so doing, he positions this bread, wine, and beer verse as meaning that these consumptives were not the primary items consumed in the desert, but not not consumed.



With the holidays only weeks ago, it is time to prepare. If you are looking to save money on wines, go to JewishDrinking.com and click on the KosherWine.com discount logo and you get \$15 off orders of \$200 or more.

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In his continuing explanation, he offers

Now, it could not mean that they did not eat bread at all, as Scripture [says of Moses], "I neither ate bread nor drank water" (Deut. 9:9), for, on some occasions, Israel did have bread in the wilderness, as it is written, "Thou shalt sell me food for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink; as the children of Esau that dwell in Seir, and the Moabites that dwell in Ar, did unto me" (Deut. 2:28-29).

ואין טעמו שלא אכלו לחם כלל כמו לחם לא אכלתי ומים לא שתיתי (דברים ט׳:ט׳) כי בקצת העתים היה לישראל במדבר לחם כמו שכתוב (שם ב כח כט) אכל בכסף תשבירני ואכלתי ומים בכסף תתן לי ושתיתי כאשר בשעיר והמואבים היושבים בער

Thus, he is clearly arguing from these other verses in Deuteronomy that the manna supplied to them by God, as well as their potable water, were not the only items they were consuming.

He then moves on to cite a Talmudic claim: ורבותינו הזכירו (יומא עה) אחרבר מדבר "And our Rabbis mentioned that the merchants of the peoples of the world brought them [various foods] in the desert." This comes from a statement of a second century sage (Yoma 75b):

Rabbi Elazar ben Perata says: "The manna רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן פַּרְטָא אוֹמֵר: אַף caused even items that the gentile merchants דְּבָרִים שָׁתַּגָרֵי אוּמּוֹת הָעוֹלְם sold them to be digested." מוֹכְרִין לָהֶן – מָן מְפִיגָן

It is interesting that Rabbi Elazar ben Perata suggested that they sold these consumptive items, while Ramban wrote that they brought them, but instead of an outright disagreement, Ramban may simply be rephrasing this word as to indicate that these merchants were the source of these consumptive items, rather than disagreeing that there was a financial transaction or not.

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{continued from previous page}

Ramban concludes his commentary on this verse with the following:

It is further possible that, from the time the manna descended until they came to Seir, they did not eat bread at all, for they travelled through the great and dreadful wilderness. But, in the fortieth year, they approached inhabited land, and it was said to them, "You are to pass through the border of your brethren the children of Esau; you shall purchase food of them" (Deut. 2:4, 2:6). There it is written, "these forty years the Eternal thy G-d hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing" (Deut. 2:7). And, from that time on, the Edomites and the Moabites met them with bread and water where prominent Israelites would buy from them for pleasure, neither for necessity, nor for satiety, because their principal sustenance was [still] the manna.

ואפשר עוד כי מעת שירד המו עד בואם אל שעיר לא אכלו לחם כלל כי הלכו רמדרר הגדול והנורא אבל בשנת הארבעים קרבו לישוב ונאמר להם (לעיל ב ד ו) ואת העח צו לאמר אתח עוררים רגרול אחיכם רני עשו אכל תשברו מאתם ושם (דברים ב:ז׳) כתוב זה ארבעים שנה ה' אלהיך עמך לא חסרת דבר ומן העת ההיא היו האדומים והמואבים מקדימים אותם בלחם ובמים והיו גדולי ישראל קונים מהם ואוכלים לתענוג לא לצורך ולא לשבעה ועיקר המחיה שלהם במן

Indeed, it is certainly an intriguing possibility to divide the timing of when these items became available, which makes a lot of sense of the interactions with the Edomites and the Moabites. One thing that seems peculiar, however, in Ramban's concluding commentary regards their beverages.

If our ancestors were already being supplied with manna. I could understand why they would be interested in purchasing bread from these merchants. However, if they already had supply of potable water, why would prominent Israelites, according to



Ramban, buy water "for pleasure"? While it could be that they wanted a classier water, why not suggest that, just as the Israelites of means purchased bread for pleasure, why not also beer and wine for pleasure? Indeed, if we found ourselves in the wilderness for decades, subsisting off of water and manna, wouldn't we purchase bread, beer, and wine for some consumptive variety?

Fortunately, we do not live in a desert and are able to enjoy life, in general, and Shabbat, in particular, with beer, bread, and wine.

L'chaim 7 m

Wine Wednesdays

Jewish Drinking's monthly Cincinnati Wine Wednesdays continue this month with more Israeli wines. Taking place on September 13th at 8pm at a private residence, we will enjoy three Israeli wines courtesy of KosherWine.com, along with an intriguing gin, courtesy of Israel's oldest whiskey distillery (for more on this distillery, check out this week's episode of The Jewish Drinking Show (see information on the right)).

As part of Jewish Drinking's Texts-and-Tasting series, the accompanying discussion will be on Drinking Inside/Outside of Sukkot.

While there is charge to attend, a suggested minimum donation of \$18 to Jewish Drinking is requested. Any questions, please reach out to Rabbi Drew at Drew@JewishDrinking. com.



The Jewish Drinking Show



Kicking-off the "Toast to Israel at 75" miniseries, the most recent episode of The Jewish Drinking Show features Gal Kalkshtein and Tal Chotiner, the CEO & founder and Vice President of Global Sales, respectively, of M&H Distillery, the oldest The Jewish Drinking Show whiskey distillery in Israel.

Shot on location at M&H in Tel Aviv, amongst other topics, the episode mentions the effect of having won best single malt whiskey in the world this spring, as well as sourcing their own kosher sherry casks. The episode is available at JewishDrinking.com/MHDistillery









