

ONEG SHABBAS

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Nazir Grapes? Rabbi Drew Kaplan

At the outset of this week's Torah portion, we read of something that significantly affects the supply of wine - the Shemittah year, which includes specific instructions regarding vineyards (Lev. 25:2-4):

Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of The LORD. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But, in the seventh year, the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of The LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תֵבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשַׁבְתָּהּ הָאָרֶץ שֶׁבֶת לַה' שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כְּרִמְךָ וְאִסַּפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ: וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבְתָּן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שַׁבְתָּ לַה' שָׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכִרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר

This seems that it would be tough to figure out wine for the seventh year, but, wait, there's more (Lev. 25:5):

You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your ???; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land.

אֶת סְפִיחַ קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת־עֲנָבֵי נִזְיָרְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שַׁבְתּוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ

There's certainly a lot going on in these verses, but I want to focus on this non-translated word of נִזְיָר - what are "grapes of your nazir"?

Guarded Vines

One thing we should look at is a rabbinic treatment of this, which is found in a midrash (ספרא, בהר, פרק א ג):

"and the grapes of your nazir you shall not glean" - From what is guarded in the land you may not glean, but you may glean from hefker
"you shall not glean" - in the (usual) way of the gleaners

"ואת ענבי נזירך לא תבצור" - מן השמור בארץ אין אתה בוצר אבל אתה בוצר מן ההפקר.
"לא תבצור" - לא תבצור כדרך הבוצרים

While this does not help us directly, there seems to be some sense of these grapes having been guarded from which we are not supposed to glean.

This is echoed later on by Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known by his acronym,



Rashi), as he wrote (רש"י על ויקרא כ"ה:ה', ד"ה נזירך):

Those from which you barred people and from which you have kept them away, not having declared them free to everybody.

שְׁהַנְזִירָת וְהַפְרָשַׁת בְּנֵי אָדָם מֵהֶם וְלֹא הִפְקַדְתֶּם

While the midrash may not have been clear on what it meant for these grapevines to have been guarded, Rashi takes it to mean that the owner of the vineyard guarded them from other people.

Untended Vines

A different understanding of this word and its meaning is described by Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270) (popularly known by his acronym, Ramban), as he first considers what Rashi wrote and goes in a different direction (רמב"ן על ויקרא כ"ה:ה', ד:ה את ספיח קצירך):

Rashi would explain it in the following way: "Grapes which have been kept away from people you may not gather as long as they are so barred; you must rather declare them all ownerless, and then you may gather them together with the poor." The correct interpretation of the verse is that the expression the grapes of 'n'zirecha' is like 's'fiach' of thy harvest, and thou shalt not gather is like thou shalt not reap, for the purport of the whole section is to state a twofold law to the Israelites - warning with respect to fields and warning again with reference

הרב לומר ענבי נזירות לא תבצור אותם בניזירותם אבל תפקיר הכל ותבצור עם העניים. והנכון בפירוש הכתוב ש"ענבי נזירך" כמו "ספיח קצירך" ו"לא תבצור" כמו "לא תקצור" כי הענין בכל הפרשה יכפול הדין בשניהם יזהיר

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to vineyards. And the meaning of the verse [here] is that that which grows by itself in a field without intentional plowing and sowing is called "s'fiach of the harvest," because it is "attached" to the harvest of the past year, this term being of the root, 'v'nispechu' (and they shall cleave) to the house of Jacob. Likewise, the vine which has been neither cultivated, hoed, nor pruned, is called nazir, because [the owner] "held himself aloof and put it away from him" as if it were not his, of the root, because 'nazoru' from Me through their idols, [which means] "they separated themselves from Me." Similarly, 'v'yinazru' (and they separate themselves) from the holy things of the children of Israel. And Onkelos [also] translates here [and the grapes of 'n'zirecha'] as shivkach, which means [those grapes that] "you have left" to be for briers and thorns.

בשדה ויהיה בכרם.
 ופירוש הכתוב כי
 הצומח מאליו בשדה
 מבלי חרישה וזריעה
 לדעת יקרא ספיח
 קציר שהוא נספח אל
 קציר השנה שעברה
 מגזרת ונספחו על
 בית יעקב (ישעיהו יד
 א) והגפן שלא עבדו
 ולא חפר ולא זמר
 אותו יקרא "נזיר" כי
 הזיר והפרישו ממנו
 כאילו אינו שלו מגזרת
 אשר נזרו מעלי
 בגלוליהם (יחזקאל יד
 ה) פירשו ממני וכן
 וינזרו מקדשי בני
 ישראל (ויקרא
 כ"ב:ב) ואמר
 אונקלוס (תרגום
 אונקלוס על ויקרא
 כ"ה:ה) "שבקך"
 שהנחת אותם לשמיר
 ולשית



The connection that Ramban is advocating in helping our understanding to translate these words is that there is a more direct connection to the nazirite, but not in the way we were thinking of avoiding grapes/wine, but rather having uncut and flowing hair as a nazirite would.

This is echoed and succinctly described by Rabbi Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784-1855), who wrote (ביאור יש"ר על התורה, ויקרא כ"ה:ה; ד"ה ענבי נזיר):



The vineyard that is not pruned will be called a nazirite's vineyard, whose vines resemble the nazirite's unshaven hair, and the vines will also be called nazirites for this similarity, and you will not harvest them like the owner of the vineyard, but will be ownerless.

הכרם שלא נזמר יקרא כרם נזיר, שדומים זמורותיו לשערות הנזיר שלא נתגלחו, והגפנים גם הם יקראו נזירים לדמיון הזה, ואף אותם לא תבצור כבעל הכרם, אלא יהיו הפקר

It would seem from here that Ramban understands this term as that the owner of the vineyard, rather than guarding the vineyard, has actually been separated or aloof from these vines in the vineyard. He then continues to provide a fascinating image:

It is possible that the custom in Israel was that a vineyard which was uncultivated, neither pruned nor hoed, and in which briers and thorns grew up, they called nazir, that is to say, it is a vineyard of the Nazirite, since the Nazirite is forbidden to drink wine nor eat fresh grapes or dried, and he does not cultivate his vineyard. They also gave a name to long hair derived from the Nazirite, as it is said, Cut off 'nizreich' (thy hair) and cast it away. This then is the sense of [the expression here] the grapes of 'n'zirecha,' the general purport thereof being that they are the grapes which grow without cultivation of the vineyard.

ויתכן כי המנהג
 בישראל שהכרם
 אשר הוא בתה לא
 יזמר ולא יעבד ועולה
 שמיר ושית יקראו לו
 "נזיר" כלומר שהוא
 כרם הנזיר מפני
 שהנזיר אסור בין
 ובענבים לחים
 ויבשים ואינו עובד
 כרמו כי כן יקראו
 השער הארוך על
 שם הנזיר גזי נזר
 והשליכי (ירמיהו ז
 כט) וזה טעם ענבי
 נזיר והכלל שהם
 הצומחים מבלי
 עבודת הכרם



Contemporary Translations

As we consider these approaches to considering this word, it does not seem as if there is a clear consensus from these rabbis. This is reflected in contemporary Jewish translations, as we read of Rashi's approach reflected in the translation as published by Artscroll:

- The aftergrowth of your harvest you shall not reap and the grapes you had set aside for yourself you shall not pick; it shall be a year of rest for the land.

On the other hand, Ramban's approach is reflected in others with regard to translating ענבי נזירך:

- You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. (JPS)
- You shall not sow your fields or prune your vineyards; you shall not harvest what grows of itself or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine; it is a year of rest for the land. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (Koren))
- Do not harvest crops that grow on their own and do not gather the grapes on your unpruned vines, since it is a year of rest for the land. (Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan)

Conclusion

When we encounter this curious phrasing of "your nazir grapes" as something that is off-limits for our harvesting every seventh year from our vineyards, it could seem contradictory: after all, when we read of the regulations concerning the nazirite in chapter six in the book of Numbers, one of the items that is forbidden is grapes and anything associated with them, including wine. Yet, it seems that if there is any association with the nazir, it is to do with the flowing hair of the nazir, rather than the prohibition of anything grape-related.

L'chaim 

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