

ONEG SHABBAS

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How Did Lot & His Daughters Have So Much Wine?

When we read of the first appearance of wine in Noah's getting drunk (Gen. 9:21), it seems like he was surprised by the effects of the wine or otherwise did not expect to get drunk and fall asleep on account of drinking it. In this week's Torah portion, however, there is no mistaking the effects of wine. Indeed, we read of Lot's daughters clearly very intentionally using it on their father. As we read of Lot's daughters' concern for the lack of humans in the world and the need to restart humanity (Gen. 19:31-38), they seek out wine with which to ply their father to an extent that he lacks knowledge of what is taking place. Indeed, they provided so much wine that he really had no idea of what was taking place (Gen. 19:33, 35).

While there is no specific mention of Lot getting drunk, it is quite clear to any reader of the text that that is exactly what happens to him. Indeed, as Rabbi David Kimḥi (1160–1235) (popularly known as Radak) describes, insofar as his daughters were planning (את נשקה את) "ד"ק על בראשית י"ט:ל"ב, ד"ה נשקה את) (אבינו יין):

Which is to say until he got drunk and would not know what was happening and we would get laid by him, because had he known, he would not have laid down with his daughters. God forbid anyone from Avraham's culture would do such a disgusting thing.	כלומר עד שישתכר ולא ידע מה לעשות ונשכבה עמו, כי בידיעה לא שכב עם בנותיו, חלילה לתרבות אבינו שיעשה דבר נבלה
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While it is not entirely clear that Lot's daughters were drinking with him, he certainly drank a lot of wine both of these nights. Not only is there quite the sizeable amount of wine for him to consume (and, perhaps, also for his daughters), but one thing that is hard for the reader to avoid is how many times we read of the word for wine. Indeed, this Torah portion features the most mentions of wine in it than any other Torah portion (wine appears four times in this week's Torah portion (the only other Torah portions which have more than two appearances are *Nasso* and *Shelah*, which have three appearances of the word (יין)). So there is clearly a lot of wine here, but how did they have so much wine?

Brought It With Them

The clearest possibility is that they brought wine with them during their fleeing. Indeed, if one is fleeing, it is highly likely that one will bring supplies with them, especially food, but why not also wine? Perhaps, according to this possibility, they loaded wagons and took them with them, loaded with supplies. However, one issue with this method of transportation is that they were instructed to hastily flee (Gen. 19:22). While it is certainly possible that they may have decided to ignore that instruction, as it would not have been the only instruction they ignored (see Lot's wife (Gen. 19:17 & 19:26)), as they were fleeing for their lives, perhaps taking a wagon or even laden donkeys would have slowed them down too much. Another possibility is hauling provisions in bags slung over their shoulders, which is certainly likely. However, if one is taking a sizable amount of food, how much wine could they have had the strength to carry for a significant distance?



A Duo of Midrashic Suggestions

Instead of perceiving Lot's family as having carried the wine with them, there are a couple of further possibilities that a midrash furnishes (בראשית (רבה) נ"א:ח):

Whence is it that they had wine in the cave?	מנין היה להם יין במערה,
Rather, that there was so much wine stored away in the caves.	אלא ממה שהיו מרבה להם היו מחביאין אותו במערות.
Rabbi Yehudah, son of Simon, said: "A microcosm of the World to Come was provided for them, just as it says: 'It will be on that day, that the mountains will drip with juice' (Joel 4:18)."	אמר רבי יהודה בר סימון נעשה להם מעין דוגמא של עולם הבא, הרי מה דאת אמר (יואל ד, יח): והיה ביום ההוא יטפו ההרים עסיס.

These two midrashic possibilities offer us that it was not only highly unlikely that Lot's daughters had enough wine with them to get their father drunk for two consecutive nights, but that they had to source the wine from the cave where they had encamped.

A Cave Dripping with Wine

When we consider Rabbi Yehudah, son of Simon's suggestion, he draws from the book of Joel in a scene where he "envisions...that the blessings of fertility will continue to flow back into the land as a result of God's renewed presence in Zion", as described in John Anthony Dunne's *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine: A Biblical Theology of Alcohol* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2025), 182.



While the Biblical verse expresses the constant dripping of a mountain owing to how plentiful the wine will be at the time of the World to Come, Rabbi Yehudah, son of Simon takes this verse to be speaking about a microcosm of the World to Come, where there is some wine, perhaps in even smaller drips. His clever turn of the Joel verse also serves as an inversion: whereas the mountains in the Joel verse will have wine dripping from them externally, he provides an imagery of the wine dripping on the inside of the mountain, perhaps dripping down from stalactites. In this way, it would provide a constant and steady supply of wine. In this sense, it would almost seem like an everflowing spring, yet of wine.

As to whence this dripping derived, Rabbi Josh Yuter shared on the 49th episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* that, "You can look at it two ways: either one sort of a miraculous thing that you had these plants that dripped wine or you maybe they just happened to plop down by a vineyard." As many grapevines grow on hills and mountains, this could be quite possible.

{continued on the next page}

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If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, feel free to reach out at Drew@JewishDrinking.com

{continued from previous page}

Wine Stored in the Cave

The other midrashic possibility, however, might be the likeliest of these possibilities, especially considering that there was no refrigeration back in those days. Thus, if you wanted to store away wine, caves would be a fitting location in which to store one's surplus wine.

While it is possible that Lot and his daughters may "just [have] happened to come across a storage or, perhaps, they were looking for one, too," suggested Rabbi Josh Yuter on the 49th episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*. "Meaning: if you think the world is destroyed and you think caves are a good repository, you're safe." In other words, perhaps there was an intentionality in seeking out a cave that had wine stored there.

Moreover, perhaps it was not just looking for wine-storage caves: "S'dom might have been destroyed, but the caves might have been maintained from fire and brimstone raining down from heavens," continued Rabbi Yuter. Moreover, he suggests, it's not simply happenstance that they would have accidentally chanced upon a well-supplied cave. "Caves are going to be protected, so it's possible that they specifically looked for caves that already had resources in there."

Okay to Drink?

An interesting consideration concerning their consumption of this wine is the question of "Was it okay for them to drink?" Indeed, these containers of wine had been stored there by particular individuals. While it is possible that Lot and his daughters went to their own personally designated cave and knew what they had stored within it, in the event that they had gone to someone else's cave, was it okay for them to drink others' wine?

Here's the thing: those people were no longer alive. Rabbi Shmuel Yaffe Ashkenazi (1525-1595) states this clearly, as he wrote in the 16th century (יפה תואר על בראשית רבה נ"א:ח):

They were not concerned about theft, ולא חששו משום גזל
since they believed that the entire world כיון שחשבו שנתכלה
had been destroyed. העולם

This explanation gets a fuller treatment by Rabbi Henokh Zundel ben Joseph (d. 1859), who wrote (ד"ה היו מחביאין עץ יוסף על בראשית רבה נ"א:ח, ד"ה היו מחביאין) ביאור יש"ר על (cf. also Rabbi Isaac Samuel Reggio's (1784-1855) (התורה, בראשית י"ט:ל"ב):

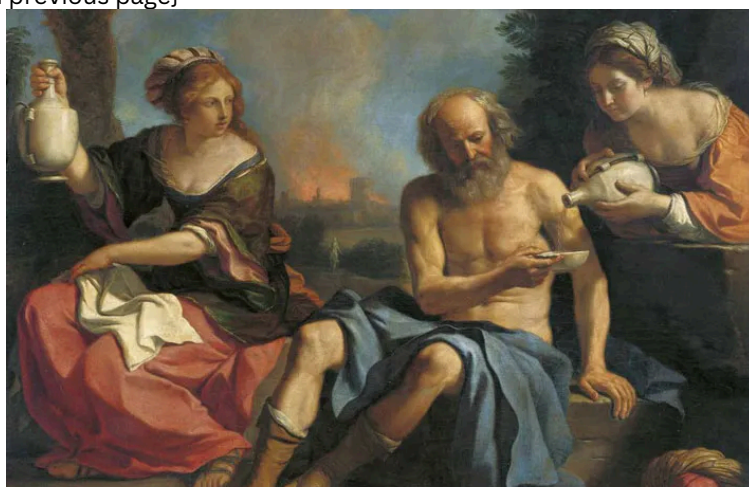
These caves were those belonging to the והמערות הללו היו משל
inhabitants of S'dom and Amora, as the אנשי סדום ועמורה כי
mountain was close to them and since היה ההר סמוך להם.
they all died, Lot and his daughters וכאשר מתו כולם זכו בהם
acquired this wine, as it was now לוט ובנותיו מן ההפקר
ownerless, so it was not theft. ולא היה גזל

Now that all of this wine that was stored away became ownerless, it was now fair game for them to drink.

Episodes on Lot & His Daughters

- Ep. 7 - "Lot Gets Drunk with His Daughters", featuring Aaron Roller (13 November 2019)
- Ep. 8 - "Discussing Lot's Drinking with His Daughters", featuring Rabbi Eryn London (20 November 2019)
- Ep. 49 - "Lot and His Daughters' Drinking Episode in the Midrash (*Bereshit Rabbah*)", featuring Rabbi Josh Yuter (27 Oct. 2020)
- Ep. 50 - "Lot, Lot's Daughters, and Wine", featuring Aliza Lipkin (3 November 2020)

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Exclusively Wine?

While I would have thought that wine was the only alcoholic beverage they may have encountered in the caves, what if it wasn't, as Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (1816-1893) (popularly known as Netziv) suggested (העמק דבר על בראשית י"ט:ל"ה, ד"ה גם בלילה ההוא את אביהן יין):

The language of the verse is different שניה הלשון ממה
from the language of the first night, דכתיב בליל הראשון
since they were worried that he would משום דבליל שני חשו
not want to drink more wine on the שלא ירצה עוד
second night and get drunk. Therefore, לשתות יין ולהשתכר
they provided him with other [alcoholic] ע"כ השקוהו משקאות
beverages; following which, they then אחרות ומה הגיע
had him drinking wine. ששתה גם יין

In his perspective on this second night, Lot did not want to repeat another drunken night off of wine, so his daughters got his drinking going with beer, that led into wine, so perhaps less wine may have been required for the second night.

Conclusion

However Lot's daughters were able to procure these copious amounts of wine, it is pretty fascinating that they had so much of it. What's even further fascinating, however, is that there is neither astonishment, nor surprise in the narration of this story about how much wine was available. It seems that, in the telling of this story, there is an assumption that there should be so much wine for such purposes. Beyond this observation, there is, at no point in the story, any sense that they exhausted their wine supplies over the course of these two nights.

Indeed, it seems to us readers that, while they used copious amounts of wine these first two nights, they likely continued drinking after these two nights. While it was highly unlikely that they drank at the same rate following these two nights as they had for procreative purposes, it almost seems as if it was normal to have wine around. (Yes, I also realize there is a possibility that, despite the story leaving off after the first two nights, they may have not solely relied on these first two nights for procreative possibilities and continued their attempts at re-populating the world for further nights. Thus, they would need an even further abundance of wine to support this manner of behavior.)

Finally, while they may have found wine in one cave, it is also possible that they may have run out of wine in one cave and could have scouted out further caves for their wine storage. No matter how it took place, it is certainly fascinating how the narrative matter-of-factly assumes that wine is available.

L'chaim 🍷



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