

Editorial

The production of alcohol from fruits, grains, and vegetables has been a process used for thousands of years for beverage manufacture. According to the World Book Encyclopaedia signs of fermentation, the process whereby bacteria, moulds, and yeast break down the sugars in food to make alcohol, appear on pottery from Mesopotamia as early as 4200 BC. The alcohol referred to here goes by the common chemical name, ethanol, of formula C_2H_5OH . Because alcohol had been produced from living material for so long it came to be regarded as a molecule only available from life processes. It wasn't until the 19th century that chemists finally recognized that ethanol could be produced from non-living material.

The intoxicating nature of ethanol is very well-known in our modern society but was also well-known in ancient cultures. The biblical characters, Lot and Noah, experienced the effects of intoxication according to Genesis. Fermentation can lead to an ethanol content in a beverage of between about 3% and 20%. Distillation, a process used from about 100 AD, can increase the ethanol content to as

much as 55% or more leading to what are known as spirits such as gin, rum, vodka, and whisky. Binge drinking has become a troubling phenomenon amongst the youth of our society because of the impact of intoxication on social behaviour. It is an issue on the political agenda of state and federal governments.

In this volume of the journal, Dr Steve Thompson introduces us to the way alcohol was understood in ancient Roman and Greek society. Dr Ewan Ward and a selection of his biomedical students give us a look at the impact of alcohol on our biology from a physiological and biochemical perspective. Dr John Ashton has also provided some useful facts in relation to the impact of alcohol on society. The reader is invited to consider the questions asked at the conclusion of the feature articles as these particularly address what might be a Christian response to the use of alcohol in our society given the information presented in the articles. I hope you find the articles both informative and challenging.

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Editor