

Water into Wine

Israel, the Land of Vineyards

Israel was a blessed fertile land with a mild climate suited for vineyards which produced the best annual agricultural yields. Grapes provided various sources of nourishment: raisins which were dried and provided an energy source which could be eaten year round; grape juice concentrate, which could be preserved from spoiling and fermenting and used over a longer period of time as sweet syrups, jellies or reconstituted as grape juice by adding water to the concentrate. (Nu 16:14; Dt 6:11-12; Jos 24:13; 1 Sa 8:14; Ne 5:4-5,11; Ps 107:37; Is 36:16-17; 65:21; Jer 32:15; Eze 28:26; Am 9:14; Hab 3:17.) In Old Testament times, wine was a common table drink, which often times was clearly fermented and a curse. (Gen 9:21-25) The Old Testament warns, "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise." Pr 20:1. "Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled by wine, they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions." Is 28:7. Numerous other accounts are given of disastrous outcomes of intoxicating wine: (Ge 19:30-38; Pr 23:29-35; 31:4-5; Is 28:7-8; Jer 25:27; 51:39, 57.)

Hebrew/Greek Words for Wine

Yayin, wine of all kinds, (Ne 5:18) was used one hundred forty times in the O.T. which often applied to fermented grape juice (12-14 percent alcohol). *Yayin*, can sometimes refer to fresh grape juice, as in Isaiah 16:10, "No one treads out *yayin* at the presses." Jeremiah similarly speaks of unfermented *yayin*. (Jer 48:33; 40:10,12)

Tirosh, another Hebrew word translated as "new wine," which was used thirty-eight times in reference to blessing, harvest of fresh produce in the field, and offerings of first fruits. (Nu 18:12; Dt 7:13, Pr 3:10; Is 65:8)

Shekar, is used twenty-three times in the O.T. and refers to beer made from barley, a favorite Philistine drink. At other times it refers to other fruit drinks.

Shekar and Yayin, used together include all intoxicating beverages.

Oinos, the Greek term used for wine in the N.T.

Wine - Alcoholic?/ Non-Alcoholic?

Many assume that since refrigeration was unavailable in ancient times, there were no means for preserving wine in an unfermented state in the warm Mediterranean climate. The production of non-alcoholic wine was known as *aigloukos*, always sweet. To preserve wine in a non-alcoholic state for long periods of time was to boil the fresh grape juice down to about a third of its original volume. The resulting condensed juice was very sweet, and because of its high sugar content, it both resisted

spoilage and did not ferment. Later, a three to one ratio of water was added back to produce reconstituted juice. This practice is often referred to as “mixed wine” in ancient writings.

In the ancient world, as today, often, people consumed alcoholic wine in order to become intoxicated. The god of wine and revelry was known among the Greeks as Dionysus and among the Romans as Bacchus. Riotous drinking parties and drinking contests held in honor of this pagan god are well documented. It is unlikely that the wine used at such events was diluted with water. Any alcohol consumption leads to some impairment of a person’s motor skills and thus decreases his or her ability to operate an automobile or other machinery safely.

Water Into Wine

The Gospel of John presents seven miraculous signs which pointed to Jesus as being Israel’s Messiah and God’s incarnate (not adopted) Son, “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14,17). John emphasizes in his Gospel the theme of “newness.”

*new wine (John 2:1-11)

*new temple (John 2:14-22)

*new birth (John 3:1-8)

*new life (John 4:4-26)

In the person and ministry of Jesus, something brand new and unprecedented was coming forth in redemptive history. The old order of Judaism, was opposing and rejecting the newness that Jesus was bringing. The six stone water jars used for Jewish ceremonial washing represent the old way of Judaism; the new wine that came forth out of the old represents the newness that God brings to us in His Son.

The great quantity of water turned into wine by Jesus (120-180 gallons) represents the extravagant plenteousness and lavish abundance of God’s grace and new life that comes to us in Jesus.

“New Wine”: Unfermented

Jesus created “new wine” (unfermented) rather than “aged wine” (alcoholic) for the following reasons:

1. “New wine” fits better the context of John with its emphasis on the “newness” of the gospel that Jesus brings. (John 2:1-11; 2:14-22; 3:1-8; 4:4-26; Mt 9:16-17; 2 Co 5:17) Old wineskins and old wine are associated with Judaism, not the gospel, in the four Gospels (Lk 5:37-39). The ultimate goal of redemption is to make all things new. (Rev. 21:5)
2. The quality of wine that Jesus made is called “choice” wine in contrast to “cheaper wine.” The choice wine was the sweetest wine – one that could be drunk freely and in large quantities without harm.

3. The wine miracle of Jesus as His first miraculous sign was intended to reveal “His Glory” and cause His disciples to put their faith in Him. (John 1:14; 20:31) Jesus regarded the OT as God’s authoritative Scripture; it is unlikely that He would have created alcohol to reveal His glory in light of the strong warnings given in Pr 23:29-35.