

Wine or Grape Juice For Passover

*M*any people assume from their experience with "communion" that wine is the proper liquid to represent the memorial shedding of the Savior's blood at Passover.

But was it wine that was in the Passover cup? There was once a group that could not decide, so they offered both wine and grape juice at the Passover memorial. Are we not commanded to discern what is right and proper from what is not? According to 1 Kings 18:21, we are.

Have you ever investigated the meaning of the Passover cup and its symbolic contents?

Life in the Blood

A basic principle in the Bible is that the only possible atonement for the act of sin is a giving up of life. And the **ONLY** way we can be free of sin's death penalty, which we have all earned because of our sins, is through blood, which contains life, Leviticus 17:11.

Israel's sins were covered under an elaborate system of sacrifices in which animal blood was shed. That system gave way to a better sacrifice in the New Testament. Yeshua shed His blood on the torture stake as the perfect sacrifice. His blood paid the death penalty for our sins, just as the blood of animals was shed under the Old Covenant merely to cover Israel's sins (but not take them away). Read Hebrews 9:13-15.

Contrary to what many believe, the principle of sacrifice remains, only now instead of animal sacrifice, it is the sacrifice of the Savior and the shedding of His blood that we trust in.

What Represents Blood?

Our Savior instituted a new symbol at that New Covenant Passover--the cup. This symbol represented the blood of the perfect Lamb, which was He Himself.

The question is, what liquid represented His pure, sinless life? Wine? Grape juice? Water? Is there any way we can know?

Yes, there is! Does it really matter? It certainly does, because one is right and proper, the rest are wrong and of no effect. Some read John 4:46 and say the cup should contain water, because Yeshua changed water into wine at Cana. They also opt for water in the cup because both blood and water came out of the Savior's side when He was pierced by the Roman soldier while on the stake.

But the cup must symbolize blood. At best, John 4:46 shows only an association between water and wine, not water and blood.

The fact that both water and blood issued from His pierced side proves nothing in relation to the Passover cup. If He had shed only water on the torture stake, then we could conceivably call water his shed "blood." But His blood is what saves us, not water. Therefore, we must find something other than water as the proper symbol for His blood.

Grape Juice Analogous to Blood

The Old Testament never mentions a cup for Passover—only the lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. You might be wondering, but what about the drink offering?

The drink offering used in regular Old Testament sacrifices comes from the Hebrew word "nacak," and it means to pour out. Although called a "drink" offering because it was liquid, it was not drunk but always "poured out" at the altar. Paul wrote to Timothy that he was ready to be offered (Greek "spendomai," poured out like a drink offering") at the end of his ministry. The drink offering, therefore, can give us no clue as to the contents of the cup that was drunk in the New Covenant Passover service.

An important indication of the cup's contents, however, is found in the Hebrew word for blood, "dam." Strong's Exhaustive Concordance Hebrew Dictionary defines "dam" or blood: "(as that which when shed causes death) of man or an animal; by anal. the juice of the grape; fig. (especially in the plur.) bloodshed(i.e. drops of blood)."

'Wine' Never Used for 'Cup'

Both Yeshua and Paul referred to the Passover beverage simply as "cup" or "fruit of the vine." They NEVER used "wine" in referring to the cup.

Fermented wine is the Greek "oinos," used 28 times in the New Testament, but NEVER for the contents of the Passover cup.

What we can deduce, then, is that "fruit of the Vine" properly represents His blood (Luke 22:20). But is that fruit of the vine fermented, or is it the pure, unadulterated juice of the grape? Had the New Testament writers used "gleukos," the other word for fermented wine (occurring one time in Acts 2:13), the meaning would be clear.

But just as they did not use "oinos" (fermented wine), neither did they employ "gleukos" in reference to the Passover cup. Why? Is there a reason they did not use "wine" when speaking of the Passover cup?

Wine Symbolic of Retribution, Celebration

Let's look at the symbolic attributes of wine and see whether this substance would be appropriate for the solemn, redemptive Passover observance. In the prophetic Book of Revelation we find clear, symbolic meaning in wine. In 14:8 wine represents wrath unleashed for Babylon's fornication. Verse 10 reads, "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of Elohim, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation..."

Wine ("oinos") symbolizes the fierceness of Yahweh's wrath in Revelation 16:19. He calls it "wine of her [Babylon's] fornication" in 17:2. The use of wine ("oinos") in other parts of the New Testament is significant as well.

In the New Testament wine is used in celebration, during times of rejoicing. The first miracle Yeshua performed was to change water to wine at a wedding feast, John 2. It is a celebration drink.

Upon Abraham's victorious return from battle with the kings, Genesis 14:18, Melchizedek greeted him with bread and wine ("yayin"--a fermented drink).

Similarly, in Deuteronomy 14:26 we find that wine is expressly used for REJOICING at Yahweh's joyous Feasts ("wine" here is the Greek "shekar," an intoxicant, but we are commanded against drunkenness, Eph. 5:18).

Wine, therefore, would be inappropriate for the solemn, deadly **SERIOUS** and even frightening observance of the Passover (recall that the death angel struck absolute **FEAR** into the hearts of Israel).

Paul chastized the once pagan Corinthian Assembly for coming together at Passover to gorge themselves on food and drink. He showed in 1 Corinthians 11 that the Passover was a solemn occasion and not a festive time. It is a time for sober introspection, v. 28.

Wine at the Passover would be inappropriate in light of what Paul was teaching about sobriety and humility at Passover. Both wine (yayin) and "strong drink" were expressly forbidden during worship services, "that you may put difference between holy and unholy, between clean and unclean." This was a statute Yahweh gave forever, for "all generations" (Lev. 10:9-11). Under the New Covenant, an elder is not to be "given to wine," 1 Timothy 3:3.

Intoxicants simply have no place in a worship setting.

Wine: Chemically Altered and Leavened

Wine is not a firstfruit of the grape. It is a byproduct. Wine is produced when yeast, a leavening agent, acts on the sugar molecule of fruit juice to produce ethyl alcohol and carbon dioxide. Wine, then, is juice that has been chemically changed into something different. It is not the original, pure fruit of the vine, but a secondary byproduct. As a symbol for the pure, uncorrupted, sinless blood of Yeshua, a modified substance like wine would be inadequate. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Messiah?...?" (1 Cor. 10:16)

More importantly, wine has been leavened in the same way bread is leavened by yeast. The Passover was to be eaten only with unleavened bread, Exodus 12:8. Nothing leavened was to be used at the Passover Memorial.

Unleavened bread represents Yeshua's body unchanged by the corruption of sin, Mark 14:22. Similarly, the cup represents His pure blood, untainted by outside influences of the sinful world. Would a chemically altered drink like wine best represent His pure, unadulterated blood, or would the virgin juice from the grape?

Blood of the Grape

Biblically, the symbolism between blood and the pure juice of the grape is unmistakable.

In Genesis 49:11 we find a reference to the "blood of grapes." A citation to drinking the "pure blood of the grape" is found in Deuteronomy 32:14.

Isaiah 63:1 speaks prophetically of the returning Messiah Yeshua, who comes from Edom ("red") with dyed garments (red from blood) from Bozrah (meaning "vintage"--the yield of grapes from a grape crop).

Verse 2 reads, "Wherefore are you red in your apparel, and your garments like him that treads in the winefat?" "Winefat" is the Hebrew "gath," which means to tread out grapes. It is not "yekeb," which would be a wine-vat or a container storing wine.

"I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me: for I will tread them in Mine anger and trample them in My fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garment, and I will stain all My raiment," Isaiah 63:3.

"Winepress" is a misnomer. It is in fact a trough for squeezing grape juice, with a drain at one lower end. The grapes were pressed down and the juice flowed out the drain. Here, the juice that flows from the grapes is equated with the blood of those whom Yeshua will destroy when He returns. Their blood is equated with the "blood of the grape"--grape juice.

The analogy is complete in Revelation 14:20, where "blood came out of the winepress." "Blood" here is the Greek "haima," and according to Strong's Concordance Greek Dictionary means: "Blood, lit. (of men or animals), fig. (the juice of grapes) or spec. (the atoning blood of [Messiah])."

Savior as a Firstfruits

Yeshua is the firstfruit sacrifice for man, 1 Corinthians 15:20. The people were to offer the firstfruits of their produce to the priests, Deuteronomy 18:4--"...the firstfruit also of your corn, of your wine..." "Wine" here is "tiros."

For more uses of "tiros" as freshly pressed juice of the winepress, see 2 Chronicles 31:4-5 and Nehemiah 10:37-39; 13:5, 12. Just as the winepress is really a giant grape juice press, so wine is also used metaphorically for grapes. "As the new wine [Heb.

"tirosh, " fresh grape juice] is found in the cluster..." [Isaiah 65:8. We don't find wine in a cluster, but we do find grapes that way.

"New wine" signifies the best--that juice which squeezes out by the sheer weight of the grapes in the winepress, before the treading. Thus, it is the firstfruits of the grape batch.

Yeshua is called the firstfruit of the dead, and the true vine. This pure firstfruit can only equate with the first of the freshly squeezed grape juice, not with a byproduct or wine, adulterated through chemical change.

Pure, unadulterated juice is the only proper symbol of the pure, saving blood of Yeshua the Messiah in the Passover. Grape juice is the only symbol that fits all the criteria and offers the only symbolism that is unique to His pure, precious blood.

Paul tells us that the Savior represents the first of the harvest: "But now is the Messiah risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20).

Firstfruits offerings were commanded of Israel in Deuteronomy 18:4: "The firstfruit also of your corn, of your wine, and of your oil..." "Wine" here is the Hebrew "tirosh," meaning freshly pressed juice. Similarly in Isaiah 65:8 we read of the "new wine ["tirosh," fresh grape juice] found in the cluster" (see 2Chron. 31:4-5; Neh. 10:37-39; 13:5, 12).

Yeshua is actually the first of the firstfruits, 1 Corinthians 15:23, and the true vine, John 15:1. This pure Firstfruit can only equate with the first of the freshly squeezed grape juice, not with the byproduct known as wine, which has been mixed with yeast spores and changed through aging and chemical action.

Can Grape Juice Be Preserved?

Some years ago a number of wine producers and processors of grape juice were contacted with the question, "Could grape juice have been preserved in the Holy Land 2,000 years ago from the fall of the year until early spring?" The response was equally divided. Those producing wine expressed doubts that grape juice could be preserved. Those producing grape juice stated it was possible even under primitive conditions, to do so. Furthermore, grapes in Israel had a high content of sugar, which was an advantage in preservation, some pointed out.

The Living Bible Encyclopedia in Story and Pictures explains how grape juice could be preserved: "The means for preserving grape juice were well known. Kato (De Agri Cultura CXX) has this recipe: 'If you wish to have must [grape juice] all year, put grape juice in an amphora and seal the cork with pitch. Sink it in a fish pond. After 30 days take it out. It will be grape juice for a whole year'" (vol. 16, pp. 2088-2089).

Another method of preserving grape juice was to concentrate the juice by boiling it into a syrup. Stored in a cool place, this concentrate would not ferment. Adding water later yielded a sweet, unfermented grape juice. This was common in ancient times.

Still another way to have grape juice all year was to finely chop raisins, which are dried grapes--and then add water to produce the reconstituted juice.

Yeshua Kept His Promise

As Yeshua was participating in His memorial with His disciples, He said: "Drink you all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:27-29). About to die, Yeshua said He would not drink of the "fruit of the vine" until He was with them in the Kingdom. If the Passover cup contained wine, as some allege, then He broke that promise. Why is that? Simply this:

John 19:28-29 reveals that Yeshua's thirst was satisfied when on the tree they gave Him "vinegar" ("oxos" in Greek), which is described as an inferior, common wine drunk by soldiers and laborers. (The Complete Biblical Library) "When Yeshua therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the Spirit" (John 19:30).

Yeshua had refused the wine ("oxos") four times, but just before His death He did receive the wine. Had the previous Passover cup contained wine instead of "fruit of the vine" (grape juice), He would have broken His word not to drink of it again after the Passover and before the Kingdom.

Grape juice had to have been in the Passover cup. Pure, unadulterated "blood of the grape" is the only proper symbol for the pure, saving blood of Yeshua the Messiah in the Passover.