

The Passover Cup

Should It Contain Wine or Grape Juice?

Many assume from their experience with "communion" that wine is the proper liquid to represent the memorial shedding of the Savior's blood. But is it? Have you ever really investigated the meaning of the cup and its symbolic contents?

Blood Atones for Sin

A basic principle in the Bible is that the only possible atonement for the act of sin is giving up a life. And the ONLY way we can be free of sin's death penalty, which we all 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. Yahshua 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, Heb. 9:13-15).

Contrary to what many believe, the principle of sacrifice remains, only now 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 the New Covenant Passover—the cup. This symbol represented the blood of the perfect Lamb, which was Himself.

The question is what was the liquid in that Passover cup which 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!

Some read John 4:46 and say the cup should contain water, because Yahshua 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, John 19:34. But the cup must symbolize blood. At best, John 4:46 can show 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 regard to the Passover cup. If He had shed only water at the 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.

An Old Testament Indication

The Old Testament never mentions a cup for Passover—only the lambs, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs.

You might be wondering, what about the drink offering?

The drink offering is 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 on the altar of sacrifice.

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 animal, by anal. The *juice* of the grape; fig. (especially in the plur.) *bloodshed* (i.e. *drops* of blood)."

'Wine' Not Symbolic for Cup

Both Yahshua 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 can we deduce, then, is that "fruit of the vine" properly represents His blood (Luke 22:20). But is that fruit of the fermented, or is it the pure, unadulterated, unchanged juice of the grape?

Had the New Testament writers used *gluekos*, the other word for fermented wine (occurring one time in Acts 2:12), the meaning would be clear. But just as they did not use *oinos* (fermented wine), neither did they employ *gluekos* in reference to the Passover cup.

Why? Is there a reason they did not use "wine" when speaking of the Passover cup?

What Wine Represents

Let's look at the symbolic attributes of wine and see whether this substance would be appropriate for the solemn Passover observance.

In the prophetic Book of Revelation we find clear, symbolic meaning in wine. In 14:8 wine represents wrath 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 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.

Wine—A Celebration Drink

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

Upon Abraham's victorious return from battle with the kings, Genesis 14:18, Melchizedek greeted him with bread and wine.

Similarly, in Deuteronomy 14:26 we find that wine is expressly used for REJOICING at Yahweh's joyous Feasts ("wine" here is for *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 chastised the one pagan Corinthian Assembly for coming together at Passover to gorge themselves on food and drink. He showed in 1Corinthians 11 that the Passover was a solemn occasion and not a festive time. It is a time for sober introspection, v. 28.

Wine, particularly too much of it would render one incapable of earnest soul-searching.

Wine Forbidden in Worship

Both wine (*yayin*) and "strong drink" were expressly forbidden during worship services, "that you may put differences between holy and unholy, between clean and unclean." This was a statute Yahweh gave forever, for "all generation" (Lev. 10:9-11). Under the New Covenant, an elder is not to be "given to wine," 1Timothy 3:3, nor are deacons, verse 8.

Wine is a Byproduct

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 chemically altered. It is not the original, pure fruit of the vine, but a secondary byproduct. As a symbol for the pure, uncorrupted, sinless blood of Yahshua, 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?..." (1Cor. 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.

Unleavened bread represents Yahshua'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 an altered drink like wine best represent His pure, unadulterated blood, or would the virgin juice from the grape?

Blood and the Grape

Biblically, the connection between blood and the juice of the grape is unmistakable. In Genesis 49:11 we find a poetic reference to the "blood of grapes." A reference to drinking the "pure blood of the grape" is found in Deuteronomy 32:14.

Isaiah 63:1 speaks prophetically of the returning Messiah Yahshua, who comes from Edom ("red") with dyed garments (red from blood) from Bozrah (meaning "vintage"). 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 a winepress or place to squeeze out grapes. It is not *yekeh*, 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 with a drain at one 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 Yahshua 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 Greek Dictionary means: "blood, lit. (of men or animals), fig. (the juice of grapes) or spec. (the atoning blood of [Messiah])."

Firstfruits of the Vine

Yahshua is the firstfruit sacrifice for man, 1Corinthians 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 *tirosh*. For more uses of *tirosh* as freshly pressed juice of the winepress see 2Chronicles 31:4-5 and Nehemiah 10:37-39; 13:5. 12.

Just as the winepress is really a 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.

"New wine" signifies the best—that juice which squeezes out by the sheer weight of the grapes in the winepress, before the treading.

Yahshua 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 of wine, adulterated through chemical change.

Pure, unadulterated juice is the only proper symbol of the pure, saving blood of Yahshua 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.

Before He suffered, Yahshua went into the garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26:36. Gethsemane comes from two Hebrew words, *gath* or winepress, and *semane*, meaning liquid or grease. Being in the garden of Gethsemane, Yahshua was in the "winepress." He was under so much pressure that He sweated as it were, drops of blood, Luke 24:44. Isn't grape juice that which is first squeezed out of the grapes by the sheer weight of the grapes in the press? "...and [He] began to be sorrowful and very heavy, " Matthew 26:37. Juice of the grape is equated with His blood.

Can 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, as pollution was much less of a problem then. Furthermore, grapes in Israel had a high content of sugar, which was an advantage in preservation.

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) had 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 fishpond. After 30 days take it out. It will be grape juice for a whole year.'" (Vol. 16, pp. 2088-2089)

Another method for 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.

Still another way to have grape juice all year was to finely chop raisins—which are dried grapes—and then add water to produce juice. [For more information, see William Patton, *Bible Wines—Law of Fermentation*, pp. 24-41; C.A. Christoforides, "More on Unfermented Wine, " *Ministry*, April 1955, p. 34; Lael O. Caeser, "The Meaning of Yayin in the Old Testament," (master's thesis), Andrews University, 1986, pp. 74-77; F.C. Gilbert, *Practical Lessons from the Experience of Israel for the Church of Today* (Nashville, Southern Publishing Assn., 1972, pp. 240-241.)]

Yahshua Did Not Lie

As Yahshua 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." (Matthew 26:27-29)

About to die, Yahshua said He would not drink of the "fruit of the vine" until He was in the Kingdom. If the cup contained wine as some allege, then He broke that promise. John 19:28-29 reveals that Yahshua's thirst was satisfied when 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 Yahshua therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the Spirit," (John 19:30)

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

Wine is Altered, Not Yahshua

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

The pure, unadulterated juice of the grape is the only proper symbol of the pure, saving blood of Yahshua the Messiah in the Passover observance.

New Covenant Symbol

In the parable of the new and old wine (Matt. 9, Mark 2, Luke 5) the Pharisees and others were complaining that Yahshua's followers were not conforming to what they and the followers of John were doing. But these complainers were under the Old Covenant, while Yahshua came to usher in the New.

The Messiah said that one does not put new wine (unfermented juice) in old wineskins but in new wineskins. Why? Because the fermentation process of the new wine (grape juice) would burst the old skins that had already been stretched to the limit. (Isaiah 65:8 talk about "new wine in the cluster"—grapes.)

On the other hand, old wine had already undergone fermentation and was suitable for the old wineskins, which were likened to the Scribes and Pharisees who were under the Old Covenant. New wine—or unfermented juice—is what is suited for the New Covenant of Yahshua.

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