

I. Biblical words for “wine” and their uses:

- A. This is important because of the misconceptions surrounding the word “wine” in the bible.
1. Many assume that “wine” in the bible always refers to an alcoholic, intoxicating drink.
 2. This, however, is a modern-day use of the word, not that of the biblical text itself.
- B. Hebrew words:
1. **Yayin**: designates grape-juice, or the liquid which the fruit of the vine yields (intoxicating or not) 2. “...wine (as fermented); by impl. intoxication...(Kitto’s *Cyclopaedia*; *Strong’s*)
 2. **Shakar**: an intoxicant, intensely alcoholic drink, strong drink (*Strong’s*).
 - a. NOTE: This is usually made from mixed fruits.
 3. **Tirosh**: must or fresh grape juice (as just squeezed out); by impl. (rarely) fermented wine:- (new, sweet) wine. (*Strong’s*).
 4. There are others of minor uses.
- C. Greek words:
1. **Oinos**: is the general word for wine; fermented or unfermented (*Vine’s*; *Strong’s*).
 2. **Gleukos**: sweet wine, i.e., (prop.) must (fresh juice), but used of the more saccharine (and therefore highly inebriating) fermented wine:-new wine; 2. sweet “new wine” or must...an intoxicant; 3. Must, the sweet juice pressed from the grape...sweet wine (i.e., intoxicating wine – Acts 2:13, rp) 4. sweet new wine (*Strong’s*; *Vine’s*; *Thayer’s*; *BDAG*).
- D. Therefore, to assume that “wine” in the Bible always refers to intoxicating drink is not based upon scripture, but upon modern day bias and ignorance of its biblical usage.

II. There are two biblical classifications of wines.

- A. *Intoxicating* wine is classified as evil (these are just a sampling).
1. It was used as a cause of personal hurt and woe (Prov. 23:29, 30 - yayin).
 2. It is described as the means of turning from God (Isa. 28:7 - yayin).
 3. It is viewed as destructive and addictive (Prov. 23:31-35 - yayin).
 4. Condemns those who love drinking (Isa. 5:22 - yayin; 1 Cor. 6:10 – “drunkards”).
 5. It is spoken of as an emblem of punishment and ruin (Jer. 25:15 - yayin; Revelation 14:10; 16:19 – “wine of the wrath” of God - oinos).
- B. Certain wines within the Bible were seen as a blessing.
1. The new wine (tirosh) that blessed was said to be found in the “cluster” of the grapes (Isa. 65:8). The juice is not fermented *in* the cluster.
 2. The blessings of God and a necessity of life (Gen. 27:28; Prov. 3:10 - tirosh).

3. It was a symbol of spiritual blessings (i.e., God invites all to partake freely and abundantly - Isa. 55:1-2 - yayin).
4. It is used as an emblem of the blood of atonement, by which are the forgiveness of sins and eternal blessedness (Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 10:16).

C. What is the point?

1. One is poison and destructive, while the other is harmless and refreshing.
2. One is not even to be “looked upon,” which the other is to be enjoyed in abundance!
3. Is this a contradiction, being a reference to the same type of wine? Surely not.
4. I do not believe we can assume these are the same “wines.”
5. The assumption that biblical wines were all alcoholic like our own is simply wrong.
6. And, the assumption that alcoholic wine is “good” as long as taken in moderation is equally false, being based upon an unproven assumption.
7. With this in mind, we will next address the *false assumption* that the only way they had to preserve grape juice was by fermentation.

III. The people of Biblical times had the ability to preserve grape juice in its “sweet,” or unfermented, form.

A. Keeping alcoholic wine “sweet” took skill because fermentation requires:

1. The presence of the correct amount of sugar.
2. A temperature above 50 degrees but below 70 or 75 degrees.
3. The correct consistency of the liquid (i.e., thick syrup will not undergo fermentation-jellies, jams, syrups, etc.), nor will it ferment if there is too much water.
4. The presence of the “right quantity of gluten, or yeast.”
5. So, it takes some “skill” to preserve grape juice that is fermented!
6. Pliny (AD 70-79), for example, frankly acknowledges that “it is a peculiarity of wine among liquids to go moldy or else to turn into vinegar; and whole volumes of instructions how to remedy this have been published.” (Pliny, *Natural History*, 14, 26).

B. In biblical times the grapes and grape juice could be preserved without fermentation.

1. Much ignorance of this fact, some willful, persists.
 - a. **Cecil Hook:** “Vacuum seal bottles are a modern invention. They had no means for keeping fresh grape juice, but by fermenting it, they could keep it as wine. I have read some fantastic claims that the Jews had some means of preserving “unfermented wine.” If they could do it, why can’t we? If someone will demonstrate that grape juice can be kept in any desirable state for drinking from summer until Passover in the spring,

without benefit of cold, vacuum seal, or fermentation, he will have a plausible argument.” (from “**Free To Speak**”)

- b. This statement is prejudicial and without foundation, seeing that what we can do today says nothing of what they could do then (i.e., pyramids?).
2. Grapes could be kept through the winter, etc., in their natural form by people of the 1st Century and earlier.
 - a. **Columella**, a renowned agriculturalist who lived in the **first century A.D.** discussed how grapes themselves can be preserved by “treating their pedicles [stalks] with hard pitch” and then placing the grapes in “dry chaff,” which will cause them to “remain green for as much as a year.” (*On Agriculture and Trees*)
 - b. **Pliny**, a Roman scholar and naturalist, and a contemporary of Columella, briefly describes other methods used to preserve grapes: “Some grapes will last all through the winter if the clusters are hung by a string from the ceiling, and others will keep merely in their own natural vigor by being stood in earthenware jars with casks put over them, and packed round with fermenting grape-skins.” (*Natural History* 14, 3, 16, trans. H. Rackham, *The Loeb Classical Library*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960).
 - c. So, they could have fresh, unfermented grape juice at any time of the year!
 3. Methods used by the ancients for keeping grape juice sweet and unfermented.
 - a. **Boiling:**
 - i. Water is evaporated leaving too much sugar to ferment.
 - ii. Aristotle (born 384 B.C.) “the wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles,...and to dissolve it in water” (Aristotle, *Metereologica* 4, 10).
 - iii. The Mishna, a Rabbinical book, states that the Jews were in the habit of using boiled wines (*Kitto’s Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, p. 477).
 - iv. Columella explains: “If there is plenty of wood, it is better to boil the must and clear off all the scum with the dregs; if this is done a tenth part will be lost, but the rest keeps good forever...afterwards, when it has cooled, you should pour it into vessels, cover it and seal it up; in this way it will keep longer and no harm will befall it.” (*On Agriculture and Trees*)
 - b. **Filtration:**
 - i. Plutarch (born 60 A.D.) states, “Wine is rendered old or feeble in strength when it is frequently filtered. The strength or spirit being thus excluded, the wine neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind and the passions, and is *much more pleasant to drink*” (Plutarch, *Symposiacs* 8, 7).
 - ii. Pliny states: “The most useful wine has all its force or strength broken by the filter” (Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24).

- 1) Why? Because it was safe for drinking without fear of drunkenness!
- 2) Everyone assumes they wanted alcoholic wine. But, they didn't!

c. **Fumigation:**

- i. Adams in *Roman Antiquities* states, "The Romans fumigated their wines with the fumes of sulfur; that they also mixed with the mustum, or newly pressed juice, yolks of eggs, and other articles containing sulfur. When thus defaecabantur (strained, filtered), it was poured into smaller vessels or casks covered over with pitch, and bunged or stopped up."
- ii. Horace, a Roman poet, alludes to this practice in a poem dedicated to the celebration of a glad anniversary: "This festal day, each time the year revolves, shall draw a well-pitched cork forth from a jar set to drink the smoke in Tullus' consulship." The next stanza suggests that this fumigated wine was unfermented, because a hundred cups of it could be drunk without causing "clamor et ira," that is, "brawls and anger" (Horace [Roman poet], *Carminum Liber 3*, 8, 9-12).

d. **Subsidence** (i.e., cooling wine for a period of time so as to allow the yeast to settle out).

- i. **Columella** as well as the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* state that "Before you apply the press to the fruit, take the newest must (juice) from the lake, put it into a new amphora, bung it up, and cover it very carefully with pitch, lest any water should enter; then immerse it in a cistern or pond of pure cold water, and allow no part of the amphora to remain above the surface. After 40 days, take it out, and it will remain sweet for a year."
- ii. **Pliny**: "Care is needed for its production, as it must not be allowed to boil [*fervere*, to ferment]—that is the word the Romans used to denote the passage of must into wine. Consequently, as soon as the must is taken from the vat and put into casks they plunge the casks in water till midwinter passes and regular cold weather sets in." (*Natural History* 14, 11)

4. This should suffice to prove the naysayers wrong concerning the ability to keep fresh grape juice, or unfermented wine around from harvest to harvest. Thus, to assume that "wine" in the bible always means fermented grape juice is just wrong.

IV. The people of the Bible mixed their wines, both unfermented and fermented, with water.

A. Consider the following quotes:

1. **Plutarch** (AD 46-120) states, "...proportions of three parts of water poured into one of wine. Now this last proportion may be fit for some grave magistrates sitting in the council-hall, or for logicians who pull up their brows when they are busy in watching and unfolding arguments; for surely it is a mixture sober and weak enough...the proportion of two for one bringeth in that turbulent tone of those who are half-drunk..." (Plutarch, *Symposiacs* III, ix, quoted from *Plutarch's Essays and Miscellanies*, by A. H. Clough and W. W. Goodwin (New York, 195), Vol. III, p. 283).

2. “According to **Homer** and **Hippocrates**, wines required twenty parts water to one of wine.” (Everett Ferguson, “Wine as a Table-Drink in the Ancient World,” in **Restoration Quarterly**)
 3. **Plutarch** also stated, “We call a mixture ‘wine,’ although the larger of the component parts is water” (Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 20 in *Moralia* 140F).
 4. **Athenaeus** quotes **Mnesitheous** of Athens: “The gods had revealed wine to mortals, to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse...In daily [life], to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer; but if you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse.” (Athenaeus quoting Mnesitheous, *Deipnosophists* x.426c,d; Ferguson, p. 143)
 5. **Ferguson**: “One might even call the ancients “water drinkers” in view of the preponderance of water in the drink...Somehow the ancients had discovered that mixing wine with water had a purifying effect on the water...” (**Restoration Quarterly**, 13, 1970, p. 146).
 - a. “The modern Greek word for wine...is not the oinos...but krasi, from krasis (literally “mixing”). (Ibid. 151)
 - b. So, it is a serious mistake to assume that Christians of the bible drank what we perceive “wine” to be, whether as a table drink, or ever as a drink.
- B. It should also be considered by the Christian that they had no process of distillation, which is used today to fortify our wines with more alcohol than is naturally produced.
1. Distillation was not invented until the 900’s.
 2. The content of alcohol in their normal wines only reached at maximum 6-8% compared with our wines going up to 20% and spirits that reach 70%+.
 3. Thus, if we assume Christians even used alcoholic wine, and that they used the strongest to be found, after it was diluted at the minimum of a 3-1 mixture, which was often higher, it contained around 1.5 – 2% alcohol (see Ferguson, p.. 144-45; WINE in N.T., J. Hodges).
 4. All modern alcoholic drinks exceed this by at least 50%, which includes a small percentage of beers sold in states that require a lower percentage of alcohol when sold in a grocery store!
 5. So, what justification would any Christian have for drinking beer (4.6-6%), table wines (8-14%), fortified wines (16-22%), or spirits (20-70%)?

In conclusion – the discussion of “wine” in the bible must be left to the context. Most importantly, the word “wine” does NOT necessarily indicate that the drink was alcoholic.