

## Wine in Scripture

I would like to offer some thoughts on the article of the above title published in May 2007 (p. 170).

In the manufacture of grape juice, the skins of course have to be broken, but fermentation takes time, giving sufficient length of time for the extracted juice with its sweetness to be preserved, by the proper treatment, before fermentation begins. The sweet unfermented juice of the grape was termed *gleukos* by the Greeks and *mustum* by the Romans, both meaning, essentially, new or fresh wine. According to Kitto,<sup>1</sup> when it was desired to preserve it in a sweet state, an amphora (a two-handled jar for storing wine) was coated with pitch inside and outside, and then filled with juice trodden from grapes and stoppered so as to be perfectly air-tight. It was immersed in a tank of cold fresh water or buried in wet sand and allowed to remain a month or two. The result of this process was an unfermented grape juice which would remain sweet and unchanged for about a year.

In the account in John 2 of the Lord's miracle in Cana we are told that there were six stone vessels, each containing eighteen to twenty-seven gallons apiece, which the Lord commanded to be filled to the brim with water and which he then turned into wine. In light of this large quantity, I think one must consider the possibility that this wine was non-alcoholic, otherwise we have to visualise the sudden appearance of between 100 and 160 gallons of alcoholic beverage in circumstances which

would certainly be conducive to widespread drunkenness. The party had already consumed wine from the host when this additional provision was made by the Lord. It may have been that the wedding party numbered many hundreds of guests, in which case the consumption would not have been so great; we just do not know.

Despite the above, I am sure there were numerous occasions where alcoholic wine was used in moderation during our Lord's ministry.

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Though I am happy to publish the information from Kitto, I note that the word *gleukos* occurs only once in the New Testament, in Acts 2:13, where it refers to something alcoholic. When the apostles spoke in tongues, people sneered, "These men are full of new wine", to which Peter replied, "these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day" (v. 15). The translation "new wine" is accurate, but must refer to grape juice which has already begun to ferment to the extent that it would intoxicate if consumed in quantity. There was a strong temperance movement amongst the churches in nineteenth-century Britain, which led to attempts to argue that the wine referred to in the New Testament was unfermented grape juice, and Kitto's comments may reflect that.—*T.B.*

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1. Kitto, John, *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, Edinburgh, Adam and Charles Black, 1845, Vol. 2, p. 955.