

Unfermented Fruit of the Vine at Passover Time?

By Stephen M. Golden
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Was there unfermented Fruit of the Vine at Passover time?

Yes!

First, it should be noted that there is no reference in scripture that calls the drink served in the Lord's Supper "wine." The Greek word "*oinos*" is not used. Every reference to the drink served at the Last Supper is called "the cup" or "the fruit of the vine."

Mt.26:27 Then he took **the cup**, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

Mk.14:23 Then he took **the cup**, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

Lk.20:22 And likewise **the cup** after they had eaten, saying, "**This cup** that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

1Cor.11:25 In the same way, after supper he took **the cup**, saying, "**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Mt.26:29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

Mk.14:25 "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."

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Lk.22:17 After taking **the cup**, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the **fruit of the vine** until the kingdom of God comes."

This is the case for every faithful translation of God's Word. The only version in which it is called "wine" is the dubious New Living Translation (NLT), and it is completely unwarranted. The word for wine is not in the original manuscripts.

Even if the Greek word "*oinos*" had been used in the original writings, the reader should be aware that "*oinos*" describes any juice from a grape, fermented or not. The only way we can even determine what was in the cup is by knowing what was served at the Passover meal.

Jesus called it "fruit of the vine" instead of using any of several words that might refer to alcoholic drink. I believe this was an intentional effort to be clear about the contents of the cup. It was grape juice.

Some have been known to say that the drink served at the Last Supper had to have been alcoholic because that is how they preserved "fruit of the vine" in those days. They maintain that unfermented "fruit of the vine" was unavailable at Passover time. This reasoning is simply incorrect and reflects a lack of understanding of the preservation methods in use at that time.

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Below are some sources regarding the drink served at the Lord's Supper and the use of boiled or steeped raisins to reconstitute fruit of the vine, as well as methods of keeping fresh grape juice for the Passover meal.

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)

2. The Elements:

As to the elements used in the original institution of the Supper, they were bread and wine. The bread of course was the unleavened bread of the Passover, during which feast every trace of leaven was removed (Exodus 12:19). The Eastern church, perhaps influenced by the bitter Ebionite spirit of the Judaizers, later adopted the use of common bread (*koinos artos*); the Western church used unleavened bread. Protestantism left the matter among the *adiaphora*.

As regards the wine, the matter has been in dispute from the beginning (see Kitto's *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*). The early church always used mixed wine, wine and water, following the Jewish custom. Whether the wine used at the institution of the Lord's Supper was fermented or unfermented wine, **must of course be determined by the Jewish Passover-customs prevailing at that time.** [emphasis added] The matter is in dispute and is not easily settled.

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Modern Orthodox Jews quite generally use raisin-wine, made by steeping raisins over night in water and expressing the juice the next day for use at the Passover-meal. The ancient Jews, we are told, used for this purpose a thick boiled wine, mixed with water (Mishna, Terumoth, xi). Whether oinos, the word used in the New Testament, stands literally, as the name indicates, for fermented wine, or figuratively for the mixed drinks, well known to ancient and modern Jews, is a debatable matter. As late as the 16th century the Nestorian Christians celebrated communion with raisin-wine, and the same is said of the Indian Christians ("St. Thomas Christians"). The word "new," used by Christ in Matthew 26:29, is believed by some to indicate the character of the wine used by Christ at the institution of the Eucharist, namely, the juice of grapes fresh pressed out (see Clem. Alex., Paed., xi). On the other hand the third Council of Braga explicitly forbade this practice as heretical. It is evident that the whole subject is shrouded in much mystery. Some ancient sects substituted an entirely different element, water and milk, for instance, being used (Epiph., Haer., xlix; Aug., Haer., xxviii). Such customs were utterly condemned by the Council of Braga (675 AD). In general, however, the Christian church, almost from the beginning, seems to have used fermented red wine, either mixed or pure, in the administration of the Eucharist, in order to maintain the correspondence between the symbol and the thing symbolized.

<https://beta.studylight.org/enc/isb/view.cgi?number=T5577>

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<https://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rls=GGLD,GGLD:2005-10,GGLD:en&q=%22lord%27s+supper%22+raisins+boiled>

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Or fresh preserved grape juice:

From the writings of Cato we can learn that fresh must or grape juice was highly prized, and kept fresh throughout the year. He wrote a book on agriculture of his time. He wrote about the time of Christ. Also, Pliny wrote about similar subjects, and he lived about the end of the first century. Both writers mention how to preserve the fresh grape “must,” and to use it to make various medicines. Josephus mentioned that the palace of Masada had stores of fruits and other produce that had been laid up during the time of Herod. These fruits were found fresh when the Roman's took possession of Masada almost a hundred years later. These and other accounts show that fresh grape juice could be kept fresh.

Our Lord used an illustration on the preservation of wine (grape juice) to teach principles of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 9:17 "Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

This text teaches that to preserve new wine (“must,” or grape juice) you must store it in a new wine skin. The reason for this was because once the seal had been broken from the wine skin, the air would get into the skin, and the germ of fermentation would be present. If new wine were

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put into the new skins, then sealed, the wine would be kept from the fermentation process. If the new wine were put into the old skins, the fermentation germ would be present, and the wine would begin to ferment, and the skin would burst from the pressure created by the expanding gasses released from the fermenting grape juice.

<http://www.newtestamentchurch.org/York/libraryfiles/FRUITOV.html>

The principal reason for the use of water with wine by the Jews, was not that Intoxicating wine was used, but the admitted fact that **ancient wines were generally inspissated** or boiled to a thick syrup like "I'mustvm" of the Romans (referred to in Appendix C) ; they were too thick or "strong" for drinking and had to be "mixed" or mingled with water. Both kinds of **wine, unfermented and fermented juice of grapes,** dates, etc., were used by the Ancients as beverages; for religious purposes, however, as the Report admits, unfermented wine made from dried grapes or raisins steeped in water was used by various churches, with or without official Ecclesiastical authority.

The late Dr. Norman Kerr in "Unfermented Wine a Fact" states-"**If unfermented grape juice be enclosed in an air-tight vessel, and heated in boiling water, fermentation will be rendered impossible**" (this is one of the modern methods of preserving Unfermented Wine).

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He also states "Inspissated grape juice boiled down to a half, a third, or a fourth of its bulk, does not ferment for a very long period, and then only slightly and on its surface."

<https://www.wpl.lib.oh.us/AntiSaloon/print/wine.html>

Wine was NOT used in the celebration of the Passover until Hellenistic times. Then, among the spiritually minded, it must be "boiled" wine or fresh from the vat.

<https://www.piney.com/ComeDrink.html>

New Wine —fermented?

Is there any scriptural indication that "New Wine" is unfermented?

The Hebrew word 'tirosh' refers to the fresh pressed juice of the grape. (Isa.65:8, Joel 2:24, Prov.3:10)
Used alone, it is never associated with drunkenness.

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Here is a passage from three different versions of the Bible: Isaiah 65:8

This is what the LORD says:

"As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes
and men say, 'Don't destroy it,
there is yet some good in it,'
so will I do in behalf of my servants;
I will not destroy them all.

NIV

Thus says the LORD:

"As the new wine is found in the cluster,
and they say, 'Do not destroy it,
for there is a blessing in it,'
so I will do for my servants' sake,
and not destroy them all.

ESV

"But I will not destroy them all," says the LORD. "For just as good grapes are found among a cluster of bad ones (and someone will say, 'Don't throw them all away—there are some good grapes there!'), so I will not destroy all Israel. For I still have true servants there.

NLT (to show the inconsistency)

Judges 9:13

And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

KJV

But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my wine that cheers God and men and go hold sway over the trees?'

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ESV

Refers to juice still in the grapes on the cluster,
attached to the vine!

Concept from <https://www.piney.com/ComeDrink.html>