

Did Jesus Approve of the Consumption of Alcohol?

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If the wine Jesus created at the wedding of Cana was alcoholic, does this mean that He approved the consumption of alcohol?

The Greek word *oinos*, translated as “wine” in the New Testament, simply means wine. The Greeks had a different word for grape juice. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia suggests that in New Testament times wine usually existed in a fermented form. It states:

Unfermented grape juice is a very difficult thing to keep without the aid of modern antiseptic precautions, and its preservation in the warm and not overly clean conditions of ancient Palestine is impossible (p.3086).

The references to wine in the New Testament are both positive and negative. For example, John the Baptist’s refusal to drink wine was a sign of his special responsibility as the last prophet in the Old Testament tradition, and Jesus was not willing to take wine while on the cross because of His desire to experience fully the “cup of suffering” that His Father had given Him. On the other hand, Jesus used wine to illustrate His teaching. His first miracle was the creation of wine at the marriage in Cana ([John 2:1-11](#)), and He used the illustration of “new wine” and “new skins” to stress the need for a change of perspective about the law ([Matthew 9:16-17](#)).

Timothy was exhorted by Paul to take a little wine as medicine, while drunkenness is severely condemned ([Romans 13:13](#)). The *New Bible Dictionary* gives the following summary of the New Testament’s teaching about the use of alcoholic beverages:

To sum up, then, it may be said that while wine is not condemned as being without usefulness, it brings in the hands of sinful men such dangers of becoming uncontrolled that even those who count themselves to be strong would be wise to abstain, if not for their own sake, yet for the sake of weaker brethren ([Romans 14:21](#)).

The June 20, 1975, issue of *Christianity Today* contained an interesting article by Robert H. Stein: “Wine-Drinking In New Testament Times.” He observes that the wine used in ancient times was mixed with water in ratios of up to four parts water to one part wine. Mr. Stein explains:

In the Talmud, which contains the oral traditions of Judaism from about 200 BC to AD 200, there are several tractates in which the mixture of water and wine is discussed. One tractate (Shabbath 77a) states that wine that does not carry three parts water is not wine. The normal mixture is said to consist of two parts water to one part wine. In a most important reference (Pesachim 108b) it is stated that the four cups every Jew was to drink during the Passover ritual were to be mixed in a ratio of three parts water to one part

wine. From this we can conclude with a fair degree of certainty that the fruit of the vine used at the institution of the Lord's Supper was a mixture of three parts water to one part wine. In another Jewish reference from around 60 BC, we read, "It is harmful to drink wine alone, or again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment" ([II Maccabees 15:39](#)).

Dr. M. R. De Haan expressed his viewpoint concerning the use of wine in moderation:

It is the abuse of wine rather than the use of wine which is strongly condemned in the Scriptures. I know that in European countries, even among Christians, wine is oftentimes used as an appetizer, but not in excess. Personally, I do not use it, and I wish that we could eliminate it entirely. But it is well to remember that the use of wine does not mean the abuse of wine. Certainly it was never meant to be used for the purpose of intoxication, and I believe that it would be a great deal better not to use it at all, seeing the evil to which it often leads.