

Did JESUS turn water into wine?

The obvious answer to the question, "Did Jesus turn water into wine?" is yes. At the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee recorded in John 2:1-11, Jesus turned water into wine. However, this question does not usually ask what is meant by it. What is usually meant is "Did Jesus make intoxicating wine?" And the answer is no. Let me explain.

The word translated "wine" in English (oivos in Koiné Greek) can refer to either alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine. At present, the term "wine" is almost used exclusively of alcoholic wine, but let us never be guilty of interpretation based solely upon modern day definitions. Consider these examples of the word "wine" being used in Scripture with reference to unfermented grape juice.

- ✓ Joel 1:10 says "The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth." (This refers to grapes dried up in the fields which could not be intoxicating.)
- ✓ Isaiah 65:8 says "Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all." (Alcoholic wine in the cluster? No, the juice of the grape while in the cluster could not be intoxicating.)
- ✓ Jeremiah 48:33 says "And joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to fail from the wine-presses: none shall tread with shouting; their shouting shall be no shouting." (The wine of fresh squeezed grapes coming out of the winepress is grape juice and could not be fermented.)

Certainly other passages could be considered, but these are sufficient to illustrate that the

word "wine" can refer to alcoholic wine or simply grape juice.

"So, how do we know when it refers to grape juice or intoxicating wine?" The context in which the word is found will determine whether it refers to alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine. So, consider the context.

The immediate context of John 2:1-11 is quite clear. The guests at the marriage feast of Cana were able to discern between the quality of the drink that the Lord had made and that which had already been served. If intoxicating wine had been served, and people "well drunk" or "drunk freely" (American Standard Version, 1901) of it (verse 10), then they would not have had such keen discernment. Though the amount is not specified as to what they had previously drunk, if they consumed the six waterpots that Jesus had the servants fill with water and which contained "two or three firkins apiece" (verse 6), then they would have consumed somewhere between 106 to 162 gallons of booze! This is far more than enough to make the most casual drinker drunk. Those who twist this account to condone social drinking say the term "well drunk" refers to the idea that the crowd was so drunk that they could not distinguish. However, the point of "the governor of the feast" to the bridegroom is that the guest were able to discern between the "worse" and the "good wine." If it is the case that these wedding guests were so drunk that they could not distinguish, then the Lord made the six pots of alcoholic beverage for those who were already strongly under the influence, and caused them to be even more drunk! Thus, the "good wine" of the wedding feast of Canaan must have been the fresh juice of the grape.

Also, consider the logical consequence of those who want to use this passage to justify the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Their argument goes something like this: "Since Jesus produced alcoholic wine, then it is

morally right for a person to drink it." However, notice that their logic takes them further than most of them want to go. Since Jesus produced alcoholic wine (as they claim), then not only would it be morally right to drink it, it would be morally right to produce it, sell it, distribute it, and make a living from it. But since that would most certainly cause someone to stumble, then it must be morally right to cause someone to stumble. However, the logical consequence of their argument would oppose the Lord's teaching (Luke 17:1-2). No, the reasoning is a foolish argument that has no foundation in scripture.

Further, consider the general context of the Bible. Habakkuk wrote, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!" (2:15). The sin Habakkuk is rebuking is the sin of contributing to drunkenness. If Jesus supplied intoxicating wine to the wedding guests at Cana, then He contributed to their intoxication. Not only did Jesus contribute to it, He, also, condoned and encouraged people to get completely soused! Since intoxication is sinful, then Jesus sinned, and the "woe" of Habakkuk would be upon Him. If this be the case, then it would be better for Jesus "that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea" (Luke 17:2). As a perfect man, Jesus could not have turned water into alcoholic wine and offer such to others.

Another passage to consider in this context is Proverbs 23:31-32 which says, "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." If Jesus had turned water into intoxicating wine, then He would have caused others to look upon the wine when it is red opposing the wisdom of Solomon. Since, Jesus is "greater than Solomon" (Matthew 12:42), He would know the wisdom of sobriety and would not tempt

others with an intoxicating beverage. Again, Solomon wrote, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).

"What, then, was the miracle of the wedding feast in Cana?" The miracle of Cana was that Jesus surpassed or transcended the normal amount of time and the natural process that it takes to produce and harvest grape juice. That which normally takes months, took Jesus but a moment. Augustine wrote, "For he on that marriage-day made wine in the six jars which he ordered to be filled with water — he who now makes it every year in the vines; for, as what the servants had poured into the water-jars was turned into wine by the power of the Lord, so, also, that which the clouds pour fourth is turned into wine by the power of the self-same Lord." (As quoted in "Bible Wines" by William Patton, page 91.)

"How could this be? Did they have any methods of preservation of grape juice in the first century?" Yes. In fact, they had several methods. In the book "Bible Wines," the author, William Patton, discusses four methods that the ancients used for the preservation of grape juice. One such method is to keep air completely excluded — a method often used today. R. C. Foster in his book, "Studies in the Life of Christ," said, "A Greek wine ship of the second century B.C. found by divers off the southern coast of France several years ago contained a great number of wine flasks that had been sealed so tight that after more than 2,000 years the sea water had not seeped into them."

With close examination, we must conclude that the Lord did not make intoxicating wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee. "Did Jesus turn water into wine?" Yes. "Did Jesus turn water into intoxicating wine?" Absolutely Not!

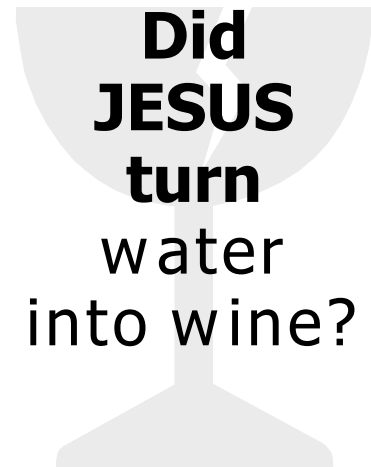
Alcohol has caused and/or contributed to broken homes, every kind of accident imaginable, disease both physical and mental,

poverty, and crimes of every kind. Since its effect is such, it is beyond my own imagination why anyone would ever want to justify its use — let alone mar the Lord's perfect example with its production and distribution. Its use is not social in any way but is in every way antisocial. Its defense by sweet-talking, soft-pedaling, so-called preachers is religiously hypocritical, morally irresponsible, and socially despicable. It has victimized the unborn, children, teenagers, the middle aged, and the old. It has victimized business people and laborers, country folks and city folks, the rich and the poor. There is probably not one person who has not felt its evil bite and its viperous sting! It is beyond my reasoning power to understand how people who claim to be spiritually minded and morally upright will rationalize its use. Blood has filled our streets because of this vile beverage. Graves have filled our hills and vales because of this evil drink. Reproach has filled our nation because of this wicked intoxicant. Corruption has filled our society because of this corrupted liquor. Shame and disgrace has filled our homes because of this malicious booze. Rather than justifying its use, let us stand diametrically opposed to it for "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

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