Fulfilled Prophecies

Why Did Jesus Turn Water Into Wine, And Why Do Many Evangelical Churches Use Grape Juice?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Jesus' first recorded miracle wasn't healing the sick, raising the dead, or casting out demons. It was turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. John specifically called this the beginning of His signs, revealing that the miracle carried a meaning far greater than providing refreshments for wedding guests (John 2:1-11).

† Why did Jesus choose wine? Why were six stone waterpots

used for Jewish purification? Why did He produce the best wine at the end of the celebration? And why do many evangelical churches today insist that Christians should drink grape juice instead of wine, even though Jesus Himself provided wine? These questions deserve answers from Scripture rather than denominational traditions (John 2:6-11; Mark 7:8).
† From the fulfilled perspective, this miracle announced something extraordinary. Jesus had come to bring the Old Covenant system to its appointed completion and establish the New Covenant through His blood. The water associated with ceremonial purification was transformed into wine, providing a beautiful picture of the greater redemption Christ was bringing (Hebrews 8:13; 9:9-15).
† Scripture doesn't teach that drinking wine is automatically sinful. It condemns drunkenness, addiction, and the misuse of alcohol. Understanding that distinction helps us appreciate both the miracle at Cana and the freedom believers have under the New Covenant (Ephesians 5:18; Romans 14:21; Galatians 5:1).

The First Miracle Revealed Christ's Glory

John 2:1, 3, 6-11
On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;
When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, They have no wine.
Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each.
Jesus said to them, Fill the waterpots with water. So they filled them up to the brim.
When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.
This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and

manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.
† John identified this miracle as the beginning of Jesus' signs. Its primary purpose was to reveal His glory and strengthen the disciples' faith in Him (John 20:30-31).
† The six stone waterpots were specifically associated with Jewish purification. Their presence connects the miracle to the ceremonial practices of the Old Covenant, which pointed forward to the greater cleansing Christ would provide (Hebrews 9:9-14).
† Each waterpot held approximately twenty or thirty gallons. Together, the six containers could hold approximately 120 to 180 gallons. Jesus didn't produce a token amount of wine. The abundance demonstrated His power and generosity (John 1:16; 10:10).
† The headwaiter recognized that the wine Jesus provided was superior to what had been served earlier. This distinction supports the symbolism of something greater arriving through Christ (Hebrews 8:6).
† Notice that John didn't describe the result as grape juice. He called it wine. The headwaiter's comments about the usual practice of serving inferior wine after guests had drunk freely fit the ordinary use of fermented wine at ancient celebrations (John 2:9-10).

The Waterpots Represented the Old Covenant Purification System

Hebrews 9:9-11, 15
which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience,
since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.
But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

† Hebrews explains that the Old Covenant included various ceremonial washings that couldn't perfect the worshiper's conscience. Those outward regulations served their purpose until the appointed time of reformation (Hebrews 9:9-10).

† The waterpots at Cana belonged to that world of ceremonial purification. Their transformation provides a meaningful picture of the transition from outward cleansing to the greater spiritual cleansing accomplished through Christ (John 2:6; Hebrews 9:13-14).

† Jesus didn't come to improve the Old Covenant by adding another ritual. He came to fulfill what the Law and Prophets anticipated and establish the promised New Covenant (Matthew 5:17; Hebrews 8:6-13).

† The miracle itself doesn't explicitly identify the waterpots as a prophecy of AD 70. However, when read alongside Hebrews, the symbolism is consistent with the covenantal transition completed when the Old Covenant temple system passed away (Hebrews 8:13; 10:1-18).

† The Old Covenant depended upon repeated sacrifices and ceremonial regulations. The New Covenant rests upon the completed sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who provides the cleansing those earlier ceremonies could never accomplish (Hebrews 10:11-18).

The New Wine Pointed Toward the New Covenant

Mark 2:19, 22

And Jesus said to them, While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well;

but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.
† Jesus described Himself as the bridegroom and used new wine to illustrate the new reality His presence introduced. His ministry couldn't simply be confined within the old religious structures (Matthew 9:14-17).
† The old wineskins represented the inability of existing religious practices to contain what Christ was bringing. The New Covenant wasn't merely an extension of the Old Covenant. It was the fulfillment of God's promises through His Son (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13).
† The wedding setting at Cana becomes especially meaningful because Jesus later identified Himself as the bridegroom. His relationship with His people would be described through the imagery of marriage (John 3:29; Ephesians 5:25-32).
† From the fulfilled perspective, the New Covenant was inaugurated through Christ's death and reached its completed covenantal establishment with the passing of the Old Covenant order in AD 70 (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:13; 10:37).
† The church now belongs to Christ as His bride. We're not waiting for another covenant to replace the one established through His blood (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 21:2, 9-10).

The Wedding Feast Was a Picture of Covenant Blessing

Isaiah 25:6
The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine.
† Isaiah described God's promised salvation through the imagery of a magnificent banquet that included aged wine. The emphasis was abundance, celebration, and the blessings of God's kingdom (Isaiah 25:6-9).
† The wedding at Cana reflects this biblical imagery. Jesus brought abundance to a celebration, demonstrating that His coming was good news rather than another burden of religious regulations (Luke 4:18-21).
† Isaiah connected the banquet with God's victory over death.

Paul later connected that same prophetic passage with the resurrection victory accomplished through Christ (Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57).
† The fulfilled perspective recognizes this promised victory in the completed redemptive work of Christ and the removal of the Old Covenant condemnation that separated humanity from God (Romans 8:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57).
† Wine itself wasn't the source of salvation. It served as an image of the joy and abundance associated with the promised kingdom (Psalm 104:14-15; Matthew 26:29).

Jesus Connected the Cup With His Covenant Blood

Luke 22:20
And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.
† Jesus explicitly connected the cup with the New Covenant established through His blood. The significance wasn't the chemical composition of the beverage but the sacrifice it represented (Hebrews 9:15-22).
† The miracle at Cana and the cup at the Last Supper belong to the same redemptive story. At Cana, Jesus revealed His glory through wine. At the Last Supper, He identified the cup with the covenant His death would establish (John 2:11; Matthew 26:27-29).
† Scripture doesn't say the wine at Cana literally became His blood. The connection is symbolic, pointing toward the redemption accomplished through His sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10-14).
† The New Covenant was established through Christ's blood, not through repeated animal sacrifices or ceremonial purification. His sacrifice accomplished what the Old Covenant system couldn't accomplish (Hebrews 9:11-15; 10:1-18).

Jesus Used the Fruit of the Vine

Matthew 26:27-29
And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you;
for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.
But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.
† Jesus called the contents of the cup the fruit of the vine. The expression doesn't specifically identify whether the beverage was fermented, although wine was the customary drink associated with ancient Jewish festive meals (Luke 22:17-20).
† Nothing in this passage commands Christians to replace wine with grape juice. Neither does Jesus establish a rule requiring every believer to consume alcohol (Romans 14:17, 21).
† The purpose of the cup was to represent His blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Making the beverage itself more important than Christ's sacrifice misses the central meaning (Hebrews 9:22; 10:12-18).
† Jesus also connected the cup with His Father's kingdom. From the fulfilled perspective, the promised kingdom came in its completed covenantal reality through the events surrounding AD 70 (Matthew 16:27-28; Luke 21:31-32).
† We shouldn't turn a covenant symbol into another religious law. Our righteousness comes through Christ, not through the choice between wine and grape juice (Galatians 2:16; 5:1).

The Bible Condemns Drunkenness, Not Every Use of Wine

Ephesians 5:18
And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,
† Paul directly condemned drunkenness. He didn't say that every person who drinks wine commits sin. His warning concerned intoxication and the loss of self-control (Galatians 5:19-23).
† Scripture distinguishes between the ordinary use of wine and

its abuse. Noah's drunkenness brought shame, while other passages describe wine as part of ordinary meals and celebrations (Genesis 9:20-21; Psalm 104:14-15).
† Jesus Himself was accused of being a gluttonous man and a heavy drinker. That accusation came from His opponents and doesn't establish that He was guilty of either behavior (Matthew 11:18-19).
† Christian freedom isn't permission for destructive behavior. Believers are called to exercise wisdom, self-control, and consideration for others (Romans 14:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:12).
† A person who chooses complete abstinence isn't disobeying Scripture. However, declaring that every Christian must abstain goes beyond what these passages command (Romans 14:3-4).

Paul Even Recommended Wine for a Medical Purpose

1 Timothy 5:23
No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.
† Paul instructed Timothy to use a little wine because of his stomach problems and frequent ailments. This instruction would make little sense if every use of wine were inherently sinful (1 Timothy 4:4-5).
† Notice Paul's emphasis on a little wine. His instruction doesn't encourage excessive drinking or establish wine as a universal medical treatment (Ephesians 5:18).
† The passage demonstrates that Scripture doesn't treat wine as automatically immoral. Its use must be distinguished from drunkenness and irresponsible behavior (Romans 14:21).
† Modern medical decisions should be based on appropriate medical guidance, not an assumption that Paul's advice to Timothy applies to every illness today (Proverbs 11:14).

Christian Freedom Must Include Consideration for Others

Romans 14:21
It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by

which your brother stumbles.
† Paul taught that believers should willingly limit their freedom when exercising it would harm another person's conscience or spiritual well-being (Romans 14:13-19).
† This principle explains why choosing grape juice can be appropriate. A congregation may wish to accommodate children, recovering alcoholics, or people who abstain for personal reasons (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).
† However, voluntarily choosing grape juice isn't the same as declaring wine sinful. Paul distinguished personal convictions from requirements imposed upon other believers (Romans 14:3-4).
† The New Covenant calls us to love one another rather than judge spiritual maturity by what someone drinks (Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:13-14).

Why Many Evangelical Churches Use Grape Juice

† The widespread use of grape juice in American Protestant communion services developed largely during the nineteenth-century temperance movement. Many Christians became concerned about the destructive effects of alcohol abuse and began advocating complete abstinence.
† During that period, temperance organizations and Protestant reformers increasingly promoted the idea that Christians should avoid alcoholic beverages altogether. Some churches began seeking an alternative to fermented communion wine.
† Thomas Bramwell Welch, a Methodist layman and dentist, developed a method of preserving unfermented grape juice in 1869. His work helped make grape juice a practical substitute for communion wine.
† Welch's son, Charles Welch, later promoted the product more widely. As commercial distribution expanded, grape juice became increasingly common in American Protestant churches.
† The change wasn't introduced by Jesus or commanded by the apostles. It developed through later religious reform movements, practical concerns, and changing cultural attitudes

toward alcohol.
† Not every evangelical church uses grape juice, and not every denomination adopted the practice for identical reasons. Some emphasize abstinence, while others use grape juice to accommodate everyone participating in communion.
† The historical distinction matters. Churches are free to adopt practices that serve their congregations, but they shouldn't present a nineteenth-century custom as though it were an explicit command from Christ (Mark 7:8; Colossians 2:20-23).

Historical References

† Josephus, writing in the first century, described Jewish customs, religious celebrations, and the importance of vineyards and agricultural produce in Jewish society. His writings provide historical background for understanding wine within the culture of Jesus' day.
† The Mishnah, compiled around AD 200, preserves earlier Jewish traditions involving wine, blessings, and Passover observances. Its discussion of cups of wine at Passover demonstrates the importance of wine in Jewish religious practice, although it was compiled after the New Testament period.
† Clement of Alexandria, writing during the late second and early third centuries, discussed the proper use of wine and warned against excessive drinking. His writings distinguish moderation from drunkenness.
† John Chrysostom, writing in the fourth century, opposed drunkenness while recognizing that wine itself wasn't inherently evil. His teaching reflected the distinction between God's creation and its misuse.
† Thomas Bramwell Welch, in 1869, developed a preservation process for unfermented grape juice. His contribution became influential in changing communion practices among American Protestant churches.
† Charles Welch helped expand the distribution and acceptance of unfermented grape juice. His family's business contributed

significantly to the transition from wine to grape juice in many churches.
† These historical sources show that the widespread preference for grape juice developed long after the apostolic period. The New Testament itself doesn't establish grape juice as a required replacement for wine.

How It Applies To Us Today

† The miracle at Cana teaches us to recognize the glory of Jesus Christ. His first sign wasn't simply about meeting a temporary need. It revealed His identity and pointed toward the greater blessings He would bring (John 2:11; 1:14-17).
† We should understand the difference between the Old Covenant purification system and the New Covenant cleansing accomplished through Christ. Our relationship with God isn't maintained through ceremonial regulations but through His completed sacrifice (Hebrews 9:13-15; 10:14).
† We shouldn't condemn Christians who responsibly choose to drink wine, and we shouldn't criticize those who abstain. Scripture calls us to exercise freedom with love and self-control (Romans 14:3, 21; Galatians 5:13).
† Churches that use grape juice should understand that their practice is a later tradition rather than an explicit biblical command. Churches that use wine should also respect believers who cannot or choose not to consume alcohol (Romans 14:19-21).
† We must never confuse the symbol with the substance of our salvation. Neither wine nor grape juice cleanses us from sin. Only the blood of Jesus Christ accomplishes that redemption (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:14).
† The wedding at Cana reminds us that Christ brought something greater than the Old Covenant could provide. We now live under the completed New Covenant, enjoying the spiritual blessings promised through Him (Ephesians 1:3; Hebrews 8:6).
† That's why the real significance of turning water into wine isn't

an argument about alcohol. It's the revelation of Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of God's promises, and the arrival of a better covenant established through His blood (John 2:11; Hebrews 8:6-13).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why did Jesus choose to turn water into wine instead of performing another miracle?
A: John explains that this was the beginning of His signs and that it manifested His glory. The setting also provides meaningful covenant symbolism through the purification waterpots and the wedding celebration (John 2:6-11; Hebrews 9:9-15).
Q: Did Jesus actually make alcoholic wine?
A: The natural reading is that He produced ordinary wine, which in that culture was generally fermented. The headwaiter's comparison with wine served after guests had drunk freely supports that understanding. John doesn't provide a laboratory description of its alcohol content (John 2:9-10).
Q: Were the six waterpots a prophecy of AD 70?
A: John doesn't explicitly identify them as a prophecy of AD 70. However, their connection with Jewish purification fits the broader New Testament teaching concerning the passing of the Old Covenant system and the establishment of the New Covenant (John 2:6; Hebrews 8:13; 9:9-10).
Q: Does the Bible command Christians to drink wine?
A: No. Scripture permits its responsible use but doesn't require Christians to consume alcohol. Paul also taught that abstaining can be appropriate out of consideration for others (Romans 14:21; 1 Timothy 5:23).
Q: Is drinking wine automatically sinful?
A: No. Scripture condemns drunkenness and the misuse of alcohol, not every use of wine (Ephesians 5:18; 1 Timothy 5:23).
Q: Why do many evangelical churches use grape juice?
A: The practice became widespread through the nineteenth-

century temperance movement, particularly after Thomas Bramwell Welch developed a method for preserving unfermented grape juice in 1869. It wasn't established by a New Testament command (Romans 14:17, 21).
Q: Is it wrong for a church to use grape juice for communion?
A: The New Testament doesn't explicitly require unfermented grape juice or specify an alcohol percentage for the cup. Churches should keep their focus on Christ's sacrifice rather than making the beverage a test of righteousness (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25-26).
Q: What was the deeper meaning of Jesus providing the best wine last?
A: The headwaiter recognized the superior quality of the wine. Within the broader biblical story, this provides a fitting picture of the greater blessings introduced through Christ and His New Covenant (John 2:10-11; Hebrews 8:6).
Q: Are we still waiting for the New Covenant to be established?
A: No. Jesus established the New Covenant through His blood. From the fulfilled perspective, the Old Covenant order reached its final historical removal in AD 70, and believers now enjoy the completed covenant blessings of Christ (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:13; 10:14-18).
Q: What's the most important lesson from the miracle at Cana?
A: Jesus revealed His glory and demonstrated that something greater had arrived. The miracle directs our attention beyond ceremonial purification and religious tradition to the redemption and spiritual blessings accomplished through Him (John 2:11; Hebrews 9:11-15).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† John 2:1, 3, 6-11; Hebrews 9:9-11, 15; Mark 2:19, 22; Isaiah 25:6; Luke 22:20; Matthew 26:27-29; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Timothy 5:23; Romans 14:21.

† Flavius Josephus, Jewish Antiquities; Mishnah, Pesachim 10; Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, Book II; John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians; Thomas Bramwell Welch, historical records of unfermented grape juice preservation, 1869; Charles Welch, historical records of grape juice promotion and distribution.

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