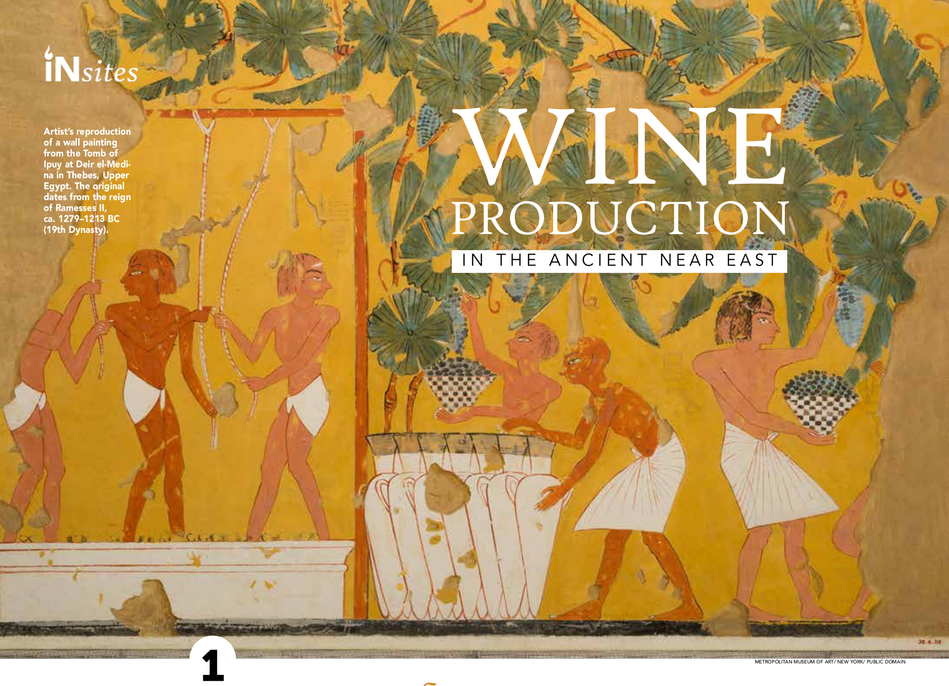
# WINE PRODUCTION
## IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST



Artist's reproduction of a wall painting from the Tomb of Ipuy at Deir el-Medina in Thebes, Upper Egypt. The original dates from the reign of Ramesses II, ca. 1279–1213 BC (19th Dynasty).

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**1**

After grapes were harvested, they were brought to a wine press. Typically, the grapes crushed on a treading floor by foot. The juice then went through a pipe or channel to a collection pool.

*Archaeological evidence of the earliest wine production installation was discovered in the South Caucasus region of the Republic of Georgia (ca. 6000 BC).*

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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ GB HOWELL (35/5478)

**2**

After the grapes had been trod underfoot, the remains were forcefully pressed in a device, such as a Roman torculum (shown above), to remove the remaining juice from the grapes.

*There are about 10,000 varieties of grapes in the world. About 35 varieties grow in Israel today.*

*Over 13,000 acres of Israel has vineyards; harvesting occurs from late July to early November.*

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE/ ISRAEL MUSEUM/ JERUSALEM (1298/1754)

Upper right: The treading floor and fermentation tanks at Gibeon; dated to the 8–7th centuries BC.

Right: Roman-style torculum at Beit Jamal Monastery.

Far right: Eighth-century BC press at Hazor. Stone weights were added to place additional pressure on the grapes being crushed at the opposite end.

Left: Bronze wine set from Tel Nami dating to 13th cent. BC. Wine sets customarily had a juglet, a strainer, and a drinking bowl.

*While terra-cotta amphoras were the original vessels for storing and transporting wine, during the period of the Roman Empire wooden barrels and glass bottles came into use.*

**3**

After the grapes had been thoroughly pressed, the juice was put through a filter or strainer to remove bits of remaining skins, twigs, or any other debris.

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Far right: Marble bust of Caligula (ruled AD 37-41); he reportedly often drank to excess.

Right: Roman terra-cotta wine amphora; from a Mediterranean shipwrecked cargo vessel that had 1,200-1,500 amphorae. The original destination was likely Gaul.

Far right: Blown glass Roman wine bottle; AD 50–150.

**4**

To produce wine, juice was poured into leather wineskins or large pottery jars. The skins/jars were then put into cool, rock cisterns where the juice was allowed to ferment. The length of the fermentation process varied, depending on the quality of wine desired. Fermentation typically took from a little over a week to a couple of months. The fermenting process can produce both wine and vinegar. Jesus referred to the fermentation process, which causes a wineskin to expand: "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, it will spill, and the skins will be ruined. No, new wine is put into fresh wineskins" (Luke 5:37-38, CSB).

## GRAPES AND VINES IN THE BIBLE

Scripture speaks of grapes, vines, and vineyards both literally and figuratively. Noah was the first cultivator of a vineyard (Gen. 9:20). Vines are included in the description of the promised land (Deut. 8:8); huge clusters of grapes grew there (Num.13:23). God described Israel as being His vineyard (Isa. 5:7). In teaching, Jesus used a vineyard as an analogy for the kingdom of God (Matt. 20:1-16; 21:33-44). He also used vine imagery to describe His relationship with His disciples (John 15:1-8).

## THE JEZREEL WINERY

IN 2012, ARCHAEOLOGISTS DISCOVERED THE remains of a large winery at Jezreel. Excavations in 2013 at the site revealed a winery complex of about 130 square feet, consisting of a 34 square foot treading floor and 2 vats, each about 14 square feet and over 3 feet deep. Comparisons with wineries in the surrounding area and analysis of this wine press design have led archaeologists to believe the winery likely dates to the period of the Israelite monarchy. The soil in the valley below is ideal for growing grapes. Thus the location of the winery in proximity to the ancient city of Jezreel and the soil quality in the adjacent valley have contributed to archaeologists believing this may have been Naboth's vineyard described in 1 Kings 21.

Below: Hewn in limestone bedrock at the foot of Tel Jezreel, this ancient winery installation consists of vats, a treading floor, and other functional pits. About 85 miles north of Jerusalem, Jezreel was the location of of the royal palace of Israel's Kings Omri and Ahab.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE (1528/6246)

*You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and new wine abound.*

—PSALM 4:7, CSB