

A Winepress in Ancient Israel

An ancient winepress was a rock-hewn open-air system. Grapes were pressed by being trodden underfoot in a treading floor. The juice would pour through a channel into a vat, where it would ferment. It would then be collected in jars.

The yeast from the skin of the grapes would begin fermenting the grape juice at the time of pressing.

Wine jars were often stoppered with unfired clay (or sometimes olive oil would be floated on top).

TREADERS

Treading floor

Grapes

Plug rock

Vat

Jars

Channel

Vat

Must

Upper Vat:
גַּת (ghath)

Pressed thorns or other plant fibers were used to filter the grape juice.

The fermentation would take a few days, bubbling vigorously, especially during the first day. When the bubbling stopped, the juice—now wine—was ready to be taken out.

The chalk/limestone bedrock in Israel makes excellent winepresses—it cuts easily and holds liquid well.

Lower Vat:
יֶקֶב (yeqev)

Wine skins were also used. Under proper conditions, stored wine could last for a year. If left exposed, it would soon turn to vinegar.

