

Simple Thoughts on Alcohol in the Bible

Bottom Line: The Bible forbids drunkenness, but does not forbid the occasional use of alcohol. That said, the Bible does give many clear warnings about its dangers and abuse. Many people will probably be best served by simply abstaining from its use.

The first occurrences of something in the Bible are important:

In Genesis 9 Noah gets drunk and is taken advantage of by his son. In Genesis 19 Lot's daughters get him drunk and take advantage of him. There are many passages where bad things happen because of alcohol abuse.

The Bible does forbid drunkenness for believers:

"Don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled with the Spirit." -Ephesians 5:18

"Wine is a mocker, beer is a brawler, and whoever staggers because of them is not wise." -Proverbs 20:1

The Bible discourages alcohol use by leaders:

"It is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to desire beer. Otherwise they will drink, forget what is decreed, and pervert justice for all the oppressed." -Proverbs 31:6

Similar verses can be found in the Old Testament forbidding alcohol use by priests and for those who had taken a special vow of service to God (The Nazirite vow). For the New Testament Pastor and Deacon the command in I Timothy 3 is simply that they be men "not addicted to wine."

The Bible discourages association with those who drink too much:

"Don't associate with those who drink too much wine, or with those who gorge themselves on meat. For the drunkard and the glutton will become poor." -Proverbs 23:20-21

The Bible tells believers not to do anything that makes a weaker believer stumble:

"It is a noble thing not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother stumble." -Romans 14:21

The Bible does have many verses that describe occasional wine use for celebrations:

Isaac says to Jacob: "May God give to you- from the dew of the sky and from the richness of the land- an abundance of grain and new wine." -Genesis 27:28

"Go, eat your bread with pleasure, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already accepted your works." -Ecclesiastes 9:7

The New Testament clearly records that Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding, and involved turning water into wine. It makes clear Jesus Himself drank while on earth, in contrast to John the Baptist, who did not. See John 2 & Matthew 11:19.

The Bible describes a medicinal use of alcohol for some people:

So Paul advises Timothy: "Don't continue drinking only water, but use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." -I Timothy 5:23

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