

To gain biblical clarity on this issue, we must analyze it with the Every-Verse Method. In doing so, we will exclude verses that give no indication of God's feelings on alcohol consumption, such as Genesis (9:20), where Noah gets drunk and embarrasses himself. Neither will we cover ceremonial instructions, such as those applying to priests in the Tent of Meeting (Leviticus 10:9) or to Nazirite vows (Numbers 6). These ceremonial laws were wiped out by Jesus' sacrifice for our sins on the cross. We will only examine verses that help us determine God's will regarding alcohol consumption today.

Deuteronomy 14:26, “And you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires and there you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household.”

Context: God instructs the Israelites to set aside a tenth of their harvest for a celebration. This is often referred to as the Festival Tithe.

Analysis: God's first mention of alcoholic drink is a positive one. He created it for our enjoyment.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21, “If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey us; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all of the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it and fear.”

Context: Various laws of God are presented in these chapters of Deuteronomy.

Analysis: This is the Bible's first mention of alcohol in conjunction with sin. Alcohol is absent from the laws of Exodus and Leviticus, which precede Deuteronomy. The focus of the verse is not alcohol itself, but rather, the sin of being disobedient to parents—a sin that breaks one of the Ten Commandments. No sound-minded parent would recommend that their child ruin himself with a hedonistic, self-destructive lifestyle abusing both food and alcohol. Here in this verse, drinking alcoholic beverages is no more of a sin than eating food (gluttony), but the abuse of either can be the ruin of any person.

Judges 13:3-5, “Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman, and said to her, ‘Behold, you are barren and have born no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.’”

Context: The angel of the Lord gives instructions to the mother of Samson regarding the son she would soon deliver. The Nazirite designation set Samson apart from other people. Samson would go on to become one of the Old Testament’s great heroes. He is best known today for his long hair that gave him strength, and for his encounter with Delilah.

Analysis: At this point in time, Samson’s mother was the only person in all of Israel who was prohibited from drinking wine, and that was only during her pregnancy. Since we now know how alcohol can hurt a developing fetus, it’s quite possible that God forbade alcohol consumption here so that Samson would be born physically superior to other babies. However, we cannot be certain of God’s reasoning, since the Bible gives no explanation. What we do know is that this was an isolated case of alcohol abstinence.

Proverbs 20:1, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.”

Context: No real context here, as Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings which apply to all people at all times.

Analysis: To be intoxicated by alcohol is not considered a sin here, but it is considered unwise. When drunk, some people do foolish things they ordinarily would not.

Proverbs 21:17, “He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.”

Analysis: Pleasure, wine, and oil are associated with feasting. Those who indulge in pleasure too frequently tend to be unproductive.

Proverbs 23:20, “Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will cloth a man with rags.”

Analysis: This verse's focus is not alcohol, but the unproductiveness of pleasure-seeking. Drunkenness is often associated with gluttony in the Bible. It's not a sin to drink alcohol or to eat food. It may not even be a sin to experience an isolated episode of drunkenness any more than it is a sin to overeat at a holiday dinner. It is a sin, however, to lead a lifestyle of pleasure-seeking. We cannot seek pleasure and be productive at the same time. We need not look far in today's world to find people whose party lifestyles get in the way of something as basic as holding a job.

Proverbs 23:29-35, "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long over wine; those who go to taste mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things, and you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. 'They struck me, but I did not become ill; they beat me, but I did not know it. When shall I awake so I can find another drink?'"

Analysis: The line, "Do not look on wine when it is red" does not mean that it's a sin to look at wine, as some have suggested. These verses use exaggerations to make a point and are not to be taken literally. Their examples of hallucinations, confusion, and foolish acts never result from moderate alcohol consumption.

This quote opposes alcohol abuse and proves that it was every bit as much of a problem 3,000 years ago as it is today.

Proverbs 31:4-7, "It is not for Kings, O Lemuel: It is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to desire strong drink, lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his trouble no more."

Context: This proverb is not from Solomon, but from the mother of King Lemuel.

Analysis: The point here is that kings should not abuse alcohol, because it will lead them to become evil and oppressive. Again, this verse does not oppose moderate consumption, because moderate consumption does not cause memory loss and poor judgment.