

# Drink Strong Drink With Rejoicing

There are many churches throughout the United States that do not allow their members to drink alcoholic beverages. This prohibition is so strong that it is actually a part of many church covenants. This covenant doesn't mention sins like murder, rape, or drug abuse, but it *does* mention alcohol – which seems to indicate that churches consider drinking to be a more serious sin than any of those things.

Given that context, you may be surprised to learn that this verse is a real, genuine Bible verse:

**Deuteronomy 14:26:** “And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, **or for strong drink**, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there **before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice**, thou, and thine household,”

You can look up this verse in other translations if you like, but there's no getting around the fact that “strong drink” means exactly that. This verse is not talking about grape juice. It really *does* say that it is a good thing for people to drink alcoholic beverages before the Lord and rejoice.

This verse is found in a passage that is talking about tithing (Deuteronomy 14:22). What the passage is saying is that God would appoint a place where the Israelites were to bring their tithes. However, if that place was too far away then the Israelites could spend their tithe on whatever they wanted (be it oxen or wine) and eat it before the Lord and rejoice. If they wanted to

spend it on strong drink then they could do that.

Now, I'm not going to go into a detailed discussion of the tithing system in the Mosaic Law. That is a complex subject that is outside the scope of this book. My point here is that the Mosaic Law, with its hundreds of regulations, did *not* prohibit the consumption of alcohol. This same idea can be seen in the New Testament. Take a look at what Christ said:

**Matthew 11:18:** “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

**19 The Son of man came eating and drinking,** and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”

Jesus is criticizing His generation for their quarrelsome nature. When John the Baptist abstained from alcohol they accused him of being demon-possessed. When Jesus did *not* abstain from alcohol they accused him of being a drunkard. They were determined to find fault no matter what the situation.

The point is, though, that the Son of Man came *eating and drinking*. In the context of the passage it is obvious that Jesus drank alcoholic beverages. I realize there are some people who look at this passage and try to force it to say “John did not drink and Jesus did not drink either”, but that ruins the contrast that Jesus was trying to draw. The whole point of these verses is that *Jesus behaved differently from John*. If neither of them drank then the verses become meaningless.

Or take a look at this:

**Proverbs 31:6:** “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.

**7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty,** and remember his misery no more.”

There are many people who believe that the Bible institutes a blanket ban on all consumption of alcohol – but that's just not what the Bible teaches. Under the Mosaic Law people were allowed to take *their tithe* and spend it on strong drink. Jesus Himself said that he drank wine.

Are there dangers involved with drinking alcohol? Absolutely. The Bible warns against the abuse of alcohol in many passages. Drinking alcohol can easily lead to all sorts of problems and has destroyed many lives. Are there people who should avoid alcohol because they have either abused it in the past or because they might be tempted by it? Yes there are, and those people should avoid alcohol.

My point is *not* that people should drink alcohol. What I *am* saying is that we need to be honest about what the Bible actually says. It is foolish to claim that the Bible completely prohibits all drinking of alcohol regardless of the quantity or situation; it simply does not say that. There is wisdom in choosing to abstain from alcohol – but all drinking is not a sin.

