



What Would Jesus Drink? What the Bible Really Says About Alcohol

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Q/A with author Brad Whittington

Why did you write *What Would Jesus Drink?* I wanted to go on record as opposing religious bullying. It actually started in 1996 with a sermon equating beer in the fridge with robbery, murder, and rape. I didn't actually have beer in my fridge, but I thought the pastor might be overstating things. My father was a Southern Baptist preacher, so I was raised to consider drinking a sin. I never questioned it, but this sermon got me to wondering. I didn't see wine in the Ten Commandments next to "thou shalt not kill," so I decided to see what it really said.

How many verses are there? Referencing wine and strong drink, 247. It took several months to read them all in context and get a sense of the overall position. Then a few more months to write up my observations.

And what was your conclusion? Read the book. ;-) The short answer is that the Bible comes down strongly in favor of moderation, not prohibition. I was surprised at how clear the message was. Back in the day I heard sermons saying the wine in the Bible was really grape juice and other arguments that seemed OK until you read the verses in context.

Why did you wait fifteen years to release the book? I released the original study on the Internet in 1996. It didn't take long for people to find it. It's been referenced and quoted on dozens of blogs and websites, in print magazines, and in two books I know of, *The Year of Living Biblically* by A.J. Jacobs and *Diary of a Part-Time Monk* by J. Wilson. I assumed that in the twenty-first century it was a moot point, but in 2011 I discovered books still being published with the grape juice argument and even more absurd claims that don't square with the source material. So I updated and expanded the original essay and released it for ereaders and in paperback.

Do you consider *What Would Jesus Drink?* to be the last word on the subject? Not at all. I'm not a biblical scholar. Several books have come out recently. So in addition to doing my own research, I read everything I could find. In 2012 my blog will feature a review of a half-dozen or so of those books. Unlike most of them, WWJD is a quick read, because unlike all the preacher's I've met, I get right to the point. The book includes a bibliography of all the books I know of on the topic. The appendix includes all 247 verses in both KJV and NIV to make it easy for others to make their own decision. And for fun, I threw in a few sample chapters of one of my novels.

So *What Would Jesus Drink?* is not your first book? I'm a novelist with three published novels and three more on the way. WWJD is my first non-fiction book and probably my last.

Do you prefer fiction over non-fiction? In the case of WWJD, a direct approach made more sense than a novel, but in general I'm more interested in exploring life in the context of story than through analysis. My first three novels chronicle the journey of a preacher's kid who confronts faith, dogma, and authenticity in ways that cause problems, sometimes humorous, both for him and those around him. For the new books, I invented a concept of assisted-suicide vacations to explore euthanasia and the limits of personal responsibility, also in a quasi-comedic context. Then there's the story about the sheriff who hears voices coming from a bran muffin.

Author contact: Brad@BradWhittinton.com

www.BradWhittington.com