

The Fidelity of the Rechabites

Jeremiah 35

Jeremiah 35:1-11 - *"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, ² "Go to the house of the Rechabites, speak to them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink."*

³ Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, his brothers and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites, ⁴ and I brought them into the house of the Lord, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door. ⁵ Then I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine, and cups; and I said to them, "Drink wine."

⁶ But they said, "We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall drink no wine, you nor your sons, forever. ⁷ You shall not build a house, sow seed, plant a vineyard, nor have any of these; but all your days you shall dwell in tents, that you may live many days in the land where you are sojourners.' ⁸ Thus we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, ⁹ nor to build ourselves houses to dwell in; nor do we have vineyard, field, or seed.

¹⁰ But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. ¹¹ But it came to pass, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, 'Come, let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and for fear of the army of the Syrians.' So we dwell at Jerusalem."

Background Notes

The events in chapter 35 took place during the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah (v1), while the events of chapter 34 took place in the days of King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. So chapter 35 went back two reigns to King Jehoiakim, in about 600 BC, or maybe one or two years earlier. The events of chapter 35 were included to show the Rechabites' faithfulness to the commands of their forefather, in sharp contrast to the unfaithfulness of Judah to the Lord's commands.

Who were the "Rechabites"? The Rechabites were an extended family group in Israel that followed a simple, nomadic, puritanical lifestyle. Jonadab, the son of Rechab, founded the family line about 250 years before this time - back in the days of Jehu, king of the northern kingdom of Israel. Rechab's family tree went all the way back to the Canaanites who were descended from Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. Rechab's son Jonadab assisted King Jehu in eradicating Baal worship from Israel at that time.

2 Kings 10:15-28: *"Now when he departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab, coming to meet him; and he greeted him and said to him, "Is your heart right, as my heart is toward your heart?" And Jehonadab answered, "It is."*

¹⁶ Then he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." So they had him ride in his chariot. ¹⁷ And when he came to Samaria, he killed all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed them, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke to Elijah.

¹⁸ Then Jehu gathered all the people together, and said to them, "Ahab served Baal a little, Jehu will serve him much.

¹⁹ Now therefore, call to me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests. Let no one be missing, for I have a great sacrifice for Baal. Whoever is missing shall not live." But Jehu acted deceptively, with the intent of destroying the worshipers of Baal. ²⁰ And Jehu said, "Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal." So they proclaimed it.

²¹ Then Jehu sent throughout all Israel; and all the worshipers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left who did not come. So they came into the temple of Baal, and the temple of Baal was full from one end to the other. ²² And he said to the one in charge of the wardrobe, "Bring out vestments for all the worshipers of Baal." So he brought out vestments for them.

²³ Then Jehu and Jehonadab the son of Rechab went into the temple of Baal, and said to the worshipers of Baal, "Search and see that no servants of the Lord are here with you, but only the worshipers of Baal." ²⁴ So they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had appointed for himself eighty men on the outside, and had said, "If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escapes, whoever lets him escape, it shall be his life for the life of the other."

²⁵ Now it happened, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, "Go in and kill them; let no one come out!" And they killed them with the edge of the sword. Then the guards and the officers threw them out, and went into the inner room of the temple of Baal. ²⁶ And they brought the sacred pillars out of the temple of Baal and burned them. ²⁷ Then they broke down the sacred pillar of Baal, and tore down the temple of Baal and made it a refuse dump to this day. ²⁸ Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel."

So that's some background for Jonadab, the forefather of the Rechabites. Jonadab, as a family leader, instructed his descendants to live a simple lifestyle, to live in tents, and to refrain from drinking wine. The Rechabites were not Nazarites, nor had they taken a temporary Nazirite vow. The faithful Rechabites followed their father Jonadab's commands for life.

Normally the Rechabites lived in open land, away from the populated cities, but they moved into Jerusalem temporarily because of Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion of Judah (v11). The Lord told Jeremiah to invite the Rechabites to come to one of the Temple court chambers, and offer them wine to drink. But the Rechabites refused to drink it because of their faithful commitment to the strict commands of their ancestor, Jonadab.

This was *not* a "sting operation" that the Lord planned with Jeremiah to try to ensnare the Rechabites into breaking their covenant! No, the Lord knew the Rechabites would be loyal and faithful to the wishes and commands of their father Jonadab. The Lord was using the faithfulness and commitment of the Rechabites as an object lesson and a message to the people of Judah, who were unfaithful to their commitment to the Lord.

Doctrinal Points

1. The fidelity of the Rechabites should not be used as a “proof text” against alcoholic beverages.

The Nazarites took a vow against drinking wine, and the Rechabites followed a family commitment not to drink wine, but that doesn't mean that the Bible is teaching that God is against the consumption of all alcoholic beverages. We know that the Bible is totally against getting drunk (Ephesians 5:18 for example). And we know that the Bible teaches the proper use of Christian liberty, as long as we don't stumble or offend other believers (Romans 14). So using Jeremiah 35 as a proof text for “teetotaling,” or an argument against the use of all alcoholic beverages - that would be a **bad hermeneutical leap!**

Having said that, the Bible gives believers liberty to make a personal commitment to be a teetotaler. That is a personal choice, and that's part of our Christian liberty. And believers can glorify the Lord with this lifestyle decision. However, for a believer to apply his or her own personal no-alcohol standards to everyone else, and judge the spirituality of other believers by his own personal choices - that would be wrong.

Using Jeremiah 35 as a proof text against the consumption of alcoholic beverages would be **bad hermeneutics**. The fidelity of the Rechabites should not be used as a proof text against alcoholic beverages.

2. The fidelity of the Rechabites should be used as a proof text for loyal commitment.

Jeremiah 35:12-19 - *“Then came the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, saying, ¹³“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, “Will you not receive instruction to obey My words?” says the Lord. ¹⁴“The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; for to this day they drink none, and obey their father’s commandment. But although I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, you did not obey Me. ¹⁵ I have also sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, ‘Turn now everyone from his evil way, amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them; then you will dwell in the land which I have given you and your fathers.’ But you have not inclined your ear, nor obeyed Me. ¹⁶ Surely the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them, but this people has not obeyed Me.”*

¹⁷“Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the doom that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them but they have not heard, and I have called to them but they have not answered.”

¹⁸ And Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts and done according to all that he commanded you, ¹⁹ therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever.””

If you're looking for a Scripture to share or a text for a sermon on the subject of loyal commitment and faithfulness to the directions of a godly leader, or to keeping a good tradition, Jeremiah 35 would be an excellent proof text to use. This would especially be useful if you wanted to contrast such loyal commitment and faithfulness with the unfaithfulness of others. That's exactly what God directed Jeremiah to do (v12-16). Jeremiah was to rebuke the people of Judah as a rebuke for their unfaithfulness and their lack of loyalty to the Lord, using the loyalty and faithfulness of the Rechabites as an example. Notice three points of contrast that are brought out in these verses:

- a. The Rechabites were obedient to their human ancestor - but Judah was disobedient to the eternal God (v14)
- b. The Rechabites were still faithful to a command that was issued once, 250 years earlier - but Judah was unfaithful in spite of the constant warnings of many prophets (v15-16)
- c. The Rechabites would be rewarded for their loyalty with a continual line of servants for the Lord - but Judah would be punished for their disloyalty to the Lord (v17-19).

So there are a lot of good lessons about loyalty and faithfulness in Jeremiah 35. The loyalty of the Rechabites can be used as a proof text for loyal commitment.

Practical Application

Remember to respect the "Rechabites"!

In any large church or good-sized fellowship there will be a few "Rechabites" - Christians who advocate a simple, puritanical type of lifestyle. They feel this is the lifestyle that is most honoring to the Lord. If these folks live a simple lifestyle to honor the Lord, they are to be respected for it. Not revered - but respected.

This lifestyle is not for everyone - *although it wouldn't hurt most of us to move a little more in that direction!* Not everyone can handle a simple "John the Baptist" lifestyle. It's not for everyone. But the Lord praised John the Baptist, even though he was different - living in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey, and wearing clothing that was certainly not in style. But John honored the Lord - and the Lord honored John.

Maybe you're a "Rechabite" type of Christian. You can bring glory to God as a Rechabite. Maybe you're not a "Rechabite" Christian. That's okay, and you can glorify the Lord by your life, too. But - remember to respect the "Rechabites"!