

Jeremiah

Chapter 35

The Obedience of the Rechabites

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: 2 “Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak with them and bring them to the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers; then offer them wine to drink.” 3 So I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, son of Habazziniah and his brothers and all his sons and the whole house of the Rechabites. 4 I brought them to the house of the LORD into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, keeper of the threshold. 5 Then I set before the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups, and I said to them, “Drink wine.” 6 But they answered, “We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, ‘You shall not drink wine, neither you nor your sons forever. 7 You shall not build a house; you shall not sow seed; you shall not plant or have a vineyard; but you shall live in tents all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn.’ 8 We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, 9 and not to build houses to dwell in. We have no vineyard or field or seed, 10 but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done all that Jonadab our father commanded us. 11 But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against the land, we said, ‘Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Syrians.’ So we are living in Jerusalem.” 12 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 13 “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction and listen to my words? declares the LORD. 14 The command that Jonadab the son of Rechab gave to his sons, to drink no wine, has been kept, and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their father’s command. I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened to me. 15 I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, ‘Turn now every one of you from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to you and your fathers.’ But you did not incline your ear or listen to me. 16 The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have kept the command that their father gave them, but this people has not obeyed me. 17 Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered.” 18 But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father and kept all his precepts and done all that he commanded you, 19 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me.”

35:1–19 The family of the Rechabites, who obeyed their forefather’s command, are an example and rebuke to the people of Judah, who have disobeyed the Lord (see v. 16). The mention of “Babylonian and Aramean armies” (v. 11) dates the chapter to no earlier than the eighth year of King Jehoiakim, who began his reign in 609 B.C., whose capital city of Jerusalem was besieged in 605 (see Da 1:1 and note) by Nebuchadnezzar, and who rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar three or four years later—an unwise act that led to raids on his territory by Babylonians, Arameans and others (see 2Ki 24:1–2). (The raids are perhaps reflected in 12:7–13.) (CSB)

The incident recorded here took place some 10 years earlier than the events described in ch 34. Though not in chronological sequence, it is documented here because, like ch 34, it furnishes further evidence that God was fully justified in threatening to destroy His rebellious people. (TLSB)

35:1 *days of Jehoiakim.* Chs. 35–36 (see 36:1) are a flashback to the reign of Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.). (CSB)

35:2 *Recabite family.* A nomadic tribal group related to the Kenites (see 1Ch 2:55), some of whom lived among or near the Israelites (see Jdg 1:16; 4:11; 1Sa 27:10) and were on friendly terms with them (see 1Sa 15:6; 30:26, 29). (CSB)

For centuries, this Kenite clan had not deviated from the austere, semi-nomadic way of life prescribed by their ancestor Jonadab, cf Jdg 1:16; Nu 10:29. At this time they were forced by the Babylonian invasion to take refuge in Jerusalem. (TLSB)

one of the chambers. Used for storage and/or as living quarters (see 1Ki 6:5; 1Ch 28:12; 2Ch 31:11; Ne 13:4–5). (CSB)

These were small cells built on the outside of the walls, used chiefly for storage purposes. (Kretzmann)

wine to drink – Before a large audience, gathered in front of a chamber in the temple court, they demonstrated their obedience to one of their ancestral rules of conduct – they refused to drink any wine (v. 6). (TLSB)

This was offering them this intoxicant to put them to a test. Rechab, the father of Jonadab and the ancestor of the tribe, had given his children the command to abstain from wine in order to keep them in the simplicity of their forefathers and to protect them from moral decay. (Kretzmann)

35:3 *Jaazaniah.* Means “The LORD hears.” It was a common name in Jeremiah’s time (see 40:8; Eze 8:11; 11:1) and appears on a stamp seal (discovered at Tell en-Nasbeh north of Jerusalem and dating c. 600 B.C.) as well as on one of the Lachish ostraca. (CSB)

Jeremiah. Not the prophet. (CSB)

This otherwise unknown person bore the same name given to the prophet. (TLSB)

35:4 *chamber of the sons.* Rooms or halls surrounded the temple courts. They were used for supplies, utensils, offices, and even dwellings. (TLSB)

sons. Perhaps here in the sense of “disciples” (see Am 7:14 and note). (CSB)

Hanan the son of Igdaliah. His chamber was near that of the princes and above that of the doorkeeper. (TLSB)

man of God. A synonym for “prophet” (see 1Ki 12:22; see also note on 1Sa 9:9), emphasizing his relationship to the One who has called him. (CSB)

Maaseiah. Perhaps the man of the same name mentioned in 21:1; 29:25; 37:3. (CSB)

keeper of the threshold. One of three supervisors (see 52:24) over those who guarded the entrances to the temple (see 2Ki 12:9). (CSB)

A priest with special duties at the boundary between the holy temple and the common streets of Jerusalem. He kept order and made sure only worthy persons entered the temple courts (Jer 52:24). (TLSB)

35:5 *pitchers*. Large vessels, from which smaller cups would be filled. (CSB)

35:6-10 “When the Rechabites are praised, it is necessary [to point out] that they have observed their custom, not because they believed (1) they merited forgiveness of sins by it or (2) that the work was itself a justifying service or (3) that it was a service by which they obtained eternal life instead of by God’s mercy, for the sake of the promised Seed (Gen 3:15; Gal 3:16). Their obedience is praised because they had their parent’s command. One of God’s commandments relates to this, “Honor your father and mother [Ex 20:12]” (Ap XXVII 61). (TLSB)

35:6 *We will drink no wine*. A permanent vow taken by the Rechabites; cf. the Nazirites’ temporary vow (see Nu 6:2–3, 20; Jdg 13:4–7). Malkijah son of Recab may have been a later renegade exception to the Rechabite vow, since he was “ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem” (Ne 3:14), which means “house of the vineyard.” (CSB)

Jonadab. Spelled “Jehonadab” in 2Ki 10:15, 23. Nearly 250 years before the days of Jeremiah, he helped King Jehu destroy Baal worship (at least temporarily) in the northern kingdom. (CSB)

35:7 *shall live in tents*. Except during times of national emergency (see v. 11). (CSB)

If they followed any agricultural or horticultural pursuit they might become settled in any one place. (Kretzmann)

That you may live many days in the land. An echo of Ex 20:12, where honoring one’s parents is commanded. (CSB)

Although living in the midst of Israel and Judah and having accepted the true God, the Rechabites maintained their own nationality. (Kretzmann)

35:8 *We have obeyed ... Jonadab*. Contrast Judah’s disobedience toward God (see v. 16). (CSB)

35:11 See note on vv. 1–19. (CSB)

Marauding bands of Syrian tribes took every opportunity to plunder exposed parts of Palestine, 2 Kings 24, 2. So the Rechabites make use of the city as a temporary refuge, until they might return to their home-land. The Rechabites thus offered a fine example of willing obedience to the command of their tribal head. (Kretzmann)

35:12-19 Then Jeremiah turned to the men of Judah. What they had heard and seen was an object lesson of the enormity of their sin of disobedience. For (1) they broke the Law of God, who gave them the Promised Land, and not merely a rule of unproved merit issued by a fellowman; (2) they violated the divine demand not to “go after other gods”; (3) They did this not once but many times over; and (4) they could not claim ignorance of God’s will, for He persistently sent them His prophets to instruct them and call them to repentance. Such deliberate, obstinate wickedness would be punished, whereas the kind of unwavering fidelity displayed by the Rechabites will always be an example of acceptable service to God. (TLSB)

35:13 *receive instruction*. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “respond(ed) to correction” in 2:30; 7:28 (see 5:3; 17:23 and note). (CSB)

35:14–15 *spoken to you persistently* – The Hebrew idiom underlying this phrase is found frequently in Jeremiah (v. 25; 11:7; 25:3–4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14–15; 44:4), but appears nowhere else in the OT. (CSB)

35:15 He had commanded nothing unreasonable, but simply to serve Him, and he had attached to His command a most gracious promise, but all in vain. (Kretzmann)

35:17 The connection of thought is this: Just as faithfulness in keeping a father's commands has a promise of blessings, so, and much more so, disobedience to the Lord's commands will, on the other hand, bring a most severe punishment. The emphasis of the passage lies in the contrast. (Kretzmann)

35:19 *never lack a man to stand before me*. See 33:18. Various traditions in the Jewish Mishnah claim that the Rechabites were later given special duties to perform in connection with the Jerusalem temple built after the return from Babylonian exile.

The bodily descendants of the Rechabites no longer constitute an identifiable group, yet their clan is spared from destruction. The loyalty they displayed lives on as the approved hallmark of countless numbers who dedicate themselves to serve the Lord. (TLSB)

The family of the Rechabites would not die out, and it would continue in the worship of Jehovah without interruption. According to the accounts of trustworthy travelers, the descendants of Rechab are still living in the desert of Yemen, near Senaar, on the border of Mesopotamia and Arabia. Thus the Lord rewards the careful observance of the Fourth Commandment by blessings continuing through many generations. (Kretzmann)

Ch 35 God uses the faithful Rechabite family to show His people what obedience looks like. People seem to be much more willing to follow the traditions of men and ignore the Law of God (cf Mt 15:1–6). (Consider, e.g., how holiday traditions spread easily though their spiritual meaning is often lost.) God patiently calls sinners to repentance, sending messengers and granting them ample time to turn back to Him in faith. • Father, make us ready servants, faithful to Your Word and will, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)