

CHAPTER 35

A variety of methods is tried, and every stone turned, to awaken the Jews to a sense of their sin and to bring them to repentance and reformation. The scope and tendency of many of the prophet's sermons was to frighten them out of their disobedience, by setting before them what would be the end thereof if they persisted in it. The scope of this sermon, in this chapter, is to shame them out of their disobedience if they had any sense of honour left in them for a discourse of this nature to fasten upon.

I. He sets before them the obedience of the family of the Rechabites to the commands which were left them by Jonadab their ancestor, and how they persevered in that obedience and would not be tempted from it (v. 1-11).

II. With this he aggravates the disobedience of the Jews to God and their contempt of his precepts (v. 12-15).

III. He foretels the judgments of God upon the Jews for their impious disobedience to God (v. 16, 17).

IV. He assures the Rechabites of the blessing of God upon them for their pious obedience to their father (v. 18, 19).

~~281~~ JEREMIAH 35:1-11

THE CASE OF THE RECHABITES

This chapter is of an earlier date than many of those before; for what is contained in it was said and done *in the days of Jehoiakim* (v. 1); but then it must be in the latter part of his reign, for it was after the king of Babylon with his army *came up into the land* (v. 11), which seems to refer to the invasion mentioned ~~281~~ 2 Kings 24:2, which was upon occasion of Jehoiakim's rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. After the judgments of God had broken in upon this rebellious people he continued to deal with them by his prophets to turn them from sin, that his wrath might turn away from the. For this purpose Jeremiah sets before them the example of the Rechabites, a family that kept distinct by themselves and were no more

numbered with the families of Israel than they with the nations. They were originally Kenites, as appears ^{<1025>}1 Chronicles 2:55, *These are the Kenites that came out of Hemath, the father of the house of Rechab*. The Kenites, at least those of them that gained a settlement in the land of Israel, were of the posterity of Hobab, Moses's father-in-law, ^{<1016>}Judges 1:16. We find them separated from the Amalekites, ^{<1016>}1 Samuel 15:6. See ^{<1017>}Judges 4:17. One family of these Kenites had their denomination from Rechab. His son, or a lineal descendant from him, was Jonadab, a man famous in his time for wisdom and piety. he flourished in the days of Jehu, king of Israel, nearly 300 years before this; for there we find him courted by that rising prince, when he affected to appear zealous for God (^{<1205>}2 Kings 10:15, 16), which he thought nothing more likely to confirm people in the opinion of than to have so good a man as Jonadab ride in the chariot with him. Now here we are told,

I. What the rules of living were which Jonadab, probably by his last will and testament, in writing, and duly executed, charged his children, and his posterity after him throughout all generations, religiously to observe; and we have reason to think that they were such as he himself had all his days observed.

1. They were comprised in two remarkable precepts: —

(1.) He forbade them to *drink wine*, according to the law of the Nazarites. Wine is indeed given to *make glad the heart* of man and we are allowed the sober and moderate use of it; but we are so apt to abuse it and get hurt by it, and a good man, who has his heart made continually glad with the *light of God's countenance*, has so little need of it for that purpose (^{<1046>}Psalm 4:6, 7), that it is a commendable piece of self-denial either not to use it at all or very sparingly and medicinally, as Timothy used it, ^{<1023>}1 Timothy 5:23.

(2.) He appointed them to *dwell in tents*, and not to build houses, nor purchase lands, nor rent or occupy either, v. 7. This was an instance of strictness and mortification beyond what the Nazarenes were obliged to. Tents were mean dwellings, so that this would teach them to be humble; they were cold dwellings, so that this would teach them to be hardy and not to indulge the body; they were movable dwellings, so that this would teach them not to think of settling or taking root any where in this world. They must dwell in tents *all their days*. They must from the beginning thus

accustom themselves to endure hardness, and then it would be no difficulty to them, no, not under the decays of old age. Now,

2. Why did Jonadab prescribe these rules of living to his posterity? It was not merely to show his authority, and to exercise a dominion over them, by imposing upon them what he thought fit; but it was to show his wisdom, and the real concern he had for their welfare, by recommending to them what he knew would be beneficial to them, yet not tying them by any oath or vow, or under any penalty, to observe these rules, but only advising them to conform to this discipline as far as they found it for edification, yet to be dispensed with in any case of necessity, as here, v. 11. He prescribed these rules to them,

(1.) That they might preserve the ancient character of their family, which, however looked upon by some with contempt, he thought its real reputation. His ancestors had addicted themselves to a pastoral life (^{<026>}Exodus 2:16), and he would have his posterity keep to it, and not degenerate from it, as Israel had done, who originally were shepherds and dwelt in tents, ^{<054>}Genesis 46:34. Note, We ought not to be ashamed of the honest employments of our ancestors, though they were but mean.

(2.) That they might comport with their lot and bring their mind to their condition. Moses had put them in hopes that they should be naturalized (^{<002>}Numbers 10:32); but, it seems they were not; they were still *strangers in the land* (v. 7), had no inheritance in it, and therefore must live by their employments, which was a good reason why they should accustom themselves to hard fare and hard lodging; for strangers, such as they were, must not expect to live as the landed men, so plentifully and delicately. Note, It is our wisdom and duty to accommodate ourselves to our place and rank, and not aim to live above it. What has been the lot of our fathers why may we not be content that it should be our lot, and live according to it? *Mind not high things.*

(3.) That they might not be envied and disturbed by their neighbours among whom they lived. If they that were strangers should live great, raise estates, and fare sumptuously, the natives would grudge them their abundance, and have a jealous eye upon them, as the Philistines had upon Isaac (^{<034>}Genesis 26:14), and would seek occasions to quarrel with them and do them a mischief; therefore he thought it would be their prudence to keep low, for that would be the way to continue long — to live meanly, that they might *live many days in the land where they were strangers.*

Note, Humility and contentment in obscurity are often the best policy and men's surest protection.

(4.) That they might be armed against temptations to luxury and sensuality, the prevailing sin of the age and place they lived in. Jonadab saw a general corruption of manners; the drunkards of Ephraim abounded, and he was afraid lest his children should be debauched and ruined by them; and therefore he obliged them to live by themselves, retired in the country; and, that they might not run into any unlawful pleasures, to deny themselves the use even of lawful delights. They must be very sober, and temperate, and abstemious, which would contribute to the health both of mind and body, and to their living many days, and easy ones, and such as they might reflect upon with comfort *in the land where they were strangers*. Note, The consideration of this, that we are strangers and pilgrims, should oblige us to abstain from all fleshly lusts, to live above the things of sense, and look upon them with a generous and gracious contempt.

(5.) That they might be prepared for times of trouble and calamity. Jonadab might, without a spirit of prophecy, foresee the destruction of a people so wretchedly degenerated, and he would have his family provide, that, if they could not *in the peace thereof*, yet even in the midst of the troubles thereof, *they might have peace*. Let them therefore have little to lose, and then losing times would be the less dreadful to them: let them sit loose to what they had, and then they might with less pain be stripped of it. Note, Those are in the best frame to meet sufferings who are mortified to the world and live a life of self-denial.

(6.) That in general they might learn to live by rule and under discipline. It is good for us all to do so, and to teach our children to do so. Those that have lived long, as Jonadab probably had done when he left this charge to his posterity, can speak by experience of the vanity of the world and the dangerous snares that are in the abundance of its wealth and pleasures, and therefore ought to be regarded when they warn those that come after them to stand upon their guard.

II. How strictly his posterity observed these rules, v. 8-10. They had in their respective generations all of them *obeyed the voice of Jonadab their father, had done according to all that he commanded them*. They *drank no wine*, though they dwelt in a country where was plenty of it; their wives

and children drank no wine, for those that are temperate themselves should take care that all under their charge should be so too. They built no houses, tilled no ground, but lived upon the products of their cattle. This they did partly in obedience to their ancestor, and out of a veneration they had for his name and authority, and partly from the experience they themselves had of the benefit of living such a mortified life. See the force of tradition, and the influence that antiquity, example, and great names, have upon men, and how that which seems very difficult will by long usage and custom become easy and in a manner natural. Now,

1. As to one of the particulars he had given them in charge, we are here told how in a case of necessity they dispensed with the violation of it (v. 11): *When the king of Babylon came into the land with his army, though they had hitherto dwelt in tents, they now quitted their tents, and came and dwelt in Jerusalem, and in such houses as they could furnish themselves with there.* Note, The rules of a strict discipline must not be made too strict, but so as to admit of a dispensation when the necessity of a case calls for it, which therefore, in making vows of that nature, it is wisdom to provide expressly for, that the way may be made the more clear, and we may not afterwards be forced to say, *It was an error,* ²⁰⁶ Ecclesiastes 5:6. Commands of that nature are to be understood with such limitations. These Rechabites would have tempted God, and not trusted him, if they had not used proper means for their own safety in a time of common calamity, notwithstanding the law and custom of their family.

2. As to the other particular, we are here told how, notwithstanding the greatest urgency, they religiously adhered to it. Jeremiah took them into the temple (v. 2), into a *prophet's chamber*, there, rather than into the *chamber of the princes*, that joined to it, because he had a message from God, which would look more like itself when it was delivered in the *chambers of a man of God*. There he not only asked the Rechabites whether they would drink any wine, but he set *pots full of wine before them*, and cups to drink out of, made the temptation as strong as possible, and said, "*Drink you wine, you shall have it on free cost. You have broken one of the rules of your order, in coming to live at Jerusalem; why may you not break this too, and when you are in the city do as they there do?*" But they peremptorily refused. They all agreed in the refusal. "*No, we will drink no wine; for with us it is against the law.*" The prophet knew very well they would deny it, and, when they did, urged it no further, for he saw they were stedfastly resolved. Note, Those temptations are of no force

with men of confirmed sobriety which yet daily overcome such as, notwithstanding their convictions, are of no resolution in the paths of virtue.

~~245D~~ JEREMIAH 35:12-19

CASE OF THE RECHABITES APPLIED

The trial of the Rechabites' constancy was intended but for a sign; now here we have the application of it.

I. The Rechabites' observance of their father's charge to them is made use of as an aggravation of the disobedience of the Jews to God. Let them see it and be ashamed. The prophet asks them, in God's name, "*Will you not at length receive instruction?*" v. 13. Will nothing affect you? Will nothing fasten upon you? Will nothing prevail to discover sin and duty to you? You see how obedient the Rechabites are to their father's commandment (v. 14); but *you have not inclined your ear to me*" (v. 15), though one might much more reasonably expect that the people of God should have obeyed him than that the sons of Jonadab should have obeyed him; and the aggravation is very high, for,

- 1.** The Rechabites were obedient to one who was but a man like themselves, who had but the wisdom and power of a man, and was only the father of their flesh; but the Jews were disobedient to an infinite and eternal God, who had an absolute authority over them, as the Father of their spirits.
- 2.** Jonadab was long since dead, and was ignorant of them, and could neither take cognizance of their disobedience to his orders nor give correction for it; but God lives for ever, to see how his laws are observed, and is in a readiness to revenge all disobedience.
- 3.** The Rechabites were never put in mind of their obligations to their father; but God often sent his prophets to his people, to put them in mind of their duty to him, and yet they would not do it. This is insisted on here as a great aggravation of their disobedience: "*I have myself spoken to you, rising early and speaking by the written word and the dictates and admonitions of conscience* (v. 14); nay, *I have sent unto you all my*

servants the prophets, men like yourselves, whose terrors shall not make you afraid, rising up early and sending them (v. 15), and yet all in vain.”

4. Jonadab never did that for his seed which God had done for his people. He left them a charge, but left them no estate to bear the charge; but God had given his people a *good land*, and promised them that, if they would be obedient, they should still dwell in it, so that they were bound both in gratitude and interest to be obedient, and yet they *would not hear*, they would not *hearken*.

5. God did not tie up his people to so much hardship, and to such instances of mortification, as Jonadab obliged his seed to; and yet Jonadab's orders were obeyed and God's were not.

II. Judgments are threatened, as often before, against Judah and Jerusalem, for their disobedience thus aggravated. The Rechabites shall rise up in judgment against them, and shall condemn them; for they very punctually *performed the commandment of their father*, and continued and persevered in their obedience to it (v. 16); but *this people*, this rebellious and gainsaying people, *have not hearkened unto me*; and therefore (v. 17), because they have not obeyed the precepts of the word, God will perform the threatenings of it: *“I will bring upon them, by the Chaldean army, all the evil pronounced against them both in the law and in the prophets, for I have spoken to them, I have called to them — spoken in a still small voice to those that were near and called aloud to those that were at a distance, tried all ways and means to convince and reduce them — spoken by my word, called by my providence, both to the same purport, and yet all to no purpose; they have not heard nor answered.”*

III. Mercy is here promised to the family of the Rechabites for their steady and unanimous adherence to the laws of their house. Though it was only for the shaming of Israel that their constancy was tried, yet, being unshaken, it was *found unto praise, and honour, and glory*; and God takes occasion from it to tell them that he had favours in reserve for them (v. 18, 19) and that they should have the comfort of them.

1. That the family shall continue as long as any of the families of Israel, among whom they were strangers and sojourners. it shall *never want a man* to inherit what they had, though they had no inheritance to leave. Note, Sometimes those that have the smallest estates have the most numerous progeny; but he that sends mouths will be sure to send meat.

2. That religion shall continue in the family: “*He shall not want a man to stand before me, to serve me.*” Though they are neither priests nor levites, nor appear to have had any post in the temple service, yet in a constant course of regular devotion, they stand before God, to minister to him.
Note,

(1.) The greatest blessing that can be entailed upon a family is to have the worship of God kept up in it from generation to generation.

(2.) Temperance, self-denial, and mortification to the world, do very much befriend the exercises of piety, and help to transmit the observance of them to posterity. The more dead we are to the delights of sense the better we are disposed for the service of God; but nothing is more fatal to the entail of religion in a family than pride and luxury.