

JEREMIAH 35

THE RECHABITES

The march of Nebuchadnezzar's army against Jerusalem was preceded by incursions of Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites. Up the valleys swept these destroyers – massacring the peasantry, devouring the crops, and spreading terror on every side. Therefore, the inhabitants of the neighboring countryside – eager to save their lives and perhaps some few relics of their property – left their houses and lands to the mercy of the invaders, and fled for protection to the metropolis of Jerusalem. They figured that they would find safeguard within the massive walls of Zion.

Among these people, there came a tribe that excited much curiosity because of their strange and antiquated manners. They refused to shelter in the houses or permanent buildings of the city; but rather, they pitched their dusky tents in some open space within the walls, and there awaited the turn of events. Their record was an honorable one, reaching far back into the early days of Hebrew history. When Israel was passing through the wilderness of Sinai, the tribe of the Kenites showed them kindness; and this laid the foundation of perpetual friendliness between the two peoples. The Kenites seem to have adopted the religious convictions of Israel, and to have accompanied them into the Land of Promise. Although they retained their integrity as a somewhat separate people, the Kenites maintained their friendly relationship with Israel during the intervening centuries (Judges 4:17, 24; 1 Sam. 15:6; 1 Chr. 2:55); and it was from this tribe that the Rechabites (for such was the name of this strange, tent-loving people) had sprung.

Around the time of the prophet Elijah – and perhaps largely influenced by him – the sheik or leader of one branch of these Kenites was Jonadab, the son of Rechab. He was dismayed at the abounding iniquity of the times – especially among the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, which were then under the fatal spell of Ahab and Jezebel's evil influence. In his endeavor to save his family from perishing in the midst of such corruption, this noble man bound his people under a solemn pledge to drink no wine; nor to build houses, sow seed, or plant vineyards, but to dwell in tents forever. Since that time, 250 years had now passed; but when the descendants of these people arrived in Jerusalem, they were still true to the traditions of their tribe. And so, with sturdy strength, they stood out among the weak and idol-loving people of Jerusalem; for they were living representatives of the noblest and purest days of Hebrew history.

As soon as the news of the Rechabites' arrival came to the ears of Jeremiah, he was seized by a Divine impulse to derive from them a striking object-lesson for his own people. Taking the leaders of the Rechabites with him, he

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jeremiah offers wine to the Rechabites, but they refuse to drink – verses 1-11
- ❖ The prophet gives his people an object lesson from their obedience – verses 12-19

went into the Temple and brought them into one of the rooms therein – probably followed by a number of the Jews who were curious to watch the prophet’s proceedings with these strange men. He caused bowls of wine to be set before the tribesmen; and then he offered them cups, so that they could dip them in and drink. But they bluntly refused and said, “We will drink no wine.” And then they proceeded to give an explanation of the solemn obligation which had been laid upon them by their forefather, centuries before.

The lesson here was obvious. Here were men who were loyal to the wish of their ancestor (although he was little more than a name to them), refusing the offered sweets in which so many others freely indulged. How great a contrast to the people of Jerusalem, who persistently disregarded the words of the living God Who perpetually remonstrated against their sins! This could only lead to one result. Judah was rotting away because of all the crimes and corruption against which God had protested in vain; and so they must now reap the whirlwind, as they had sown the wind. There could be no escape from the judgment which was drawing nearer with every daybreak! If the people would not heed words of exhortation, entreaty, and warning; and if they regarded them as vain exaggerations – they would at least be compelled to admit that not one of God’s threats of vengeance had missed its aim, or failed to be fulfilled.

On the other hand, the Rechabites’ devotion to their family’s principles not only gave them an assurance of perpetuity, but also brought about a promise from the Almighty. “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever!” This statement had a very profound significance. It suggested, of course, that the tribe would not cease to exist, but there was an even deeper thought than that. The phrase “a man to stand before me forever” is often used, in the Scriptures, to refer to priestly service – a life entirely dedicated and consecrated to God, and detached from the world. If this is how we desire to be characterized, then we must pray to God for grace to imitate these Rechabites by abstaining from the vices and corruptions of our times, and by holding on lightly to the pleasures and luxuries of this earthly life. It is difficult to detail everything that worldliness consists of. What would be worldly to some people is simply an ordinary part of life’s circumstances to others. But all of us are sensible of ties that hold us to the earth. We may discover what they are by considering what we find to be hard to let go, even into the hands of Jesus. If it is a weight that impedes our speed heavenward, then we must ask the Lord for strength to deliberately lay it upon His altar, so that He may do with it as He will. And then we shall be able, without hindrance, to be wholly consecrated and dedicated to the One Who bought and redeemed us with His own precious blood!

Lord, we beseech You to pour out the grace of Your Holy Spirit to keep our hearts and minds from becoming attached to this world. Amen.

