

The Rechabites (Jeremiah 35:1–19)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (9/13/2020)

Introduction

1. The story takes us back approximately 15 years during the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah.

It was published in the last days of Zedekiah to remind the people why the judgment was upon them.

2. The story involves the *Rechabites*, descendants of Jonadab, a Kenite, related to Moses through marriage (1 Chron. 2:55).

Jonadab (“*Yahweh is willing*”) joined Jehu in his campaign (2 Kings 10:15, 23) against the house of Ahab and to destroy the worship of Baal in Israel. The descendants of Jonadab were nomads who recently moved to Jerusalem to find protection against the Syrian and Chaldean invasion. The Lord ordered Jeremiah to invite them to the temple and to serve them wine, not to tempt them but to demonstrate their loyalty to Jonadab, their great grandfather.

The Rechabites responded to Jeremiah’s invitation and came to the temple. When they were given the wine to drink, the Rechabites refused. The story focuses on the reason for their refusal (vv. 6–11).

3. The implications of the story are not immediately discernable.

The evident purpose to put this blind tradition on display was to show how the Jews obeyed the directives of men with unquestioning loyalty but turned a deaf ear to the Lord and His truth. The Lord commended the Rechabites for their loyalty to Jonadab, His reason was to argue for the need of the people of Judah to listen and obey their covenant Lord

I. The Issue

1. God of speaks to His people in the Word, informing them of His will with respect to the kingdom.
 - a. The *Law (torah)* provides “instruction” (Luke 10:28).
 - b. The *prophets* (ones authorized to speak for God) were watchmen for the kingdom, warning and reminding kingdom citizens of their privilege and duty revealed in the *torah*.
2. The people’s response to the Word of God was shameful, but consistent with their sinful state.
 - a. They were quick to promise, “*All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient*” (Ex. 24:7, actually 3 times: here, 19:8, and 24:3).
 - b. Religion was substituted for relationship, and ritual replaced loving and submissive obedience.
 - c. By the time of Jeremiah, the habit of heartless conformity to religious ritual comforted the rebellious and explained their deafness to the Word of God sent to correct them (vv. 14b, 15). The Lord’s message was rejected out of hand with no inclination to hear or listen to the Word.

3. The significance of the text is not in *what* the Rechabites did but that they *honored* the person and desire of Jonadab, unlike the Jews (v. 8, 16).
 - a. The patience and persistence of the Lord before the age of grace is evident (v. 14b).
 - 1) These words speak of *the Law*, the books of Moses given to *instruct* the people of God.
 - 2) These words address *the prophets* whom the Lord sent to get the people's attention (v. 15).
 - b. The process the Lord uses in this age of grace is no different but, due to Christ's sacrifice, is greatly empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 1:5, 6).

II. Your Tradition

1. The tyranny of tradition
 - a. The great error of the Pharisees was to live under the tyranny of past traditions for which there was no biblical authority (Matthew 15:3).
 - b. In feudal days, a name was given to this tendency to practice things for which one could give no reasonable explanation—*manis mortura*, “the dead hand.”
2. There is no place where tradition is more evident than in sterile religious practices.
 - a. Religion, biblically defined, is the practice of duly authorized commands from Scripture (James 1:27).
 - b. Tradition is easy. It requires *no* thought and demands *no* emotional involvement. It is here that traditional religion is dangerous. Christ demands a whole-hearted involvement with Him and His mission on earth. The tendency of all people is to settle for the easy way.

People are satisfied by the appearance of following Christ—church attendance, devotional reading, grace at meals, familiarity with Christian expectations, and such. Comfortable Christians are in the greatest danger of self-deception as to their true state before Christ. Psalm 139 describes the thoughtful self-awareness of a true saint (vv. 1–6). The closing verse shows the proper response to this awareness.

How Does This Truth Affect Us?

1. We need discernment to distinguish carefully between tradition and law, between the understanding of law and its application to life. This discernment recognizes law's abiding principle which, enabled by grace, allows one to know and fear God in daily walk.
2. Jesus actively set Himself against all tradition that obscured the will of God expressed in the law.

The tradition of Corban, for example, put formal worship before the care of parents. Again, I remind you of James 1:27.

3. The cure for this danger
 - (1) Be sure of your salvation. Earnestly seek the Lord Himself to give you this assurance through His Word.
 - (2) Don't settle for “devotions,” but earnestly seek to be devoted to Christ and His ways.