

The Rechabites...A Lesson From Jeremiah

By Joe R Wheeler

Introduction When we face tests and trials, we are sharing a common experience with all Godly people since the very beginning. Similarly, we face temptation that is often quite strong, especially when we are already feeling weak, or out of our element.

In this lesson I want to go far back in history to a time that we only know of from God's Word. It was a difficult time for God's people. It was a time when the Lord's anger with the sins of the Israelites as a people had reached the point that punishment was the only recourse left to Him to try to change their direction, and bring them back from total destruction.

Jeremiah, like many other prophets, had been sent to warn Judah of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the death and captivity that was soon to come for all the people. To save their souls would require God to destroy the city, and the temple, and to remove His wayward children from the promised land. They had simply failed to do as He had instructed them to do, and finally they had gone too far. Now the end of all they had made for themselves had come upon them. They waited inside the walls of Jerusalem for those outside to breach through and destroy everything. The fear and dread must have been terrible indeed, we can only imagine the tremendous sorrow that must have weighed down every soul.

In the midst of this mass of people now facing what was to many a still uncertain outcome, there were a few who knew the fate that awaited them. All hope of salvation for the city and its inhabitants was now gone. However, not every individual inside those walls was guilty of having turned away from God. Jeremiah for one had not been unfaithful, and yet like the rest he waited for the end.

During these dark days, the word of God came to Jeremiah to seek out a particular group, a family actually, and to bring them to the temple. God wanted Jeremiah to make an offer to them, and to be sure, God already knew what their response to that offer would be...

I. The Lord Tests His People...

Jeremiah 35:1-5 *The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, 2 Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto 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 Habaziah, and his brethren, 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, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door: 5 And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine.*

Surely this seemed to Jeremiah a strange request for God to make of him. Why bring these people to the Lord's house and put a temptation in front of them? Although drinking wine wasn't in and of itself a particularly sinful thing in those days, God knew that to these people it was no small request Jeremiah made of them. Was God really trying to cause these people to sin? I believe God knew that for this family, their really was no danger of their giving in to Jeremiah's request.

II. The Lord's People Stand Firm...

Jeremiah 35:6-10 *But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever: 7 Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. 8 Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; 9 Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: 10 But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.*

Jeremiah must have been very surprised and impressed by the noble response he got to his request. He now knew that these people were not like the rest of the people within the walls of Jerusalem that day. These were not sinful rebellious men and women who had taken on the sinful traits of the Canaanites and adopted idol worship. These were not part of the crowd who in times past had persecuted the prophets sent from God and pursued and killed them. These had no blood on their hands, no share in the guilt. These were men who had been faithful to their forefathers and to God. They had remained firmly committed when all those around them had fallen into sinfulness.

III. The Lord's People Trust In Him...

Jeremiah 35:11 *But it came to pass, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and 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.*

I don't think we should judge harshly what the reasoning of these noble people was for coming to Jerusalem. Fear for ones children and relatives is not a trait of cowardliness. There was an army moving through the land with the express purpose of destroying or enslaving any whom they met. These men had not run in fear and terror, but had acted wisely for the benefit of their family. They were not disobeying their fathers command by going into the city, they were only temporarily there. These obedient men would certainly go back to their tents and flocks as soon as the danger was past. We must remember that God had noticed these pure lambs among the impure sheep of Israel. God had troubled Himself to point these men out to Jeremiah for a purpose. He was honoring them and encouraging Jeremiah. I'm sure that Jeremiah had often mourned the fate of his brethren and, like Elijah in 1 Kings 19:8-18, Jeremiah needed to see that there were still faithful men in the land. These men trusted God to protect and preserve them...they went to His city, to the place where His temple was. They were sheltering under the wing of their Father in Heaven!

IV. The Lord Glorifies His Faithful Children...

Jeremiah 35:12-15 *Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, 13 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the LORD. 14 The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me. 15 I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.*

God holds these people up like a lamp in the darkness that had come over the promised land. "This is what you should have done", He says as He holds them up high. These men had simply obeyed the instructions they had been given. That was their great claim to fame, obedience and submission. How often in the years since their father had commanded them to stay as they were had they been tempted to disobey him and become just like everyone else? Surely Jeremiah was not the first to tempt them? No, they had remained faithful to what they had been sworn to by their ancestor Jonadab, after many years they were still doing what they were supposed to do. To the rest of the Israelites they must have seemed fools in the past when they kept to their tents instead of building houses...when they refused wine while all around them were happily engaging in drunkenness and immorality. Isn't that the way it's always been, and still is today? God had a shining example of purity to display for all the rest to see!

V. The Lord Preserves His Faithful Children...

Jeremiah 35:16-19 *Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto me: 17 Therefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered. 18 And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: 19 Therefore 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.*

We have here an example we can all profit from. What will happen to these people? Are they to be spared from death and captivity? We never hear what became of these people after this point. Jerusalem will fall and all who are not killed are brought into subjection by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar their king. God had raised him up for the express purpose of punishing all of the evil nations around at the time. The Rechabites, like the rest of the people have to suffer within the walls of Jerusalem. They, like the rest went

into captivity. But one thing we can be assured of...their experience in captivity was certainly not typical. Those who deserved punishment got punishment, but I am certain these people were treated well by their captors. Like them, we as Christians are not removed from suffering or pain by becoming Christians. We endure the ups and downs of life buoyed by our faith and hope in God. Like the Rechabites, we are among those who refuse to do as they have been instructed to do. We live in opposition to the world around us. And like the Rechabites we stand out as different for our faithfulness. When finally God's wrath demands that the world receive the just reward of all of its wickedness, we will be preserved. And also like the Rechabites we will be shown as an example to those who are lost.

Conclusion

The best thing we can get from this is what Jeremiah got from it. Encouragement. We can see from this record, that God will recognize faithfulness, and He will reward it as well. Let us close with a passage from the New Testament that shows the history of faith...the role call of those who, like the Rechabites endured this world...our fathers in faith...

Hebrews 11:13-40 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. 21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones. 23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. 24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. 28 Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians attempting to do were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. 32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: 33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: 36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: 37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*