

A Family's Example

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:4

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 35:1–19

Today's Scripture: Jeremiah 35:5–11

I. Ancestral Practice

Jeremiah 35:5–6

⁵ Then I set bowls full of wine and some cups before the Rekabites and said to them, “Drink some wine.”

⁶ But they replied, “We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jehonadab son of Rekaḇ gave us this command: ‘Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine.’”

5. The opening verses of Jeremiah 35 establish the time, place, and persons of the teaching illustration that is about to unfold. Jeremiah is meeting with *the Rekabites* and offering them *wine to drink* because of the Lord's command to do so. Other than in this chapter of Jeremiah, the Bible reveals little about the Rekabites. A genealogy listing locates them as being from the tribe of Judah, at least at first glance. A closer look, however, reveals that they are descendants of “the Kenites” (1 Chronicles 2:55), whose identity, loyalty, and actions are sketched in Numbers 24:21–22; Judges 1:16; 4:11, 17; and 1 Samuel 15:6.

6. The Rekabites' response to Jeremiah's offer is immediate and firm: *We do not drink wine*. They base this decision on the instructions of *Jehonadab son of Rekaḇ*, a forefather of some 200 years previous. He was a prominent leader among

the Rekabites during the time of King Jehu. Jehonadab knew the king personally and had been invited on a “ride along” to help the king abolish idol worship in Samaria, part of the northern kingdom of divided Israel. The southern kingdom of Judah was not immune to such influences, as Jeremiah well knew.

Jehonadab's specific reason for the prohibition is unknown. Wine is depicted in both positive and cautionary ways, depending on the context.

The book of Jeremiah itself illustrates this variety of approaches to wine, using it to describe scenes of both celebration (Jeremiah 31:12) and judgment (25:15). Jeremiah even compared himself to a “drunken man, . . . overcome by wine,” so disturbed was he at the lies being spread by the false prophets of his day (23:9).

Perhaps Jehonadab desired his descendants to participate in the Nazirite vow (or something similar) in order to reflect passionate devotion to the Lord. Possibly such abstinence could serve as a deterrent to taking part in Baal worship or other pagan religious practices.

II. Full Obedience

Jeremiah 35:7–10

⁷ “Also you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but

must always live in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.’⁸ We have obeyed everything our forefather Jehonadab son of Rekab commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine⁹ or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops.¹⁰ We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jehonadab commanded us.”

7. This verse offers some insight as to Jehonadab’s command to abstain from drinking wine. The restriction seems to be part of a larger pool of prohibitions to improve chances of long life. The picture of living *in tents* is that of a nomadic, easily movable lifestyle as contrasted with a settled, agrarian one. The latter would require planting *seed* for the harvesting of grain and the cultivation of *vineyards* for making wine.

To forego all the trappings that accompany a settled life carries with it the possibility of both positive and negative results. The positive is the envisioned longer life, perhaps based on the idea that there won’t be a temptation to resist an invading army to protect house and crops. In this sense the people of the tribe would be *nomads* in the land. There also would not be a temptation of defilement by mixing seed. Negatively, one can see a risk of legalism as human prohibitions add to and supersede God’s Word.

Various factors may have contributed to Jehonadab’s requirement of a mobile lifestyle. One should keep in mind the challenging times in which he lived in the 800s BC. The worship of Baal was heavily promoted in the northern kingdom of Israel, primarily by King Ahab, who was spurred on by his evil wife, Jezebel. Jezebel had no scruples whatsoever about seizing the vineyard of Naboth, a godly man

whose devotion to the Lord’s law prevented him from selling his vineyard to Ahab, who had his heart set on possessing it. The depth of her depravity is evident in the steps she took to have Naboth executed on false charges so Ahab could have his vineyard. Perhaps Jehonadab concluded that not owning property such as a vineyard was one way to avoid the malicious intentions of power-mad individuals such as Jezebel and Ahab. The Lord’s prophets indicted ruthless men who abused their power and took houses and fields at will from those who had no ability to resist them. Perhaps for Jehonadab and his fellow Rekabites, the philosophy was, “You can’t lose what you don’t have.”

8–9. The Rekabites exhibit complete compliance to their ancestor Jehonadab’s desire. We don’t know precisely how the Rekabites survived under such a restrictive lifestyle, but evidently they had up to that point. Perhaps Jehonadab, again in deference to Abraham, taught his family to walk by faith and to trust that God would provide their daily needs.

10. More than 200 years have passed since Jehonadab’s lifetime, and the Rekabites remain faithful in their obedience to his requirements. The promised land had experienced much turmoil since his day, including the conquest of the northern kingdom in 722 BC. Yet the Rekabites find Jehonadab’s desire still valuable and workable. At some level, this can illustrate what God intends for his covenant people so that faithful obedience to him can be passed on generation after generation.

III. Necessary Relocation **Jeremiah 35:11**

¹¹ “But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded this land, we said, ‘Come, we must go to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Aramean

armies.’ So we have remained in Jerusalem.”

11a. Here we learn why the Rekabites are in Jerusalem and available to receive the invitation to drink wine. The Babylonian king *Nebuchadnezzar* had begun his invasion of Judah in 605 BC, the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign. Accordingly, the Rekabites’ plan of relocation described in this verse may have occurred not long after they learned that Nebuchadnezzar and his troops were on their way. The Babylonians’ brutality was probably well-known throughout the territory.

The Rekabites calculated that it would be safer for them to enter well-fortified Jerusalem rather than risk being overrun by two armies. Jerusalem would in time prove unable to resist the Babylonians; several passages make clear that the Lord was allowing the Babylonians to serve as the instruments of his judgment in attacking Jerusalem.

During their invasion of Judah, the Babylonians secure the assistance of other peoples. These include those who had once been subject to the Israelites and are eager for revenge. The Arameans had faced more dealings with the now-exiled northern kingdom of Israel since their territory lay just to the northeast of Israel. Conflicts between the Arameans and the northern kingdom became especially frequent during the reign of King Ahab and the ministries of the prophets Elijah and Elisha in the 800s BC. But the Arameans had also come under the control of King David during the expansion of his kingdom. We easily imagine that they were more than willing to administer any “payback.”

11b. We can see from this turn of events that Jehonadab’s instructions about living as nomadic “strangers” were not considered inviolable. Should circumstances change and the Rekabites’ find themselves threatened by deadly force, they did not

see themselves to be betraying Jehonadab by shifting to self-preservation mode. This may be seen as a kind of “rigid flexibility” or “flexible rigidity.”

The point of this real-life illustration is driven home in the eight verses that follow this one. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, challenges the people of Judah and *Jerusalem* to learn from the Rekabites’ example of faithfully following the instructions of their ancestor. The message is delivered in the form of what is called an *a fortiori* argument.

These *a fortiori* arguments in the Bible are particularly important in Paul’s letter to the Romans for proving the reality of God’s grace. If only God’s covenant people had followed the Lord’s instructions that faithfully! Blessings awaited for doing so. Refusal to obey was inconsistent with logic. Because they refused to listen to and obey the Lord’s voice, judgment was inevitable.

Also notable is a contrast with King Jehoiakim in the next chapter. That chapter opens by noting the time to be the fourth year of his reign, or about 605 BC. Here, the Lord yet again tries to get the attention and obedience of both king and people, this time via a written scroll. With the Babylonian invasion underway, the message on the scroll did cause fear among the people, but not changed behavior.

In contrast with the Rekabites, King Jehoiakim did not follow the godly example of his father, Josiah. Instead of heeding God’s message, Jehoiakim cut the scroll in pieces and burned them. This demonstrated his utter contempt for God’s words. This action contrasted sharply with that of his father, who in anguish tore not the message but his clothes when he realized how far the people had strayed from the Lord’s words. Jehoiakim was demonstrating disrespect not only for his father, but for the Lord as well.

Involvement Learning

A Family's Example

Into the Lesson

Write a sentence that describes your family's legacy:

In today's lesson, pay attention to what a family's legacy and traditions indicate about their beliefs and values. Consider why Jeremiah points this family out as a notable example to God's people.

Key Verse

"To this day they do not drink wine, because they obey their forefather's command."

—Jeremiah 35:14b

Into the Word

Read Jeremiah 35:5–6. Choose one of the following passages and use the question words to compare the passage with Jeremiah 35:5–6.

Context: Jeremiah 35:1–4.

Legacy: 2 Kings 10:15–28.

Who:

What:

When:

Where:

Why:

Into Life

Write down a family tradition you might establish that could be passed down to future generations.

What testimony could this tradition demonstrate to others about your family's faith and commitment to the Lord?

Thought to Remember

Use traditions to foster faithfulness to God.