The Rechabites (Abridged)

By Jerry King

In about 840 B.C., Jehu violently ended the rule of wicked Ahab's family and instituted political and religious reform in the Northern Kingdom. Taking part in that reformation was Jehonadab, son of Rechab, a Kenite (2 Kings 10:15-17, 23). Sadly, Jehu's reforms were incomplete. He destroyed Baal worship but failed to separate Israel completely from idolatry. Second Kings says no more about Jehonadab, but Jeremiah 35 introduces us to his family, the Rechabites, about 240 years later.

Jehonadab (or Jonadab, as he is called in Jeremiah 35) had commanded his descendants to distinguish themselves from the Israelites among whom they lived. They were to live in tents, not farm the land, and abstain from wine. Remarkably, his family obeyed these instructions for generations.



About 600 B.C., God told Jeremiah to bring the Rechabites into the temple chambers and serve them wine. Jeremiah obeyed, but they refused, saying, "We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us" (Jer. 35:1-6).

The point is revealed in Jeremiah 35:12-17. God asks Israel, "Will you not receive instruction to obey My words?" Although God had repeatedly spoken through His prophets, Israel refused to listen. In contrast, He declares, "Surely the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father." Jonadab's children demonstrated the loyalty God wanted, but was not receiving, from His own children.

What can the Rechabites teach God's children today? Consider three lessons.

1. We can be in the world without being of the world. The Rechabites accomplished what many consider impossible: they lived among others without living like them. Jesus prayed for this very distinction in John 17:14-16.



How did they do it? Through determination. They decided to remain faithful to their father's charge. Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Obedience begins in the mind.

The moment we decide that it is impossible to remain moral in an immoral world, truthful in a dishonest world, or kind in an angry world, we begin surrendering to conformity. Can we obey our Father in a disobedient world? If the Rechabites could, we can.

2. They teach us how to say "no." The Rechabites did not need an emergency meeting when Jeremiah offered them wine. They had already decided what they would do. If we wait until temptation arrives before deciding where we stand, we make obedience much harder.

They also knew why they refused. Their father had commanded them. Sometimes the strongest answer to temptation is simply, "My Father said I couldn't." When arguments and rationalizations surround us, God's authority remains sufficient.



3. Time does not dull what is commanded. Two hundred and forty years had passed, yet the Rechabites said, "Thus we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he charged us" (Jer. 35:8).

Do New Testament truths have expiration dates? Have two thousand years given us such superior wisdom that we now see what Peter, Paul, James, John, and even Jesus somehow missed? Has modern society become so sophisticated that ancient truth no longer matters?

John wrote of "the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever" (2 John 2). The Father's commands do not spoil with age, and neither should our determination to obey them. We must "continue in His goodness" (Rom. 11:22).

Our influence matters. Jesus called His people the salt of the earth and light of the world. The Rechabites stood apart because they remained faithful. We are the Lord's Rechabites today. May He give us strength and courage to remain faithful to our Father's commands.