



The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 35:1-19

Topic

Knowing the Rechabites won't drink it,
God instructs Jeremiah to set wine before them

Title

*"You Can Lead a Rechabite to Wine
but You Can't Make Him Drink"*

Introduction

The Hobbit is playing in theaters and those who are fans of *The Lord of the Rings* have been drawn back into the world of J.R.R. Tolkien as interpreted by director Peter Jackson.

A plot point in the previous movie trilogy was the offer of the one ring by the ringbearer, Frodo, first to Gandalf and later to Galadriel.

It's an offer they refuse knowing that the one ring would only corrupt them. They instead remain true to their own character and convictions.

An offer is made and refused in our text in Jeremiah thirty-five. The Rechabites seek refuge in Jerusalem against the advancing armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. While in the city Jeremiah invites them to happy hour and sets wine before them to drink.

You're gonna find out that Rechabites have convictions about a few things and wine is one of them. None of their descendants have drunk it for over two hundred years.

They refuse Jeremiah's offer, as he knew they would, and God uses their refusal as a living parable.

I'm going to suggest that we are like the Rechabites in this story; that we *can* and *should* identify with them.

It's not a study about alcohol, although we will use it as an example. It's about living a separated life as Christians in a world that is constantly offering us all manner of things we really ought to refuse in favor of the things of The Lord.

I'll organize my thoughts by asking two questions: #1 What Is The World Offering You That You Really Ought To Refuse?, and #2 What Is The Lord Offering You That You Really Ought To Receive?

#1 What Is The World Offering You
That You Really Ought To Refuse?

(v1-11)

There's a pretty intense backstory to the Rechabites. They are not Hebrews but were nevertheless zealous followers of Jehovah.

They were named after Rechab but he wasn't the most famous Rechabite; that would be his son, Jonadab. About two hundred and fifty years before this scene in Jeremiah Jonadab teamed up with Israel's King Jehu to kill the servants of Baal and thereby eliminate Baal worship from the nation. It was a spiritual high point.

Immediately after the slaughter of the servants of Baal you read,

2Kings 10:28 Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel.

2Kings 10:29 However Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin, that is, from the golden calves that were at Bethel and Dan.

Jonadab undoubtedly was disturbed at King Jehu's halfheartedness and hypocrisy. As he thought about it, and about the sad history of Israel's disobedience to God over the centuries, he may have determined that city living among the Canaanites would keep leading to compromises and sin. He therefore voluntarily adopted a nomadic lifestyle and passed it on to his descendants - some of whom were the invited guests in this chapter.

Jeremiah 35:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, Jeremiah 35:2 "Go to the house of the Rechabites, speak to them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink."

God decided to throw them a wine tasting party. Offering wine to Rechabites was the last thing you'd ever do under normal circumstances.

God will ask you, from time to time, to do things that may seem odd at first but nevertheless have a profound purpose.

Jeremiah 35:3 Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, his brothers and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites,

Jeremiah 35:4 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, above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door.

Jeremiah 35:5 Then I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine, and cups; and I said to them, "Drink wine."

We commonly say that Jeremiah was all alone in his ministry with no real converts. Along the way, however, we read of other godly individuals who were his contemporaries. Hanan was "a man of God," which usually meant a prophet. We can't speculate about his relationship with Jeremiah because we don't know anything else about him. We can say that God provides or withholds fellowship as He sees our true spiritual needs.

Jeremiah 35:6 But they said, "We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall drink no wine, you nor your sons, forever.

Jeremiah 35:7 You shall not build a house, sow seed, plant a vineyard, nor have any of these; but all your days you shall dwell in tents, that you may live many days in the land where you are sojourners.'

Jeremiah 35:8 Thus we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters,

Jeremiah 35:9 nor to build ourselves houses to dwell in; nor do we have vineyard, field, or seed.

Jeremiah 35:10 But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.

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

Dwelling in Jerusalem was a temporary situation in response to the presence of enemies in the surrounding regions. The

Rechabites had no intentions of relaxing the code they had lived by for more than two centuries.

Regardless what you can lawfully do, sometimes you need to think about what you ought to do or ought not do to give yourself the best spiritual chance to stay close to The Lord.

There was no prohibition in God's Law against building houses or sowing seeds or planting vineyards or drinking wine. The Rechabites had taken these steps on their own as safeguards against falling into the kind of sin that Jonadab saw particularly in King Jehu and in the Israelites in general.

Jonadab didn't have to be a prohibitionist nomad; he *chose* to be one. He made a lifestyle decision that would give he and his descendants the best spiritual chance to obey God in those circumstances.

Regardless what you can lawfully do, sometimes you need to think about what you ought to do or ought not do to give yourself the best spiritual chance to stay close to The Lord.

The Rechabites were a small group of zealous believers who found themselves surrounded by folks who professed to believe in God but were living compromised, sinful lives.

We live in a nation that professes to be Christian but the majority of people are clearly not saved. Many of those who are saved are making carnal choices in disobedience to God's clearly revealed will.

We, therefore, should want to be Rechabites - a small but zealous group of followers of Jesus who remain separated from the world.

I can confidently say that the world is going to offer you things you really ought to refuse. I say that because it is a favorite strategy of Satan's to get you to conform, to compromise, to relax biblical standards of character and conviction.

Abraham's nephew Lot comes to mind. All Satan had to do was get him to look over towards Sodom and Gomorrah and soon Lot was living there as a defeated believer. For his part Uncle Abraham remained a nomad and finished strong.

What is the world offering **you**? For you it **could** be alcohol. While it's OK to drink (as long as you don't get drunk), that doesn't mean you should drink. You might want to adopt the convictions of Jonadab knowing that alcohol leads to mostly bad things.

Something more universal would be the world offering us its morality. God created marriage to be between one man and one woman to last their lifetime. Sex is a gift to be enjoyed within a biblical marriage.

The world offers a very different view of sexuality and marriage. Sadly, a lot of Christians have compromised and are committing sexual sins and pursuing nonbiblical divorces. We could use a little more Jonadab in our approach to these things.

These issues of morality and marriage aren't suggestions, by the way. They are God's absolutes. If we can't get a few simple absolutes right then we are going to be easy prey in the gray areas.

Answer for yourself - What is the world offering you that you really ought to refuse? There are things clearly prohibited by the Bible we must refuse. There are also things we can choose to refuse in order to remain separated from the world - nomads on our way home to be with Jesus.

#2 What Is The Lord Offering You That You Really Ought To Receive?

(v12-19)

If we are not careful we make Christianity sound like a restrictive list of don'ts. It's not that at all. It is the opposite in that it sets us free to pursue life that is worth living.

The Rechabites voluntarily lived as tee-totaling nomads. They were free to roam all over the land God had promised His people. They could enjoy the city without living there among all the problems of city life.

Most importantly, they had the freedom to say "No" to things they had liberty to partake of that could nevertheless lead them into slavery.

Alcohol provides a good example of this principle of true freedom. It is certainly possible to drink without becoming a drunk. But nobody becomes a drunk who doesn't drink. There is always the possibility that our freedom to drink will lead to the slavery of alcohol abuse and addiction.

Drinking has become wildly popular among certain younger Christian ministers. Listen to these observations and comments by Pastor John MacArthur.

If everything you know about Christian living came from blogs and websites... you might have the impression that beer is the principal symbol of Christian liberty... whole websites [are devoted] to the celebration of brewed beverages. They earnestly assure one another "that most good theological discussion has historically been done in pubs and drinking places." They therefore love to meet for "open dialog on faith and culture" wherever beer is served - or better yet, right at the brewery. The connoisseurs among them serve their own brands and even offer lessons in how to make home brew... Mixing booze with ministry is often touted as a necessary means of penetrating western youth culture, and conversely, abstinence is deemed a "sin" to be repented of. After all, in a culture where cool is everything, what could be a better lubricant for one's testimony than a frosty pint?

You just don't know, do you, where alcohol is going to lead you. It can be the greatest exercise of freedom to say "No" to your liberty and go on enjoying life without becoming enslaved to something or to someone other than Jesus.

Jeremiah 35:12 Then came the word of the LORD to Jeremiah, saying,

Jeremiah 35:13 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Will you not receive instruction to obey My words?" says the LORD.

Jeremiah 35:14 "The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; for to this day they drink none, and obey their father's commandment. But although I have

spoken to you, rising early and speaking, you did not obey Me.

Jeremiah 35:15 I have also sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way, amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them; then you will dwell in the land which I have given you and your fathers.' But you have not inclined your ear, nor obeyed Me.

Jeremiah 35:16 Surely the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them, but this people has not obeyed Me." '

God used the Rechabites as a living parable to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judah.

It can be the greatest freedom to say "No" to your liberty and go on enjoying life without becoming enslaved to something or to someone other than Jesus.

You are considered a living letter as a Christian. People 'read' you to find out about God. Your life is no less a living parable; in fact, it is even more one than the Rechabites.

God wasn't tempting them. For all we know Jeremiah may have told them what he was going to do. He may have enlisted their help as his actors.

The idea was to compare and contrast their faithful obedience to a mere earthly forefather with the faithless disobedience of the Jews to the Heavenly Father.

I don't like to make comparisons between the efforts of Christians and, say, the zeal of the cults. It's too easy to criticize believers by pointing at Mormon missionaries racking up bike miles or JW's getting bloody knuckles from going door-to-door.

By "too easy" I mean it doesn't factor in the leading of the Holy Spirit. Just because cults are going door-to-door or wearing out ten speeds like they're going out of style doesn't mean we should be doing the same. No, we should be constantly listening for the Lord's leading and following it.

If you want to make a valid comparison you ought to look for believers who are sold-out to The Lord and full of joy serving Him - not cultists who are doing it out of fear. Let them inspire you - not bring condemnation upon you.

The real criticism might be that we can too often be far more zealous for other things we enjoy or want to talk about than the things of The Lord.

The apostle Paul once said, "for in [Jesus] we live and move and have our being..." (Acts 17:28). We can be zealous for lots of things so long as Jesus remains at the core of them.

Jeremiah 35:17 "Therefore thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the doom that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them but they have not heard, and I have called to them but they have not answered.' "

One commentator called it Rechabite faith versus Judahite folly.

Judahites had the word of the mighty and sovereign God of all creation. Rechabites had nothing but the word of a mere mortal yet they were more faithful to the **miniword** than Judah was to the **Mighty Word** (The Preacher's Commentary).

Jeremiah 35:18 And Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts and done according to all that he commanded you,

Jeremiah 35:19 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever." ' "

I don't feel one bit sorry for the Rechabites for not being able to enjoy the wine set before them. Or for their living out in the countryside in tents rather than houses as nomads.

I feel sorry for the Jews who thought they were enjoying wine and other material things when, in fact, they had become blinded by them, compromised by them, enslaved to them, and had no walk with The Lord.

The Lord made the Rechabites a promise. Their line would continue and they would forever have a presence before The Lord. In their tribal culture that was huge - a lottery win.

Mean time these guys were pretty different from the city-dwelling Jews. In dress and demeanor as well as vocation, they were odd.

What are some of the ways we might look different and even odd to the world? There's a bunch. I've already mentioned biblical morality. There's no more obvious way to look different from the world than to hold biblical values of marriage and sexuality. By their behavior it seems most Christians don't hold to biblical morality anymore. If *you* do, you will be different and odd but in a really good way that gives a testimony of the grace and power of God.

We could talk about things like our language. The words we choose to use are important. Lately there has been a movement in certain Christian circles to infuse words that are edgy and even foul into the pulpit and, after that, into our daily vocabulary. They say it helps us to seem more real, more approachable, more down to earth to nonbelievers.

Do you honestly think Jesus cussed when He was at the homes of sinners in order to reach them and to seem more real to them?

One pastor commented,

Look, I am all for relevance. We need to make sense to the people we are reaching. But let's not lower our standard in order to extend our reach. Let's not trade reverence for relevance. I think for us to seek to live godly lives is very relevant, and very different than what this world has to offer. That's how we will turn our world upside down, instead of the world turning us upside down.

We ought to adopt a way of thinking that asks, all the time, What can I be doing in this setting that would set me apart from the world and give a testimony that I love Jesus?

Maybe it's as simple as applying a bumper sticker or wearing a Christian t-shirt or setting the radio to Christian music. Or carrying your Bible or displaying Scripture where you work.

Maybe it's giving-up alcohol or, for sure, not taking it up as a new habit simply because you can. Maybe it's moving somewhere not to get away from it all but to be in the center of it all in order to be a laborer in the harvest of souls. Maybe it's using vacation time to go on a mission.

The possibilities are endless when you ask The Lord for His direction.

You want to stand **for** The Lord and then **before** The Lord.

There was a Christian campaign a few years ago, "Go against the flow." It was a slogan on t-shirts and bumper stickers.

It might have started with Jonadab and his descendants. But he'd say, "Go against the flow *even if you don't have to.*"

Do it because you **want** to - because you want to stand **for** The Lord and then **before** The Lord.