

## THE RECHABITES - AN EXAMPLE OF SEPARATION AND FAITHFULNESS

In the 35th Chapter of his prophecy, the Lord through Jeremiah introduces us to a family of faithfulness - the Rechabites - in contrast to Israel, who were a family of unfaithfulness:

“Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people have not hearkened unto me: Therefore thus saith Yahweh God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them ...”, but unto the Rechabites, he saith “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: Therefore thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever” (Jer 35:16-19).

So it was that in the coming day of judgment, disobedient Judah were to be made desolate at the hands of the Babylonians, whereas the Rechabites were given a hope of salvation.

The similarities with our day are quite striking, as we shall see. We are living in the period immediately before the Judgments of Almighty God are to be poured out upon a faithless and disobedient Generation. And just as within Israel there existed this faithful family, diligently seeking to heed the wise counsel of their father, a family which would ultimately find blessing in the sight of their Greater Heavenly Father, so we ought to examine ourselves with a view to determining which group we belong to. The majority wandering blindly into their own destruction, or the faithful minority who will survive the Lord’s judgments upon the ungodly to stand before the Lord “for ever”? The choice is ours, for the outcome depends on our actions, and the degree of our faithfulness. And to contemplate the Rechabites can only help us to remain part of the true family of righteousness, for in them, we see characteristics which pertain to everlasting life.

The Rechabites, we learn from the Inspired record, were a branch, or tribe of the Kenites, who served as scribes before the Lord. In 1 Chronicles 2, the families of Israel are recounted: “And the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and Suchathites. These are *the Kenites* that came of Hemath, *the father of the house of Rechab*” (v 55). The father of the house of Rechab then, Hemath, was a Kenite, through whom certain families, including the Rechabites came, each family taking up the position of Scribes in the service of the Lord.

### THE KENITES - GENTILES DESTINED FOR DESTRUCTION

The Kenites, through whom the Rechabites came, were remarkably a Gentile nation, destined for destruction under the promises Yahweh made to Abraham - their land forming part of the territory promised to his seed: “Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt, unto the great river, the river Euphrates; the Kenites, and the Kenizites, and the Kadmonites ...” (Gen 15:18,19). And this only adds to the wonder of what we read of in Jeremiah 35, that the

Rechabites were from a Gentile people! It was a Gentile family that were held as an example of faithfulness to Israel, in the last days prior to their destruction, and who were given such a glorious promise by Israel's God! So it is, that in these things we have foreshadowed the manner in which through the Jewish rejection of the things of God, in these last days, the hope of Salvation is extended to us, as Gentiles, if we learn to emulate the faith and obedience of the Rechabites.

The Kenites we find, came and dwelt among the Children of Judah, following the death of Joshua: "the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people" (Judges 1:16). From this record, we also learn that Moses' father in law was a Kenite and this perhaps helps to explain the faith which that family had. Through association with Moses, the family would come to learn of the God of Israel, and were sufficiently convinced of Him, that they would eventually forsake their own land, to take up an inheritance among the people. And ironically this family, particularly the Rechabites who came from them, ultimately proved themselves to be more faithful than Israel themselves, in their example of separation and obedience to the principles of God, and the commandment of their father, Jonadab.

### **JONADAB - AN EXAMPLE OF CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH**

The next reference to the Rechabites in Scripture comes in 2 Kings 10, where we read of Jehonadab (referred to as Jonadab, in Jeremiah's prophecy), the father whose commandments the Rechabites obeyed. And here, we find that Jehonadab played an instrumental role in the revolution which established Jehu upon the throne in the stead of Ahab, that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled. We pick up the narrative from verse 15, speaking of Jehu coming from the slaughter of Ahaziah's brethren:

"And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up in his chariot. And he said, come with me, and see my zeal for Yahweh. So they made him ride in his chariot. And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of Yahweh, which he spake to Elijah" (2 Kings 10:15-17)

Ahab was one of the most wicked of all the kings: "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of Yahweh, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up" (1Kings 21:25). It was in Ahab's reign that the worship of Idols was first established as the national religion by a King in Israel. Idolatry was the character of his reign, instigated by his evil wife, Jezebel, who imported the false gods of the heathen into the land. This being so, Jehu's campaign was not simply against the royal family, but against the very core of idolatrous worship in Israel, something made abundantly manifest by the events which were to follow, as we shall see. But what a remarkable thing it was, that Jehu invited Jehonadab, as a Gentile into his chariot, to go forth and assist him in this warfare against Idolatry. Both of them went forth, a Jew and a Gentile, riding together in the same chariot, to "earnestly contend for the faith" in

seeking to destroy every vestige of that idolatrous king - a marvelous Type of the work of the ecclesia, composed of individuals from both peoples to “war the warfare”, against the things of this world. This earnest contention is required of all believers; not a literal warfare using carnal weapons, “for we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12). And again, “though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2Cor 10:5). This is the warfare with which all of Christ’s servants are engaged - Jew and Gentile together; a spiritual struggle against every false way, whether it be within, or without - or in our own selves, that ultimately the Truth might prevail, and be seen to be proclaimed without compromise in a dark and evil generation.

The events which followed the destruction of Ahab confirms that this was indeed a campaign by Jehu against the idolatry he had established. Having removed the head of the state system of religion, Jehu then proceeded to deal with the remaining prophets:

“Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it subtly, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal.” (2Kings 10:18:19).

The intention was, to cause all the prophets of Baal to be gathered together into one place, that they might be more vulnerable to attack, and easily eradicated. And we note Jehonadab’s involvement with this, in ensuring that no true servants of Yahweh were present: “And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of Yahweh, but the worshippers of Baal only”; and to make doubly sure, the worshippers were required to put on garments which identified themselves with that abominable system of worship that they adhered to, ensuring that the idol worshippers were easily identifiable for the events which followed. So it was, that as soon as sacrifice had been offered to their fictitious god, the people themselves were made a sacrifice, for “Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal. And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them” (2Kings 10:25,26).

To the perceptive, these events are filled with lessons and examples for our admonition, which truly reveal what a profoundly spiritual character Jehonadab actually was. Firstly, being faced with destruction by the hand of the Israelites, the Kenites forsook a world of iniquity to be joined to Israel and Israel’s God - being so zealous for the ways of True worship, and the things pertaining to the Word of Yahweh, that they even became scribes in the Lord’s service. And, the man Jonadab continued this zeal for things of Truth, seeking to assist the overthrow of idolatry in the land, with Jehu - a Jew and Gentile both riding in the same chariot, with the same aims and hopes, to destroy the worship of Baal, and give glory to Israel’s God But also, we see the care of Jonadab for the true servants of Yahweh, in ensuring than none of these were present to be

mistakenly destroyed amongst the idolaters - a care which, as we shall presently consider, extended into the commandments to his sons, the obedience of which ensured that they would not be destroyed with idolatrous Israel at the hands of the Babylonians.

### THE COMMANDMENTS OF JEHONADAB

Having examined the background to the Rechabites, we now direct our attention once more to the obedience of this family in obeying the commandments given to them by Jehonadab. The situation of Jer. 35, is that the prophet was to gather the family together, present them with wine, and invite them to drink. Their response was as follows:

“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 for ever: 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. Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us” (Jer 35:6-8).

What then, was the significance of these commandments, and why were they given? The faithful observance of these commandments, was required “that ye may live many days in the land”, and is alluded to by the Apostle as an example for children to follow in our day: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, *and thou mayest live long on the earth*” (Eph 6:1-3). And ultimately, the length of days we look forward to upon the earth is in the Age to Come, when the meek shall inherit the earth for a millennial possession (Mat 5:5). So it is that those commandments contained vital principles which all of Israel ought to have followed to ensure their continuance in the Kingdom, and principles which we also need to observe, that we might be given length of days in the future Kingdom.

The first commandment related to the abstention from wine. Not only were the sons of Jonadab to avoid drinking wine; neither were they to plant, or possess vineyards, the means of it's production. And although wine can be used in a good sense in Scripture (cp Song 1:2), it's application here is something to be avoided - depending on it's use (or abuse), wine can be a good or a bad thing. The Proverbs describe the consequences of it's abuse: “at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again” (Prov 23:32-35). This is a description of the drunkard, intoxicated with wine to the extent that a perception of reality is lost. But in contrast to this, the Rechabites were to abstain from wine - something which taught them the need to remain sober (cp 1Thess 5:6-8), and undefiled from the pleasures of sin. But wine is also used as a symbol of an intoxicating doctrine, as in Rev 18:3, where nations are depicted as being inebriated with Romish Papal doctrine, to the extent that they follow mere delusions, unable to perceive the reality of Revealed Truth. So it is, that in abstention from wine - and even the very means of it's production, the Rechabites were taught the need for separation from the intoxicating influence of false doctrine, which Jonadab contended against, yet could see was permeating it's way into the Israelitish nation, and

separation from the pleasures of sin, which corrupt the partakers thereof, leading them only to the grave.

This same principle of Separation is demonstrated in their living habits. The Rechabites were not to dwell in houses, but were to “dwell in tents”, to the end that their days upon the land might be perpetuated. The dwelling in tents was a characteristic of the faithful fathers of Israel: “By faith Abraham ... sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:8,9). The dwelling in tabernacles then, was a token of the faith which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had, that the possession of the promised inheritance would be granted. Rather than to become settled and secure in constructing permanent dwelling places, they lived as strangers and sojourners, looking for the future city - New Jerusalem, built and made by God. And this was the spirit by which the Rechabites were to abide - separation from the wickedness of the land in which they merely sojourned, looking towards that time to come when their inheritance shall be made secure, and Jerusalem shall be founded on righteousness, being granted the name Yahweh Shammah, or “Yahweh is there” (Ezek 48:35).

The final aspect of Jondadab’s commandments related to the sowing of seed. The Rechabites were not to sow seed, or have fields (Jer 35:7,9), again activities associated with permanence; rather than the spirit of mere sojourners, awaiting the establishment of a better Kingdom. There was great wisdom in these commandments in many ways. Those Israelites who invested much time, effort and resources in ploughing the land, establishing their smallholdings, and vineyards, would literally lose everything they had, when the Babylonians came and destroyed the land. Their crops, vines, and everything would be lost. But not so, for the Rechabites. Their thoughts and efforts were not for the present things of this life, but for days yet future. They did not lay up for themselves treasure or goods “upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal”. In planting no crops, or vines, they gave “no thought” for their life, what they should eat, or what they should drink, but rather trusted in the Lord who provides all (see Mat 6:19-25). And so, rather laying up for themselves treasure in heaven, they lost nothing in the day of destruction, for their firm confidence, trust and faith remained - and that was all they valued. So it was that they sowed no seed. That is to say, they did not literally sow to the flesh, but rather to the Spirit. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal 6:7,8). This is the true example of faithfulness and separation. Separation from the things of this life, to direct all energies to the things of the Spirit, in seeking to uphold the ways of the Father. And in the Rechabites therefore, we have a powerful exhortation for ourselves, that we might follow their example, and so find length of days in the land when our Lord shall reign as King.

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