

# NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE HOUSE OF THE RECHABITES

(Chap. 35)

In striking contrast to the story of vacillation and treachery, recorded in the chapter we have just been considering, is the very instructive incident now brought to our notice.

The prophet is bidden to go to the house of the Rechabites, and, after saluting them, to **“bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink”** (vers. 1, 2).

This was sometime during the reign of Jehoiakim; therefore a number of years before the broken covenant of the last chapter. There is, however, a beautiful moral order in presenting it in this connection, utterly precluding the impious assumption that the various parts of this book have been thrown together haphazard by some later editor.

These Rechabites were not originally of the stock of Israel. They were Kenites, a tribe, the origin of which is shrouded in mystery. It is commonly supposed that they were Midianites by extraction, as Jethro the father-in-law of Moses belonged to the Kenites (Judges 4:11). Heber the Kenite, with his wife Jael, took the part of Israel in the war with the Canaanites headed by Sisera, who was slain by Jael when he sought refuge in her tent. In I Chronicles 2:55 we find the Rechabites numbered with the children of Judah. **“These are the Kenites that came of Hemath, the father of the house of Rechab.”**

It is through their valiant representative Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, that they first acquired special prominence.

It was he who went out to meet Jehu after he had been anointed king of Israel by the nameless prophet sent by Elisha to Ramoth-Gilead. Having destroyed the vile house of Ahab, and likewise many of the house of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehu was riding towards Samaria when **“he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is”** (II Kings 10:15).

Dramatically Jehu cried, **“If it be, give me thy hand.”** Upon his doing so, he took him up with him into the chariot, saying, **“Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.”**

The conclusion is irresistible that Jehu already knew Jehonadab well as a man devoted to the worship of the Lord, and an abhorrer of idolatry. The piety of his father Rechab is expressed in the name given to his son, the meaning of which is, *“the Lord freely gave.”* In company with the zealous but cruel king, Jehonadab is found commanding the search to see that no servants of the Lord were mingled with the worshipers of Baal in the temple of Samaria, prior to their massacre at the order of Jehu. He is not again mentioned until we come down to our present chapter.

In accordance with the word of the Lord, Jeremiah took Jaazaniah, the son of another Jeremiah, and his brethren, and the whole house of the Rechabites, and brought them into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, a man of God, in the temple. Here he set before them pots full of wine, and said, **“Drink ye wine”** (vers. 3-5).

Nobly they refused the invitation, giving as a reason for their conduct the fact that this very Jehonadab (called here Jonadab the son of Rechab) had, nearly three hundred years before, commanded them neither to drink wine, nor to build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant nor own vineyards, but to dwell ever in tents, that they might live many days in the land where they were strangers. This command they had literally obeyed from his days until the overrunning of the country by Nebuchadrezzar.

The presence of his troops had made it impossible for them to live in their former unguarded manner; so, to save their lives, they had moved into Jerusalem: but although thus obliged to dwell in a walled city, they would not violate the command forbidding them to drink of the fruit of the vine (vers. 6-11). Their reverence for and obedience to their great ancestor is all the more striking when the dissolute state of Israel and Judah is taken into consideration. They were a living sermon on subjection to the law, for any who would take cognizance of them. Hence Jeremiah is bidden to **“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”** (vers. 12, 13).

Alas, their record had ever been that they only knew His law in order to break it. From the day when they made the calf in the wilderness until the time in which Jeremiah ministered to them, their history had been one long, shameful account of disobedience and willful rejection of His Word. Long ere this, He, through Isaiah, had cried,

**“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider”** (Isaiah 1:2, 3).

Less responsive than the beasts that perish, they had turned away their ears from His law, and refused to walk in the way of His commandments. Has not this awful indictment a solemn message for Christians? How widespread is the same willful spirit even among those who are **“bought with a price,”** even the precious blood of Christ! How many of us act as truly knowing our Owner?

We are not our own, but His who sold all that He had to purchase us! What kind of a bargain has He had? What is our Master's crib but the holy Word of God, so often neglected and uncared for in Christian homes! What an abundance of good provender does it contain, and all for the sheep of Christ! Yet how is it turned from, while the husks of this world are sought instead! It is to be feared there is very little moral difference between the state of Judah in the days of her downfall and the house of God to-day. Let us see to it that we learn the lesson of these faithful Rechabites.

Wine, in Scripture, is the symbol of joy (Judges 9:13; Psalm 104:15).

The Nazarite of old was to refrain from it, for he found not his joy in a ruined creation. The sons of Rechab, as strangers and pilgrims, touch not that which comes from the vine of the earth. They speak, in type, of those who seek a higher, deeper, more lasting joy than this world can ever offer. Having here no continuing city, dwelling in the pilgrim's tent, sinking no foundations in this terrestrial scene, they reach out for that which is to come. What a contrast to the time-serving trucklers to the present age, as well as to the faithless people and princes of the times of Jeremiah!

The Lord goes on to say that the words of Jonadab were performed by his descendants in all faithfulness; but although He had given His Word, "**rising early and speaking,**" His people had not hearkened. Prophets, one after another, had been sent, bidding them refrain from their evil ways and amend their doings by turning truly to Himself from all their false gods. If they would thus obey His voice, He would prosper them still, and preserve them in their land. But there was no response. They inclined not the ear, nor hearkened to His entreaties.

Once more, therefore, it becomes the painful duty of the man who loved them so dearly that his heart was pained for them, to declare the doom that must soon be meted out to them. All the evil that the Lord had pronounced against them must shortly fall upon the city and the country, because, when He spake, they listened not; when He called, they answered not (vers. 16, 17).

This is the opposite of what we get in Proverbs 1:28. There the wayward are warned of a time coming of which God says, "**Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me.**" This is the fearful result of such a course as that pursued by treacherous Judah, and by an equally treacherous Christendom. As to the house of the Rechabites, it was declared to them, by the authority of the Lord Himself, that because of their faithful adherence to the commandments of Jonadab their father, he should not want a man to stand before the Lord forever (vers. 18, 19).

The family of this devoted man has long since been lost to history, both sacred and profane, but we gather from this promise that somewhere in this world his descendants still exist; and, doubtless, in the Millennium, when all the prophecies regarding Israel and Judah are fulfilled, the house of Rechab will once more appear upon the scene, a testimony to the faithfulness of Him who is "**not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?**" (Numbers 23:19).

In that day the Rechabites shall drink the pure joys that flow through the scene of Immanuel's presence; nor will it appear as a hardship that they were denied the fruit of the vine while the curse rested upon the earth for man's sake.

**~ end of chapter 19 ~**

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