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Introduction

Jeremiah is commanded to go to the Rechabites, who, on the approach of the Chaldean army, took refuge in Jerusalem; and to try their obedience to the command of Jonadab, (or Jehonadab, 2 Kings 10:15, 2 Kings 10:16), their great progenitor, who lived in the reign of Jehu, king of Israel, upwards of two hundred and fifty years before this time, offers them wine to drink, which they refuse, Jeremiah 35:1-11. Hence occasion is taken to upbraid the Jews with their disobedience to God, their heavenly Father, Jeremiah 35:12-17; and a blessing is pronounced on the Rechabites, Jeremiah 35:18, Jeremiah 35:19.

Verse 1

The word which came - in the days of Jehoiakim - What strange confusion in the placing of these chapters! Who could have expected to hear of Jehoiakim again, whom we have long ago buried; and we have now arrived in the history at the very last year of the last Jewish king.

This discourse was probably delivered in the fourth or fifth year of Jehoiakim's reign.

Verse 2

The house of the Rechabites - The Rechabites were not descendants of Jacob; they were Kenites, 1 Chronicles 2:55, a people originally settled in that part of Arabia Petrea, called the land of Midian; and most probably the descendants of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. Compare Numbers 10:29-32, with Judges 1:16; Judges 4:11.

Those mentioned here seem to have been a tribe of Nomades or Scenite Arabs, who fed their flocks in the deserts of Judea; they preserved the simple manners of their ancestors, considering the life of the inhabitants of cities and large towns as the death of liberty; believing that they would dishonor themselves by using that sort of food that would oblige them to live a sedentary life. Jonadab, one of their ancestors, had required his children and descendants to abide faithful to the customs of their forefathers; to continue to live in tents, and to nourish themselves on the produce of their flocks; to abstain from the cultivation of the ground, and from that particularly of the vine and its produce. His descendants religiously observed this rule, till the time when the armies of the Chaldeans had entered Judea; when, to preserve their lives, they retired within the walls of Jerusalem. But even there we find, from the account in this chapter, they did not quit their frugal manner of life: but most scrupulously observed the law of Jonadab their ancestor, and probably of this family.

When the children of Hobab, or Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, were invited by him to accompany them in their journeying to the Promised Land, it is very likely that they continued their ancient usages, and lived a patriarchal life. Their property, consisting in nothing but their cattle and tents, was easily removable from place to place; and their manner of living was not likely to excite the envy or jealousy of those who had learnt to relish the luxuries of life; and therefore we may naturally conclude that as they were enemies to none, so they had no enemies themselves. Nature has few wants. Most of those which we feel are factitious; and howsoever what we call civilization may furnish us with the conveniences and comforts of life, let us not deceive ourselves by supposing that these very things do not create the very wants which they are called in to supply; and most certainly do not contribute to the comfort of life, when the term of life is considerably abridged by their use. But it is time to return to the case of the Rechabites before us.

Verse 3

The whole house of the Rechabites - That is, the family - the chiefs of which are here specified.

Verse 4

Igdaliah, a man of God - A prophet or holy man, having some office in the temple.

Verse 5

Pots full of wine, and cups - The cups were to draw the wine out of the pots, in order to drink it.

Verse 6

We will drink no wine - The reason is given above. Their whole religious and political institution consisted in obedience to three simple precepts, each of which has an appropriate spiritual meaning: -

1.

Ye shall drink no wine - Ye shall preserve your bodies in temperance, shall use nothing that would deprive you of the exercise of your sober reason at any time; lest in such a time ye should do what might be prejudicial to yourselves, injurious to your neighbor, or dishonorable to your God.

2.

Neither shall ye build house - Ye shall not become residents in any place; ye shall not court earthly possessions; ye shall live free from ambition and from envy, that ye may be free from contention and strife.
3.

But - ye shall dwell in tents - Ye shall imitate your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the rest of the patriarchs, who dwelt in tents, being strangers and pilgrims upon earth, looking for a heavenly country, and being determined to have nothing here that would indispose their minds towards that place of endless rest, or prevent them from passing through temporal things so as not to lose those that are eternal.
There must necessarily be more in these injunctions than meets the eye in the letter of this account.

Verse 8

Thus have we obeyed the voice - We have considered these precepts so very reasonable, so very useful, so conducive to the health of both body and mind, and sanctioned by such a respectable antiquity that we scrupulously and religiously observe them.

Verse 11

But - when Nebuchadnezzar - came up - If at present we appear to be acting contrary in any respect to our institutions, in being found in the city, necessity alone has induced us to take this temporary step. We have sought the shelter of the city for the preservation of our lives; so now we dwell at Jerusalem.

Verse 14

The words of Jonadab - are performed - but ye hearkened not unto me - The Lord, knowing the fidelity of this people, chose to try them in this way, that he might, by their conscientious obedience to the precepts of their forefathers, show the Jews, to their confusion, their ingratitude to him, and their neglect of his precepts, which if a man do, he shall live by them.

Verse 17

I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil - Having, by the conduct of the Rechabites, clearly and fully convicted them of ingratitude and rebellion, he now proceeds to pronounce sentence against them.

Verse 19

Thus saith the Lord - Jonadab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever - His name shall ever be honorable, and his posterity shall enjoy my continual protection, and there shall never be found a time in which men of his spirit shall be wanting as patterns of genuine simplicity, filial obedience, purity of manners, and deadness to the world. True Christians may be considered as the genuine successors of these ancient Rechabites; and some suppose that the Essenes, in our Lord's time, were literally their descendants and that these were they who followed our Lord particularly, and became the first converts to the Gospel. If so, the prophecy is literally fulfilled: they shall never want a man to stand before God, to proclaim his salvation, and minister to the edification and salvation of others, as long as the earth shall endure.