

Jeremiah 35:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine.

Analysis

And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups (גַּבְעִים יְלִיל וְכַסּוֹת)—"pots" and "cups" suggest abundance; this wasn't a single cup but multiple vessels, perhaps ceremonial drinking bowls. Jeremiah created maximum temptation: not offering wine grudgingly but lavishly, publicly, in the temple—where refusing might seem rude or religiously inappropriate (wine was used in offerings and celebrations). The test's severity makes the Rechabites' refusal more remarkable.

And I said unto them, Drink ye wine—Jeremiah's direct command raises interpretive questions. Was the prophet commanding sin? No—drinking wine isn't inherently sinful (Psalm 104:15; John 2:1-11). Rather, Jeremiah was testing whether social pressure, prophetic authority, or sacred location would override their commitment to ancestral commands. Their obedience to Jonadab superseded even a prophet's invitation, demonstrating that prior binding commitments trump new circumstances. This prefigures Paul's instruction: even legitimate freedoms should be surrendered when they violate conscience (Romans 14:23; 1 Corinthians 8:13).

The refusal about to come (v. 6) will preach God's message: if Rechabites obey their dead ancestor's arbitrary command (avoiding wine has no moral weight itself), how much more should Judah obey the living God's morally necessary commands? The argument proceeds from lesser to greater (**a fortiori**): Rechabites' fidelity to human tradition condemns Israel's infidelity to divine law.

Jesus uses identical reasoning when citing Nineveh's repentance and the Queen of Sheba's pursuit of wisdom (Matthew 12:41-42)—pagan response to lesser revelation condemns Jewish rejection of greater revelation.

Historical Context

Wine was culturally central in ancient Judah—used in worship (drink offerings), celebrations (weddings, feasts), and daily meals. Refusing wine marked one as radically counter-cultural. Nazirite vows included wine abstinence (Numbers 6:3), but Nazirites took temporary vows; Rechabites maintained permanent abstinence across generations. Their public refusal in the temple, when a prophet offered wine, would have been shocking—demonstrating conviction stronger than social conformity. This occurred during Jehoiakim's reign, when temple worship was corrupt (Jeremiah 7:9-11) and society conformed to pagan norms.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How should commitments made to God or others be maintained even when circumstances change or authorities suggest compromise?
2. In what ways might culturally normal behaviors need to be refused to maintain distinctive covenant identity?
3. Why does God often use 'lesser' examples (pagans, outsiders, human traditions kept) to condemn 'greater' covenant people's failures?

Interlinear Text

מִלְאָ יְם	גָּבָעָ יְם	פְּרַכְבָּ יְם	בֵּית	בֵּן	לִפְנֵן	יְהִי	זָאת	וְ
And I set	before	the sons	of the house	of the Rechabites		pots		full
H5414	H6440	H1121	H1004	H7397		H1375		H4392
of wine	and cups	and I said			unto them	Drink	of wine	
H3196	H3563	H559	H413		H8354		H3196	
				אֶלְיָהָם	וְאַמְתָּם	וְכָסָות	שְׁתַוּ	וְ

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 9:7 (Parallel theme): Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

Amos 2:12 (Parallel theme): But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophesy not.