

A FAMILY'S EXAMPLE

"It's going to be big fun, mate. We do it every year," explained Ambrose. "We get hammered and make a whole night of it."

"Don't you chaps do the same thing in America?" chimed Robert.

They were in Antonne's dorm at the University of West London. It was his second year at the university. It had been difficult to settle into a new country and new school, while making a new group of friends. But Antonne found his English classmates to be friendly toward Americans, possibly more so to Black students.

Ambrose and Robert had promised him a "rip-roaring, good time" for Halloween. The plan was to hook up with a larger group and to get "totally sloshed."

"I'm telling you, mate, you're not going to want to miss this. And Felicity will be there," added Robert.

Antonne kept thinking of what his extended family was doing back home: celebrating at a local farm with pumpkins, a corn maze, and all the trappings. Later they would build a campfire, drink cider, and huddle under blankets to sing or to listen to stories from his grandfather. It wasn't the typical way to spend Halloween, but it had more meaning than what other folks did.

"You know," Antonne said, sitting down and reaching for his phone, "I think tonight I might hang back and connect with my family. I haven't called my grandfather in ages."

1 What is one of your favorite family traditions?

2 What value did that tradition teach you?

3 What kind of good tradition do you want to start with your friends and family?

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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: ⁷ 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.

⁵ Then I set bowls full of wine and some cups before the Rekabites and said to them, “Drink some wine.”

⁶ But they replied, “We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jehonadab son of Rekab gave us this command: ‘Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine.’ ⁷ Also you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but must always live in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.’

The Rekabite Vows

The setting is the middle of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry. At least some of the worst outcomes have already begun. But there is yet time to save lives and to make the people understand that turning to God’s mercy is their only hope. The faithless king of Judah, Jehoiakim, has not led the people into sincere repentance. Judah has been forced to submit to the invading powers of Babylon (1 Kings 24:1). Amidst all the coming and going from the city of Jerusalem, God sends Jeremiah to one family: the Rekabites, descendants of their ancestor, Rekab. God has a planned demonstration in mind.

Jeremiah brings the clan into the temple and arranges a test. He sets bowls of wine before the family and tells them to drink (Jer. 35:5). But there is something to know about the Rekabites: unlike most other families of this time, they have certain unique traditions. They do not drink wine, do not farm, and they live in tents (vv. 6–7).

Through his actions, Jeremiah is tempting this group to violate long-held family traditions. Before them is a prophet of God who has invited them to enter the temple and has made an offer of wine (presumably, before observers). But Jeremiah anticipates their response. Jeremiah (more importantly, God) already knows what the Rekabites will do.

The family comes at Jeremiah's invitation, but they flatly decline to drink any wine set before them. They explain their traditions, perhaps thinking this might be a simple misunderstanding: "Our forefather Jehonadab, son of Rekab gave us this command: 'Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine'" (v. 6). The family members have probably kept this vow for more than two centuries, and they are not about to violate it now.

We may wonder why the Rekabites have this tradition in the first place. Unfortunately, the rest of Scripture is mostly silent about them; Jeremiah 35 is the only chapter that describes their history. More than likely, the reason their ancestor had forbidden the drinking of wine or the cultivation of crops was to free his descendants from being settled in one territory. The Rekabites are probably a clan of permanent nomads, expected to live like nomads, and a love for wine would make that lifestyle impossible.

Jehonadab—the ancestor who came up with these traditions—promised his family that, if they keep these traditions, they will "live a long time in the land where [they] are nomads" (v. 7). This promise closely resembles the wording of Israel's covenant: "Observe therefore all the commands I [God] am giving you . . . so that you may live long in the land" (Deut. 11:8–9). And here is the crux of Jeremiah's demonstration. Before the observers, Jeremiah highlights a family who upholds their traditions to ensure a righteous outcome.

1 What does Jeremiah the prophet ask the Rekabites to do? Why?

2 How do the Rekabites respond? Why?

3 What makes the Rekabites want to keep their traditions?

⁸ Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; ⁹ Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: ¹⁰ But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. ¹¹ But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and 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.

⁸ We have obeyed everything our forefather Jehonadab son of Rekab commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine ⁹ or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops. ¹⁰ We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jehonadab commanded us. ¹¹ But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded this land, we said, ‘Come, we must go to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Aramean armies.’ So we have remained in Jerusalem.”

Radical Obedience

The Rekabites and their leader, Jaazaniah, continue to explain these vows and their refusal to drink wine. After their forefather forbid them to drink wine, build houses, or farm, they “obeyed everything [he] commanded” (v. 8). Because they all followed these commands to live as nomads, they “have lived in tents and have fully obeyed” (v. 10). Their long-standing zeal toward keeping ancestral traditions overcame any temptation to seek the comfort of permanent homes, much less a temptation to drink the wine Jeremiah has set before them.

The only reason the Rekabites have come to Jerusalem is to find safety from invading armies (v. 11). As a result of their nomadic lifestyle, they were able to flee to the city in a time of crisis. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had begun invading the lands of Judah and the eastern Mediterranean. Because of these wars to the north, the Rekabites arrived as refugees to Judah and found safety in the city of Jerusalem (v. 11). Even now, they are not in violation of their vows and traditions. Even now they are still living in tents.

Following the printed text, God tells Jeremiah to speak to the

gathered people. Jeremiah recaps the test of the Rekabites and their faithful response (vv. 12–16). Then he brings the demonstration to a theological point: the Rekabites have done everything their ancestors had asked, have remained faithful, generation after generation. Conversely, during the same time, the people of Judah have proved utterly faithless to the covenant with God. God has sent many prophets (Jeremiah included) to urge Judah to turn from sin and idolatry. “But,” God concludes, “you have not paid attention or listened to me” (v. 15). Thus, the Rekabites are an illustration of the kind of faithfulness that Judah has struggled to display.

Therefore, because of this faithless behavior, God shall bring about “every disaster [God] pronounced against [Judah and Jerusalem]” (v. 17). God has provided ample opportunity to return to covenant obedience, but the door is quickly shutting.

On the other hand, the faithfulness of the Rekabites has not gone unnoticed before God. This opens a path for God to reward them. The point is not that the traditions of the Rekabites should be adopted by the other residents of Judah. But in recognition for their having kept ancestral traditions, God says, “Jehonadab son of Rekab will never fail to have a descendant to serve me” (v. 19). In the midst of a faithless generation, God finds cause to reward a family who chooses a different path.

1 How have the Rekabites demonstrated obedience to their ancestors after relocating to Jerusalem?

2 Why does God want to highlight an example of extravagant faithfulness?

3 How does God reward the Rekabites?

The Art of Finishing Well

“We have to finish this game!”

When those words came from my son’s mouth, I knew he was right. I had always been a lover of boardgames, but this was the moment I knew he loved them too. We were seated on the carpet of our living room, cards and pieces scattered in every direction. The game had gone on so long that I was willing to pack it away. But one look at his face made me certain I didn’t want to disappoint him.

“You’re right. We finish things, don’t we?”

With perfect comedic timing, my wife leaned into the room while holding a laundry basket. She said, “You finish the things you want to finish!”

It became a family joke that turned into a larger conversation. Each of us was able to think of projects and tasks that went unfinished: clothes tossed to the floor, a recycling bin that overflowed, school-work marked “Incomplete.” Thus, a new family motto was born: *In this family, we finish things.*

In the days of Jeremiah, God was seeking faithfulness, or what we might call the skill of *finishing well*. But the people of Judah were rebellious and uncommitted. Soon their lack of fortitude would reach its natural conclusion: God would send them into exile.

We can be grateful that God notices and rewards individual faithfulness. More than that, God is devoted to His plans and promises. If faithfulness is the art of finishing well, God is the master. He always brings His plans to fruition. In the person of Jesus, God has been faithful beyond the wildest imagination of human beings. We should be faithful because God is faithful.

1 What is an example of something you always want to finish?

2 How can our faithfulness in other areas of life be an example of faithfulness before God?

3 What does it look like to obey God and to finish well?

Reminding the World of God's Faithfulness

As we have studied the traditions of one ancient family, perhaps you have noticed ways that your own family traditions could point others to God. Since we serve a God who is faithful, we can look for ways to exemplify faithfulness ourselves.

With a partner, discuss a family tradition that this lesson has encouraged you to start or continue. How do you hope that your family traditions can point others to God?

Key Text

For unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: —Jeremiah 35:14b KJV

To this day they do not drink wine, because they obey their forefather's command. —Jeremiah 35:14b NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of October 20 through October 25

Mon. Joel 2:28–32—A New Salvation.

Tue. Ezekiel 36:25–35—A New Heart.

Wed. Deuteronomy 10:12–21—The Law's Essence.

Thu. 2 Corinthians 3:1–6—A New Covenant.

Fri. 2 Corinthians 3:7–11—A New Spirit.

Sat. Jeremiah 31:27–34—A New Relationship with God.

Next Week: Jeremiah 31:29–34; John 1:17

Next week we will be looking at God's promise to make His people faithful and to give a new covenant. What is an item in your life that you've updated recently?