

## Jeremiah Chapters 34-35 John Karmelich

1. My one word title is: Obedience. That should scare most of you away and I'm just starting! I can summarize these two chapters in a few thoughts. The Israelites at this point in history are close to having the Babylonians (an Empire based out of Iraq today) destroy Israel completely. Even with that threat hanging over their heads, they're still disobedient to God. That's essentially Chapter 34 and yes it's old news to us! Chapter 35 tells a story from years earlier. It focuses on a non-Israelite nomad (wandering) group. They move into Jerusalem due the Babylonian threat. This group took a vow a few hundred earlier that they wouldn't drink any alcohol. Most suspect Jeremiah wanted to tell that story here to show that this nomad group is loyal to their vows while the Israelites are failing to be loyal to their vows to God. Thus these chapters focus on obedience or a lack thereof!
  - a) I can just hear some of you thinking, I'm not perfect, but I'm a minimal sinning Christian! The issue of obedience is not about trying to prove our worth to God. Think about that, it is not possible to be perfectly pleasing to a perfect God. I assume we already believe that Jesus has died for all our sins and we're using our lives to make a difference for Jesus, so I am confused about the "obedience" thing.
  - b) I want you to think of it this way, if God was tough on the Israelites for their failure to be obedient to Him, what makes us think He expects anything less from Christians? No, He doesn't expect perfection, but at the same time He does demand obedience from us. Why is that? It's about being a good witness for Him. Further, it's the best way to live. The act of obedience is bigger than just obeying His laws. Again, we don't obey them to earn His love. He demands obedience for us to be a good witness for Him.
  - c) Let me try it one more way: God gives each of us special gifts. There are things that each of us do better than most people. We can use those gifts to just enrich our own lives, or if we've committed our lives to Jesus, we'll find ways to use those gifts to make a difference for Him. That's also the issue here.
2. For what it's worth, these chapters take on some tough topics. One is about indentured servitude, which is the idea of "Person A owes something to Person B, and if "A" can't afford to pay, then he or she must work it off for Person "B". Think of the person who can't afford to pay their bill when at a restaurant and must wash the dishes the pay the tab. It's sort of that idea. Yes, it's a mild form of slavery. God laid out rules about that in Exodus, so people won't take advantage of those who had to serve others out of debt. The next tough topic has to do with alcohol. Jeremiah tested the nomads. They were legally allowed to drink alcohol, but didn't as a sign because they refused to settle down in any one place (to plant vineyards, for example). In this lesson I'm going to discuss alcohol and I'll probably surprise some of you on my views on this. Notice Jeremiah didn't pick murder or theft as issues, but other things to teach about being a witness for God!
3. These chapters are not so much about learning history or even giving "more of the same" type of predictions about Israel's destruction. The key is to learn about the failure to a lack of obedience as well as the rewards for obedience. Both of those factors are laid out in these chapters. What it does mean is that God is "judging us" as to how we're being a witness for Him. God's watching to see if we are using the gifts He's given us, or even the time He's giving us to make a difference for Him.
4. So let me ask the obvious question. There are lots of people around us who could care less about God. How are they being judged? Differently than believers. The first question He asks if we've accepted His full payment for our sins. We can't change our minds after we're dead. A reason for judgment it to go over our lives and see if we put our money where our mouth is! Then God will ask, if we did believe it, what have we done with that information? That second question is why I write these lessons. Obedience is the obvious overriding topic that should affect all we do as His witnesses to the world. Again, not to earn His respect, but simply out of gratitude for what God's done for us. The question of this lesson is, how are we rewarded or punished regarding that?

- a) I can just hear a lot of you thinking, "I'm a pretty good Joe". I don't drink much and I don't have significant debt issues to pay off. I'm very involved in my local church. Why should I care about this stuff?" For starters it's to realize that God demands obedience and there's a big penalty awaiting if we fail to do so. Let me put it this way: The Israelites were killed in a horrid way for failing to be obedient, what makes you think God is going to be easier on us Christians when it comes to being a witness for Him? Chapter 35 explains a reward for a non-Jewish group just for keeping their vow to stay sober! In both cases, it has to do with being a witness for God. There's a clue right there! It's a reminder that we're always "on the clock" for Jesus. Keep in mind that eternity is well infinitely longer than this life. If rewards exist in heaven based on how we acted, I don't know about you but that's enough motivation to keep me on my toes! Do I have downtime? Of course. Do I have hobbies? I do. With that said, I try to keep an eye on the prize, which is about living, as He desires as A living witness for Him. My point is even if we are a "pretty good Joe", we need to think about the time we have and use it for His glory. Our eternity depends upon it.
- b) So John are you saying if I'm a bad witness for Jesus, He's going to strike me dead on that spot? Doubt it. I have heard of some pretty horrid things happening to those who claim to be a Christian and then do something horribly wrong. More likely we could lose all of the opportunities He's given us to be a witness if we fail to use our lives for His glory. So how much is "enough"? How do I know I'm doing enough? Pray through it. God makes me work hard for this ministry but the joy I get from feedback makes it all worth it. All I am saying is God makes it obvious to each of us what He desires and how much. What is His standard for us today may be different tomorrow. Still "we're always on the clock" so to speak and need to keep that in mind.
5. So is your goal to scare us into working harder for Jesus? No my goal is to first understand that a life of obedience is part of living the Christian life. Next I want each of us to find ways to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Also realize it's not always about our spiritual gifts. There are times where we just need to be helpful. Christian love is all about putting others before ourselves. That's the sort of attitude He desires of each of us and we can live that way, with the Spirit as our guide as to what He specifically wants us to do. When in doubt, help. Do something. Try things and see where God leads. Godly obedience often requires trial and error. That's how He leads us down the path He desires for each of us. Even us veteran Christians know that what worked last year or week, may not be His will for today. Even if we're really suffering sometimes we have to let others minister to us to let them make a difference. My point is obedience to God is what's the driving force behind living as He desires. That's why it's necessary.
6. Finally a few words for those who think, "I already know this stuff. I know that He demands that we be obedient to Him. Why should I study these two chapters?" For starters to see how we'll be rewarded in this lifetime for obedience or can suffer now as well as eternally for disobedience. It is a matter of sticking close to Him through the study of His word to remind us of "the prize". The focus of our lives should be on Him. Even those of us who walk closely with Him need this type of reminder on a daily basis as we know how easy it is to slip up.
- a) So are you saying getting into heaven requires obedience? Yes in that if we really believe that Jesus died for all our sins, is in charge of our lives and is God, then we'd want to live that way. Yes of course we're saved by grace. Not arguing against that at all. The issue is simply what are we doing with that grace? That's the question for all of us.
7. With that speech out of my system, it's really not necessary to go over these chapters the way that I usually do. They're pretty self explanatory about disobedience and obedience and what'll occur based on acting one way or the other. Yes there are some interesting bible facts to learn, but those are secondary to the simple fact that God demands just as much obedience from Christians as He did from the Jewish people. If we think about that as we read these chapters, hopefully that will motivate us to stay obedient to Him. With that said, yes it's time for the verse-by-verse comments on these chapters. Let's begin.

8. Chapter 34, Verse 1: While Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms and peoples in the empire he ruled were fighting against Jerusalem and all its surrounding towns, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD:
- a) The chapter opens with a "time stamp". For those of who hate dates, just know it's given within a year or so before the final destruction of Jerusalem. In this time period, the way a city was conquered was an army would surround the city and "starve it out". Therefore we get Jeremiah and the rest of the Israelites behind the walls. In that desperate time God spoke to Jeremiah to give him a message to tell direct to the king of Jerusalem. For those of you who like dates, it's about 588 BC. Now you know!
  - b) Let me explain how "empires" were formed as it may help here. It's done by threatening say a neighboring group by saying, "join us or get conquered". Then they get stuff when they conquer more groups. Then it grows by a "join us or die" attitude. I'm stating all of this so you can grasp that it was a large army attacking Jerusalem, not just one city!
9. Verse 2: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Go to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it down. <sup>3</sup> You will not escape from his grasp but will surely be captured and handed over to him. You will see the king of Babylon with your own eyes, and he will speak with you face to face. And you will go to Babylon.
- a) First a couple of questions: If God wanted to give the message directly to the king, why is it that God spoke through Jeremiah? Because he was accepted as a prophet from God. He would be taken more seriously than a direct message to the king who isn't used to getting messages from God.
  - b) Next a little about the king himself. He must have feared the Babylonian king. After all it was Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king that placed him in power in the first place. We read here that Jerusalem rebelled against Babylon and thus the siege. 2nd Kings 24 tells us that things didn't end well for that king. The short version is Zedekiah got taken prisoner to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons right in front of him, then he had his eyes taken out so the last thing he saw was his sons being killed. Then he lived out his life in relative peace after all that. I state that here, as essentially that's what we are reading in Verse 3.
  - c) The pattern that we'll see all through this chapter has to do with disobedience. Jeremiah's essential message to the Israelites for years to give up. This is after the Babylonians placed Zedekiah in power. Since they rebelled, this is what happened. So does all of this mean if we rebel against God, we'll have our "eyes put out" so to speak? As I state a lot, the issue's not salvation. It is about being a witness for God. Yes we can blow it and still be saved. A question to ask is "what will it cost us?" Yes if we say, steal or get drunk to use an obvious example, we'll suffer for it. If we just go about our lives earning a living and never being a witness for Jesus, in effect it's a wasted life as we're doing things that won't matter. Still, I am pondering will God make us suffer "badly" for failing to be a witness for Him? I won't put it past Him. I'd rather do the right thing and not go down that pathway.
    - i) With that guilt ridden thought out of my system, back to Jeremiah!
10. Verse 4: Yet hear the promise of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah. This is what the LORD says concerning you: You will not die by the sword; <sup>5</sup> you will die peacefully. As people made a funeral fire in honor of your fathers, the former kings who preceded you, so they will make a fire in your honor and lament, "Alas, O master!" I myself make this promise, declares the LORD.' "
- a) I already explained the "die in peace" aspect. Yes he got to live out the rest of his life living in Babylon, but blind with the last sight being his sons killed. If nothing else, it reminds us that God and people in power are not to be messed with!
  - b) What's interesting to me, is why make the promise that people will honor him after he did die? One reason is leaders contemplate their legacy. Another is people will see him as the last of King David's dynasty. To mourn him is to mourn the end of Israel as a nation!

11. Verse 6: Then Jeremiah the prophet told all this to Zedekiah king of Judah, in Jerusalem,<sup>7</sup> while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out--Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah.
- a) These two verses are almost a "footnote". It reminds us that the vision was actually given to Jeremiah and now he told it to the king as commanded. Jeremiah was in prison, so I'm sure that somehow God made it possible to report all of this to the king!
  - b) Speaking of footnotes, it's time to discuss why "Lachish and Azekah" are mentioned. The text says they were the only two cities still standing in the land of Israel besides Jerusalem at that time. The only reason to care about this footnote is God had preserved history as a proof of that fact. Letters from Lachish to Jerusalem at that time were found in 1935. The English translation can be read on "wikipedia". They essentially give "battle reports" to explain their situation. The letters found were incomplete. The point is simply that archeological evidence supports the accuracy of what happened!
12. Verse 8: The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves.<sup>9</sup> Everyone was to free his Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Jew in bondage.<sup>10</sup> So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free.<sup>11</sup> But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again.
- a) As I stated in the introduction we're going to get into the issue of slavery. Some argue that the Israelites sent them free as the Babylonian army surrounded Jerusalem, and they did it to save on the cost of feeding them during that time. It's possible but it's not hinted at in the text. I think a better explanation is simply that the Babylonians surrounded the city so as a gesture of trusting God they let their slaves go free as a gesture of "I'm sorry God".
    - i) We'll get a little more into the specifics of the "slavery, as you owe me money" rule a little later. The short version is that God has a seven-year time limit on that. I'm suspecting that the Israelites violated that rule in order to get more use out of them as slaves. Did Jeremiah or others condemn it? Probably, anyway, I suspect it was a sign of "yes, we're really sorry so please God forgive us".
    - ii) As most of us know, such acts don't really work. As soon as the threat or pain goes away we're back to "our old self", as we'll read in the text.
  - b) Time for a little more history here. Apparently when the Babylonians started a siege there at Jerusalem, they heard that the Egyptians were coming to attack them. (Babylon will get Egypt as part of their empire too, by the way.) Anyway, the Babylonians abandoned their siege (if you don't know that's when you surround a city and starve it out) at Jerusalem.
    - i) To make a long story short, they fought Egypt, and the Babylonians won big. Then they returned to finish their attack on Jerusalem.
  - c) I gave that little history lesson as apparently when the Babylonians stopped their siege at Jerusalem, the Israelites figured, "Hey, we did it. God listened to us! Now we can go back to our old ways as the Babylonians are no longer a threat!" Thus they took back the slaves they had before the siege started. Am I positive that's how it happened? History tells that the siege did stop and start, but why the Israelites took back the slaves is a logical guess as one studies the facts. Anyway no matter what the reason, once the punishment threat was not an issue they went back to their old way of life. That's the lesson: God doesn't want a lifestyle of obedience based on "threats". He'd rather we live as He desires because that is the way we desire to live. However, because He loves us He'll resort to the "stick" so we'll turn back to Him.
  - d) So if God was so "ticked off" at the Israelites, why did He allow the siege to break off so as for the Babylonians to go "kick some Egyptian behind" so to speak? If nothing else, it's so we can see the difference between genuine obedience and just doing it when life isn't any major threat to us at the moment. OK then, lets move on.

13. Verse 12: Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: <sup>13</sup> "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I said, <sup>14</sup> 'Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrew who has sold himself to you. After he has served you six years, you must let him go free.' Your fathers, however, did not listen to me or pay attention to me. <sup>15</sup> Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: Each of you proclaimed freedom to his countrymen. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name. <sup>16</sup> But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free to go where they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again.
- a) Verse 12 starts with the fact that God spoke to Jeremiah again. So I don't know if this is a separate speech or just a continuation. I suspect it's a separate one. The key point is we're reading of Jeremiah essentially reciting Exodus 21, which states what I said earlier that the slaves must be set free after seven years. Some argue it's sixth and set free on the seventh, but either way you get the idea that it's not permanent.
  - b) Anyway God through Jeremiah "calls them out" for going back on their word. They took back their slaves. I admit I pondered how that worked. Did signs go up around the city of Jerusalem listing the names of people and saying you must return to this address at a certain time or face jail time? Don't know, but I suspect threats were made so those who were working as slaves because of debts to be paid, had to go back to it whether they like it or not.
  - c) This would be a good moment for a quick pause to discuss how slavery ended. Essentially it was devout Christians in both England and the United States that worked hard to bring it to an end. Unfortunately in the Muslim world, it still continued for a long time after it had ended in the western world. For the most part it no longer exists but even during say World War II, there were people essentially working as slaves for the Germans. My point is it's been an unfortunate reality of human history. So why doesn't the bible just say that there's to be no slavery, "end of issue". Because the Israelites were slaves and came from a world where slavery was common. What the bible did was make it humane and required a humane treatment of slavery and a limited time scope. The bible essentially left it there as a decent way to work off debts.
  - d) With all that said, slavery is really the "side issue". The main issue is obedience to God. It is about making vows to God and keeping them. The underlying issue is God's name is at stake. If people publicly make vows to God then don't keep them, others can think, "God can be given lip service and not taken seriously". As long as we repent later, we can claim whatever we want and again repent later! While God is always willing to forgive, He also has to punish us if for no other reason than to show there are consequences when we turn from Him. That's one reason why the "stick" is applied.
    - i) I can hear a lot of you thinking, "I know a lot of non-Christians who get away with a lot of stuff and even some Christians who do as well". I'd argue God's tougher on us believers because He wants us to be witnesses for Him! Sometimes God will let us get away with "stuff" for a while to test us. Truthfully if we're "one of His" we'll be miserable living in a way that's not pleasing to Him. I'm a big believer the Holy Spirit doesn't need our help to convict people of sin. If Christians are paying attention to God in anyway, He'll do the convicting. The time believers can step in is when we see those who claim to be believers but then want to live however they want. Christianity is a religion of obedience, not to earn our salvation, but strictly to be good witness for Jesus to a lost and dying world around us.
    - ii) The way we prove our love for Jesus is based on how we act. That's why the issue of obedience is key whether we like it or not. Doesn't mean God expect perfection from us? Of course not. At the same time, He expects us to try, not to earn respect from Him, but again just to be a witness for Him.

- e) OK enough of all of that. The key point of the text was that God expected the Israelites to live under His rules. Yes, the bible was smaller in those days, but His rules are essentially laid out in the first five books. OK, what about Christians and all those laws? The short version is the New Testament is our guide as to obedience. I'd argue theft and murder are still on the books, but the "Kosher food laws" are not as Jesus declared "all foods clean". It also doesn't mean we have to sacrifice animals as Jesus paid the price for our sins.
  - f) So does that mean we can own slaves for six years? Of course not. One has to interpret a law based on the time frame one lives in. Still the principals laid out in those laws are the basis of our laws today.
  - g) OK enough of "slavery and law" talk. Back to Jeremiah:
14. Verse 17: "Therefore, this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim 'freedom' for you, declares the LORD--'freedom' to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth. <sup>18</sup> The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. <sup>19</sup> The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, <sup>20</sup> I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.
- a) The short version is we're back to "The bad news". It's the main theme of Jeremiah in that the Israelites are in big trouble for disobeying God.
  - b) There's a pun here that comes across in the English. The shorter version's that because the Israelites didn't proclaim freedom (key word) to the slaves, God's saying guess what guys, you're all now free to die by sword plague and famine! He's predicting the return of those Babylonians to surround the city and starve it out and kill those trying to escape.
  - c) Now if all that isn't gruesome enough, it's about to get worse. Going back to a story from Genesis 15, where God told Abraham to cut a few animals in half and lay them out in the sun. Then Abraham saw God walking among those animals. Let me explain: A custom at the time of Abraham involved walking among dead animals when making an agreement. The idea's that if one failed to keep their end of the agreement, they will be killed and left for dead as those animals were in Genesis 15.
    - i) With that said, realize God said that the Israelite leaders have in effect made a deal like that. Because they agreed to be His people, God's saying in effect, "Guess what guys, you failed and you're going to end up like those dead animals".
    - ii) So does that mean we'll suffer the same fate if we fail to be a witness for Him? We don't see all generations of Israelite suffering that way, although many did! What I do see is a warning about our eternal future. It may not affect whether or not we are actually saved, but I'm positive there are rewards in heaven based on what we did with the information we had about Jesus and what we did with it!
    - iii) OK enough guilt for these verses. The message Jeremiah was giving to the leaders in Israel at that time is in effect, "You're in big trouble. God raised each of you up to a position of leadership, and you're failure to live as He desires now comes with a high price!" If that doesn't scare us from whatever role God's called us, it should!
15. Verse 21: "I will hand Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials over to their enemies who seek their lives, to the army of the king of Babylon, which has withdrawn from you. <sup>22</sup> I am going to give the order, declares the LORD, and I will bring them back to this city. They will fight against it, take it and burn it down. And I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there."
- a) Remember how I said the Babylonians withdrew for a while to go fight Egypt? Verse 21 is a hint of their return. Imagine being told that not only are going to lose a battle or a war, but God Himself will be fighting against you! I don't know if that scares you, but it scares me a lot! Bottom line is the land of Israel is "going down for the count".

- b) I could probably write a little here about why all of this was necessary. What it essentially comes down to is God was "out of options" to get the Israelites to be obedient to Him. The Babylonian captivity did do one thing well, Israel as a nation never turned to idols in such a major way again in their history.
  - c) With that said, time to move on to Chapter 35 as it ties well to our obedience theme.
16. Chapter 35, Verse 1: This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD during the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the Recabite family and invite them to come to one of the side rooms of the house of the LORD and give them wine to drink."
- a) Let's start with a time stamp. It was at least a decade earlier and up to two decades earlier than the events of Chapter 34.
  - b) The next thing we should know is who are the Recabites. It requires a bunch of references from other books of the bible, but essentially they trace their roots back to the Midianites, which essentially was a clan in that area at the time of Moses. The Recabites can trace the origin of their group back to Jethro, the father in law of Moses. This group weren't Jewish but have had centuries of friendly association with the Jewish people.
  - c) Time for a few words about "nomads". Think of it as people who always live in tents, but at the same time had strict religious lifestyles. Some argue they looked down on Israelites since they turned to false gods while this group "wandered around taking care of animals as they stayed loyal to God". There is also the classic joke that nomads avoid paying taxes as they're constantly on the move. Anyway, the starters of this group set up ground rules in effect that they're not to settle down anywhere. Among their rules was no wine. It isn't about avoiding drinking it as much as the idea that they weren't to settle down to work in a vineyard and enjoy the product thereof.
  - d) Anyway, with all that said, Jeremiah sets up a test for their leaders. He invites the leaders into God's temple and offers them cups of wine. So far, this all God telling Jeremiah to go do this. The actual event is Verses 3-11. Let's continue:
17. Verse 3: So I went to get Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers and all his sons--the whole family of the Recabites. <sup>4</sup> I brought them into the house of the LORD, into the room of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah the man of God. It was next to the room of the officials, which was over that of Maaseiah son of Shallum the doorkeeper. <sup>5</sup> Then I set bowls full of wine and some cups before the men of the Recabite family and said to them, "Drink some wine."
- a) Most of us have been in pressure filled situations before. Imagine someone who's had an association with God for years, look us in the face with all our family and friends present and say, "Drink up boys, it's on me!" At the same time a bunch of the head Israelites were in the room as witnesses to the event. I'm guessing these guys were scares as they were in a room filled with top Israelite officials in Jerusalem in the temple area.
  - b) A few quick thoughts on temptation. First, welcome to club. Even the most veteran of us Christians go through temptations. 1st Corinthians 10:13 tells us God always provides us a way of escape whenever we're in a tough jam. Obviously it's best to avoid those things in the first place, but if we're stuck and we're praying for a way to escape, God promises a way to escape will occur.
  - c) With that understood, let's look at the reaction of this test:
18. Verse 6: But they replied, "We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jonadab son of Recab gave us this command: `Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine.
- a) Bottom line, is this group of non-Israelites knew what they were commanded to do, and they stuck to their guns. Again, I don't think the issue is so much getting drunk as it the idea that they never want to be associated with settling down in one place. To have wine is implying they were growing grapes in order to have that wine in the first place.
  - b) So why was it so bad for them to not settle in one place? The idea is that there were told to observe this lifestyle as a witness to others around them of their loyalty to God by it!

- c) It's sort of the idea that we're going "over and above the call of duty" not because that is a requirement to be a believer, but as proof that "we're putting our money where our mouth is" so to speak.
  - d) This group has more to say, but first I want to pause to talk about Christians and wine.
    - i) The bible definitely condemns getting drunk, but doesn't condemn drinking.
    - ii) For example Jesus drank wine at the last supper. That event was in the spring. The grapes of that region are harvested in July so Jesus wasn't drinking fresh juice. My point is Jesus drank wine, so consider that if you want to argue it's forbidden.
    - iii) At the same time I rarely drink, for the simple reason is it makes me a bad witness for Jesus if I'm associated with drinking. I'm not perfect, but I rarely indulge in it, as to be a good witness for Jesus, period.
    - iv) Meanwhile I interrupted the leader of this group as he was speaking.
19. Verse 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.<sup>1 8</sup> We have obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab son of Recab commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine<sup>9</sup> or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops.<sup>10</sup> We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab commanded us.<sup>11</sup> 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."
- a) Here we get the rest of the speech by this nomad group. Essentially he's saying we're not allowed to build houses and settle down. We wonder from place to place raising animals and travel to where there is grass. However, as the Babylonians and their allies were now on the march, this group "had to change plans to survive" and moved into Jerusalem. That also tells us that this event must have occurred during the first or second Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. For those who don't know, when the Babylonians won the first and a second time, they took some of the best Israelites captive and put their own choice as king. It was not a complete destruction but they "left their mark" that they were now in charge.
  - b) Anyway, this group that made a vow to never settle down to grow crops, had to make the exception because an invading army is on the march. It tells us this group was practical as they stuck to their vows as much as possible.
  - c) The key point of this chapter is Jeremiah wanted to show the Israelite leaders it is possible to keep one's vows! Just as the Israelites had failed to trust God and turn to other gods, so this group during the same time period, were able to keep their vows even though neither vow should be any harder than the other.
  - d) OK John, I'm not perfect and neither are you. How do we keep our vows? Will we suffer like the Israelites if we blow our vows? Tough one. I've seen major ministries die in short times due to one significant sin of a leader. I've known of others who got away with stuff for years. Eventually that type of stuff does come out. As to perfection,, God is practical for the lack of a better word. God expects us to try. He expects us to trust in His power to live as He desires. Will we fail? Of course. Welcome to the club. My point is a fear of not being perfect should never stop us from trying in the first place, nor make us quit when a moment of failure comes. He doesn't expect perfection, but He does want us to rely upon Him for the power to live as He desires. When we do fail, we're to confess it, trust that He has forgiven us no matter how often we fail, and continue to use our lives so we can make some sort of difference for Him.
  - e) Anyway, with that lecture out of my system, this group of nomads "parked their sheep" in Jerusalem and stayed there while Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land. If you didn't know, it was customary for the head general to also be the king. This guy began as the son of the king and when his father died, continued a campaign to grow the Babylonian Empire to a point where it encompassed most of the Middle East.



20. Verse 12: Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying: <sup>13</sup> "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem, 'Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words?' declares the LORD. <sup>14</sup> 'Jonadab son of Recab ordered his sons not to drink wine and this command has been kept. To this day they do not drink wine, because they obey their forefather's command. But I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not obeyed me. <sup>15</sup> Again and again I sent all my servants the prophets to you. They said, 'Each of you must turn from your wicked ways and reform your actions; do not follow other gods to serve them. Then you will live in the land I have given to you and your fathers.' But you have not paid attention or listened to me. <sup>16</sup> The descendants of Jonadab son of Recab have carried out the command their forefather gave them, but these people have not obeyed me.'
- a) Here's where Jeremiah "chews out the Israelites" by showing them a living example, yes at that time of how to be obedient. This is Jeremiah saying, "See these nomads standing here, they can be loyal to what their ancestor required of them a few hundred years earlier, but you Israelites can't be loyal to the God who created the Universe and you claim are called to be His disciples have ignored!" Let's be honest it had to hurt to be in that room then.
  - b) Let's review for a second why the false good Baal (It's part of a system) was so tempting to the Israelites. He promised financial wealth for worshipping him. He was honored with a lot of cheap sex "in his presence". The babies from that sex were offered up to him. God's essentially saying for the sake of those dead children as well as for those who claim to be mine, I (God) need to bring this to an end once and for all!
  - c) OK so why doesn't God kill people who perform abortions or those who get them? It is to give them a chance to repent. To state one of my favorite ideas, the only unforgivable sin is a lifetime denial that Jesus is God. Therefore God allows a lot of horrible things simply because He allows free will and He wants people to repent and turn to Him. So if all that is true, why did God bring the "hammer down" on this group? To show what'll happen to those who refuse to use their lives as a witness for Him. As I've stated many times in these lessons, the one positive thing that came out of all this horror is it cured Israel from living a life of idolatry collectively. The scary thing for us if God went to that much trouble just to get the Israelites to repent, what does that mean for us? I just read in Exodus 15 today, the fact that God is called a "man of war". What that means is God's at war against those who don't want to do His will and draw us sinners back to him. (Reference Exodus 15:3.)
  - d) That's enough guilt for these verses. The obvious point that Jeremiah's making is how the Israelites refuse to be loyal to "The God" yet this group of nomads are loyal to what their common ancestor required of them, even though he's only human and "God is God"! That is why I figured if Jeremiah can pour on the guilt here so could I. With that said, Jeremiah wraps up this section by explaining the punishment coming to the Israelites as well as the rewards this nomad group will receive:
21. Verse 17: "Therefore, this is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Listen! I am going to bring on Judah and on everyone living in Jerusalem every disaster I pronounced against them. I spoke to them, but they did not listen; I called to them, but they did not answer.' "
- a) Ever ponder why God went to so much trouble to warn them of this upcoming disaster? The reason is He wants repentance. He's not interested in anyone going to hell. He wants people to repent so they can spend eternity with Him. That leads to the question, why is it that hell is so everlasting? After all, wouldn't say a million years of punishment be enough to cover any sin? The issue isn't so much punishment, but a desire to not live under how it is that God wants us to live. Hell is a place where "everyone can do their own thing and it will not have any restraint on sin". It may sound like fun, but there is no joy in living how we want to live. That's why it becomes a place of eternal torture. The same idea applies to eternity in heaven. A million years is more than sufficient for whatever good deeds we've done. The issue in heaven is about a desire to live as He desires under His rules. We'll be eternally blessed for that choice to give up our will for His.

- b) Anyway, that's my lecture on why God punishes people and the Israelites at that time. It was all necessary in the big picture to teach us of the danger of turning from God and the consequences that come with it.
  - c) With that said, enough of the bad news, time to discuss the rewards for obedience:
22. Verse 18: Then Jeremiah said to the family of the Recabites, "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `You have obeyed the command of your forefather Jonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.'<sup>19</sup> Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `Jonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a man to serve me.' "
- a) Here is this group of wandering shepherders, "stuck in Jerusalem" due the Babylonians attacking the area. They're listening to Jeremiah use them as an obedience example as he chews out their fellow Israelites. They had to be thinking, "Too bad for all of you, what is going to happen to us? What's our rewards for lifetime of obedience living in tents?"
  - b) The essence of the reward as stated in Verse 19 is they'll "never lack a man to serve God". What does that mean? For starters it means that even though they're not Israelites, God's aware of how they're a witness for Him based on how they live their lives. It means they will be part of the "chosen people" just as we Christians were graced in as well. When the Israelites returned from captivity, some argue that someone from this group were part of that return. However, to me that's not "forever". Let me explain better:
    - i) One of the things I've always argued is we're not saved so we can kick back all day and watch television thinking, "I'm saved now, I won't think about that stuff until I get to heaven". We're saved so God can use us to make a difference for Him.
    - ii) I'll also argue that idea continues in the next life. I'm convinced God created life in this world to prepare us for eternity. Therefore we "get used" to serving Him now, so we'll appreciate living that type of lifestyle forever. My point as it applies to the group Jeremiah's talking to, is they'll be a part of the redeemed forever.
    - iii) The shorter version is Jeremiah is assuring this group that they're saved and God's aware of the sacrifices they've made to keep their word to their vow. No it doesn't mean we have to be always sober and always living in tents to be saved. It simply means God honored them for keeping their word as how they were required to be a witness for Him.
    - iv) Another final "obvious", is God knew the Israelites of that generation we not going to change, so why bother with this lecture? For starters to show us readers what's the price for disobedience. It was also a plea for repentance. Those Israelites would lose eternal rewards for their disobedience but would still be saved by changing to how God wanted them to live. Obviously they had to learn the hard way, but that is also how we must learn a lot too!
  - c) With that said, I'm going to end a little early. The last few lessons were a bit long, so it's ok to make up for it a little and make this one a little shorter. Thanks for reading and I pray it will drive each of us to appreciate obedience. Let's pray for that as we wrap this up!
23. Heavenly Father, Help us to realize we're saved for a purpose. Help us never to waste the most valuable thing You've given us our time. Give us Your wisdom and may Your Spirit guide us so that we use our time for Your glory. Help us to be obedient not to earn Your love, but simply because it's how You've called us to live. Convict us when we turn from You and make it obvious what is Your will for us today. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen