

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: April 3rd: Jeremiah 35: Some Notes

Themes: Chapters 35 and 36 jump back in time, but stick to a theme: the editors are more concerned with theological/God message consistency than with an historical narrative. Put bluntly, which King was more or less in charge really doesn't matter much. In Chapter 35, the lesson is very clear-cut: If some Jews can stick loyally to a 300 year old family tradition, in the face of all the cultural and convenience pressures they face, why can't other Jews stick with the constantly repeated God message about how to behave? The Rechabites have been forced to abandon their nomadic existence by invading tribes encouraged by Babylon, but they are sticking to their counter-cultural tent-living, no seed planting, no vine growing, no wine-drinking way of life. Standing out against the majority, who had been sucked into Canaanite worship along with Canaanite life style. You can google Rechabite under various headings. They were more out of step than the Nazirites with society's norms.

Quotations: "We've listened to our ancestor, and we've done what he commanded us."
"And what do I get from you? Deaf ears!"

Clarifications: See also 1 Chronicles 2: 55, and 2 Kings 10: 15-28. I love the teetotal aspect of the Rechabites, and I'm less sure about tent-dwelling, and no sowing and no planting...and slaughtering the opposition doesn't appeal to me. But the key point is the cordage to be different, which we can respect in Jehovah's Witnesses, Amish, Orthodox Jews, and others, even if we don't share the convictions which they maintain with such courage.

Questions: Have we the courage to be different, and the modesty not to be arrogant about our difference? Is pressure to conform particularly hard to handle for teenagers? Some differences maybe can't be tolerated: e.g. driving on the right. What about the man who refused to wear clothes? Do we respect politicians who say what they really believe rather than what is popular? "When in Rome, do as the Romans do"?? Where do you stand on the Scottish politician who said "I don't personally believe in gay marriage, but I respect the democratic decision to legalise it"? What about the Dutch experiment of telling pacifists that their taxes would not be spent on military things? How can a teacher who believes one thing handle teaching something different? How do we handle traveller communities and the new wayside communities?