

# Jeremiah 19 - The Sign of the Broken Flask; Foreign gods

## II. Thirteen prophecies of judgment upon Judah (Jer 2:1—25:38)

(1) Nine general prophecies of judgment that include offers of repentance (Jer 2:1—19:15)

(I) Ninth message: potter's wheel and broken jar (Jer 18:1—19:15)

(b) Potter's jar (19:1-15)

(i) Place of the message: Valley of Hinnom (19:1-2)

(ii) Content of the message: Judah's hardness (19:3-9)

(iii) Illustration of the message: Jeremiah breaks the potter's jar (19:10-13)

(iv) Repetition of the message at the Temple (19:14-15)

### Jeremiah 19

(b) Potter's jar (19:1-15)

(i) Place of the message: Valley of Hinnom (19:1-2)

1 This is what the LORD says: "Go and buy a potter's earthenware **jar**, and *take* some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests.

1 Thus says the LORD, "Go and buy a potter's earthenware jar, and *take* some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests.

1 This is what the LORD says: "Go and buy a potter's clay jug. Take along some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests.

1 Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and *take* of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests;

- This is not some sort of object lesson, it is going to be a formal announcement of God's judgment. Many scholars believe that this actualized or triggered the judgment.

- The ancient of the people and the ancients of the priests, the leaders and the men with the seniority.

- "...jar" - *baqbuq*, a clay jar; in the Hebrew the word is almost onomatopoeic (sounds like a gurgling jar)

-- This was four to ten inches in diameter, and it was intended to be a vessel for water

-- In Jer 18, we had the potter forming vessels, here we have a vessel that is done, it is brittle, it is not repairable

-- Jer 18 emphasized to Jeremiah that the object was for Jeremiah, not the people, and the potter story dealt with the sovereignty and patience of God

2 Then go out to the Valley of Ben-hinnom, which is by the entrance of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you,

2 Then go out to the valley of Ben-hinnom, which is by the entrance of the potsherd gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you,

2 Go out to the Valley of Hinnom at the entrance to the Potsherd Gate, and there proclaim the words that I'm telling you.

2 And go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee,

Now there is a shift, this is going to be a very public and formal declaration. There is an analogy in 2 Kings 19:2 where there is a formal presentation; in this case we are going to have a formal presentation by Jeremiah. We will have a contrast to the patience of God; it will be the irreversible judgment that is coming. This vessel is going to be shattered shortly, and when a vessel like this is shattered, it is discarded. The message to the people is that they are going to be discarded.

This gate is called the potsherd gate, it leads to the valley of Hinnom; the Hebrew word is *harsit* and it occurs only here. It leads at the base of the mount to the valley of Hinnom. This gate is what is between the pottery industrial area and the valley of Hinnom. The valley of Hinnom is associated with child sacrifice. As a result of that, in previous administrations, mainly Josiah makes it a garbage dump for Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:10). It is in the New Testament where it becomes the *gehenna*, meaning the valley of gehenna. It becomes a cliché, not geographically for the specific area, but as an idiom in language referring to the outer darkness. Not Hades, the center of the earth, but the place of ultimate punishment. In the Targim, this gate is called the dung gate, as in Neh 2:13; 3:13-14; 12:31. In Jerome, we find in the Vulgate and some links to the name of that gate to earthenware.

So Jeremiah is taking the leadership out to this gate to make an announcement, and he carries with him this clay jar.

#### (ii) Content of the message: Judah's hardness (19:3-9)

3 and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. This is what the LORD of armies, the God of Israel says: "Behold I am going to bring a disaster upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.

3 and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon

this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.

3 "You are to say, 'Hear this message from the LORD, you kings of Judah and residents of Jerusalem!

"This is what the LORD of the Heavenly Armies, the God of Israel, says: "I'm about to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of all who hear about it tingle.

3 And say, Hear ye the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle.

- Notice the plural there (O kings of Judah): it isn't just the ruling king at that time who is bad news, but this is a sort of climax to the kings of Judah collectively.

4 Since they have abandoned Me and have made this place foreign, and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and *since they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent*

4 Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and *because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent*

4 For they have forsaken me and have treated this place as foreign. In it they have burned incense to other gods that neither they, their ancestors, nor the kings of Judah knew. They have also filled this place with the blood of innocent people.

4 Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents;

- "...filled this place with the blood of the innocent" - refer to child sacrifice and many more

5 and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a *thing* which I did not command nor speak of, nor did it ever enter My mind;

5 and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind;

5 They built the high places for Baal to burn their children in the fire as a burnt offering to Baal—something I didn't command, didn't say, nor did it ever enter my mind!

5 They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire *for* burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake *it*, neither came *it* into my mind:

- The thought in Hebrew: not only is this offensive, it never occurred to God to prohibit it.

— He is being anthropomorphic there, you can't really surprise God, but He is expressing His offense in that what they have done is so extreme that it goes beyond all the things that occurred to Him to prohibit in the Law of Moses.

— What He is saying is that they have made the land foreign by making foreign gods at home in it.

6 therefore, behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the Valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the Valley of Slaughter.

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6 ""Therefore, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when this place will no longer be called Topheth, or the Valley of Hinnom, but rather the Valley of Slaughter.

6 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter.

- Valley of Slaughter (v6,11-15; Is 30:33)

7 And I will frustrate the planning of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I will make their carcasses food for the birds of the sky and the animals of the earth.

7 I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I will give over their carcasses as food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.

7 I'll shatter the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I'll make them fall by the sword before their enemies and at the hands of those seeking their lives. I'll give their dead bodies as food to the birds of the sky and to the animals of the land.

7 And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcases will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.

8 I will also turn this city into an object of horror and hissing; everyone who passes by it will be appalled and hiss because of all its disasters.

8 I will also make this city a desolation and an *object of hissing*; everyone who passes by it will be astonished and hiss because of all its disasters.

8 I'll make this city into a desolate place and an object of scorn. All who pass by it will be astonished and will scoff because of all its wounds.

8 And I will make this city desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof.

There are a lot of plays on words here in the Hebrew. The word that means to "ruin the plans of Judah," to make vain their counsel, there is *baqaq*, which means to make empty and pour out. This word has an almost identical sound to the word *baqbuq* which is the name for the clay jar.

9 And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the siege and in the hardship with which their enemies and those who seek their life will torment them."

9 I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh in the siege and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life will distress them."

9 I'll cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and people will eat the flesh of their neighbors in the siege and in the distress to which their enemies and those seeking their lives will subject them."

9 And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them.

- In v9, God is going to describe some things. Things will get so bad that they will be driven to cannibalism. God is not ordaining cannibalism here, it is strictly prohibited in the Law of Moses: Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53-57 where it is predicted (Cf. 2 Kings 6:28-29; Lam 2:20; 4:10).

— There is sort of an irony here, because they, earlier, had sacrificed their children to the god Molech. It is interesting that they are going to be under such stress from the siege that they are going to be driven to consuming that flesh. That actually happened twice in their history. Once was in 586 BC as Nebuchadnezzar's army indeed finally sieged Jerusalem in the third siege where they ultimately level the whole city. That becomes such a desperate siege.

It happened a second time in Jerusalem under Titus Vespasian in 68-70 AD when the four Roman legions sealed off the city and ended up slaughtering a million, six thousand inhabitants and burning it to the ground. That is why Jesus Christ wept over the city and prophesied the week he was crucified. God says "I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters." He is saying because of the judgment brought upon them, they will be driven to do that. Jeremiah is instructed to say that up until verse 9.

(iii) Illustration of the message: Jeremiah breaks the potter's jar (19:10-13)

10 "Then you are to break the jar in the sight of the men who accompany you,

10 "Then you are to break the jar in the sight of the men who accompany you

10 "Then you are to break the jug in front of the men who have come with you,

10 Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee,

11 and say to them, 'This is what the LORD of armies says: "To the same extent I will break this people and this city, just as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot again be repaired; and they will bury *their dead* in Topheth, because there is no *other* place for burial.

11 and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Just so will I break this people and this city, even as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot again be repaired; and they will bury in Topheth because there is no *other* place for burial.

11 and say to them, 'This is what the LORD of the Heavenly Armies says: "In this same way I'll break this people and this city, just as someone breaks a potter's vessel which he then cannot put back together again. They'll bury corpses in Topheth until there is no more room to bury anyone.

11 And shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as *one* breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury *them* in Tophet, till *there be* no place to bury.

- This event is seen by most scholars as activating the Lord's destruction. This gets Jeremiah into a lot of trouble in Jer 20 (Pashhur's violent reaction).

Historical context: The Egyptians had a practice that if you had someone you did not like, you put their name on a jar and then you broke the jar in a sacred place. There does seem to be a parallelism here, idiomatically at least. The main idea here is that clay can be shaped and reshaped but a jar that is not useful is broken and discarded, and they are going to be broken and discarded.

12 This is how I will treat this place and its inhabitants," declares the LORD, "so as to make this city like Topheth.

12 This is how I will treat this place and its inhabitants," declares the LORD, "so as to make this city like Topheth.

12 This is what I'll do to this place and its residents," declares the LORD, "making this city like Topheth.

12 Thus will I do unto this place, saith the LORD, and to the inhabitants thereof, and even make this city as Tophet:

13 The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will be defiled like the place Topheth, because of all the houses on whose rooftops they burned sacrifices to all the heavenly lights and poured out drink offerings to other gods."'"

13 The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will be defiled like the place Topheth, because of all the houses on whose rooftops they burned sacrifices to all the heavenly host and poured out drink offerings to other gods."'"

13 The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will be polluted like Topheth, as will be all the houses on whose roofs people burned incense to all the host of heaven and poured out liquid offerings to other gods.””

13 And the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink offerings unto other gods.

- Roofs in the Middle East. Houses are often typically on a hillside, and the roof of the house is also like a garden or a patio (Judges 16:27; 1 Sam 9:26; Neh 8:16; Acts 10:9). After dinner, you typically went out there and enjoyed the sunset or whatever; it also was the place that you entertained.

— You may recall that Jesus, when he was giving his Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, said, let not a man go down from his rooftop to get his cloak, but let him flee. So think of roofs as a second story patio and you will get a better feel for the lifestyle.

The roof also is a place of idolatry (Jer 32:29, 2 Kings 23:12; Zeph 1:5). The rooftop being the center of activity in the house is also the scene where corruption is seen if they go bad. Here specifically, God indicts them for having set up incense to the hosts of heaven. This raises a whole other thing. The planets in the ancient world interfered with their lives. Because they allowed their houses to be defiled by idol worship, God is going to defile their house (Cf. Joshua 10).

#### (iv) Repetition of the message at the Temple (19:14-15)

**14** Then Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the courtyard of the LORD'S house and said to all the people,

**14** Then Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the LORD's house and said to all the people:

**14** Then Jeremiah went from Topheth where the LORD had sent him to prophesy. He stood in the courtyard of the LORD's Temple, saying to all the people,

**14** Then came Jeremiah from Tophet, whither the LORD had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the LORD'S house; and said to all the people,

15 “This is what the LORD of armies, the God of Israel says: ‘Behold, I am going to bring on this city and all its towns the entire disaster that I have declared against it, because they have stiffened their necks so as not to listen to My words.’”

15 “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am about to bring on this city and all its towns the entire calamity that I have declared against it, because they have stiffened their necks so as not to heed My words.’”

15 "This is what the LORD of the Heavenly Armies, the God of Israel, says: 'I'm about to bring on this city and all its towns all the disaster that I declared against it because they were determined not to obey my message.'"

15 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words.

- Harden their necks or stiff-necked people. Even Stephen in Acts 7:51 speaks of Israel as a stiff-necked people.

— This term refers to oxen that are unruly and will not follow the yoke. Jeremiah doing this formal public demonstration, not saying that God is going to punish them in the usual sense, but dramatizing this breaking of the jar and declaring it actualized. This did not make him popular with the leadership.