

Judah is Like a Broken Jar

Jeremiah's Third Symbolic Action

19: 1-15

DIG: What is Judah's decision regarding God's warning? Why do all the people constantly ignore ADONAI and His warning? What sense does Jeremiah try to make of their stubbornness? How was the curse of Topheth fulfilled in two stages? Who is supposed to see the lesson of the jar first? Why do you suppose he goes to the Valley of Hinnom near the Potsherd Gate? What would be happening there? What does Jeremiah's action symbolize? What does Yirmeyahu have in common with Topheth, that their fate will be similar (Second Kings 23:10)? Why does Jeremiah repeat the warning in the court of the LORD's Temple?

REFLECT: The prophets often dramatized their messages. What message do you want the world to see? How could you make the point through a symbolic action or dramatized parable? If you could have it seen on national news what you say, what would you act out?

605 BC during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim

The one main point to the third symbolic action (what might be called a parable in action) is that Judah was broken and decreed to suffer the curse of Topheth.

Yirmeyahu had a pottery clay jar under his arm. He would speak of his concern to the elders of the people and the priests. He would tell them of ADONAI's great love and holy purpose for them. He would say what he had said so many times before, that Josiah's reform was useless if it did not change people's lives. It was no good polishing up the brass in the Temple if the quality of people's lives was left unattended in their poverty. It was no good obeying the letter of the commands written in Deuteronomy if the spirit of love that permeates that scroll was ignored. It was no good being enthusiastic over the great religious traditions if the people we don't like are treated like scum. It was no good adorning religious ceremony and ritual that make us feel holy if the feelings never get connected with holy actions. Truth is inward: we must experience within ourselves that which we profess. Statistics are a farce. Popularity is a smoke screen. All that matters is God.¹⁸³

This is what ADONAI says: Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. This "flask" was a water-jar with handles, a wide belly, and a narrow neck. It's name in Hebrew, *baqbuq*, imitates the gurgling sound water makes as it is poured.

Take along some of the elders of the people (civil leaders) and of the priests (religious leaders) and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate. It was perhaps given the name because fragments of pottery were cast there as refuse. It may be identical with the Dung Gate (Nehemiah 2:13). There proclaim the words I tell you and say: Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem (19:1-2). The problem was human sacrifice and the curse that would be applied to it. The task of the prophet was not to smooth things over, but to make things right. The function of religion is not to make people feel righteous, but to make them righteous. Love? Yes, ADONAI loves us. But His love is passionate and seeks faithful, committed love in return. YHVH does not want tame pets to coddle and feed; He wants mature, free people who will respond to Him in a genuine way. For that to happen there must be honesty and truth. The self must be toppled from its pedestal. There must be pure hearts and clear minds, confession of sin and commitment of faith.

And shalom? Yes, the LORD gives shalom. But it is not a peace that gets along with everyone by avoiding the hint of anything unpleasant. It is not a peace achieved by refusing to talk about painful subjects or touch sore spots. It is a peace that is hard won by learning to pray. There is evil to combat, apathy to defeat, dullness to challenge, ambition to confront. There are persons all around us, children and parents, adolescents and adults, who are being trampled and violated, who are being hurt and despised. Any preaching of *shalom* that turns its back on these is a cruel farce.

There is nothing wrong with success, and there is nothing wrong with applause. It is not evidence of a sellout when a messianic rabbi or pastor has a crowd of people before him, and it is not proof of superficiality when a messianic synagogue or church is sparsely attended. Conversely, nor is it a sign of integrity that a man is persecuted and run out of town for what he says. He may, in fact, be a dangerous fraud. Nor can poverty be claimed as proof of courageous truth . . . the person may be simply incompetent. What is wrong is to evaluate the worth of words and deeds by their popularity. What is scandalous is to approve only what is applauded. What is disastrous is to assume that only the celebrated is genuine.

There are times when the truth will receive a wide hearing and times when it will not. Jesus had a congregation of five thousand one day and four women and two bored soldiers another. His message was the same both days. We must learn to live by the truth, not by our feelings, not by the world's opinion, not by what the latest statistical survey tells us is the most gratifying lifestyle. We are trained in the biblical faith to take lightly what the experts say, the scholars say, the pollsters say, the politicians say. We are trained to listen to the **Word of God**, to test everything (**Acts 17:11**) against what **God** reveals to us in **Christ**, to discover all meaning and worth by examining life in relation to **God's** will.¹⁸⁴

This is what ADONAI of heaven's angelic armies, the God of Isra'el, says: Listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it ring. Why is this curse coming? It was a judgment on the City for covenant violations - forsaking YHVH, going after strange gods, burning incense to them, and shedding innocent blood, which here includes the loathsome practice of child sacrifice at Topheth.

During the reigns of the wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh, human sacrifices to the Ammonite god Molech were offered in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, or the Valley of Slaughter, or Topheth. Good king Josiah stopped the practice, but after his untimely death the Jews reverted back to this evil practice, prompting ADONAI to use the prophet Jeremiah to issue his decree of doom - the curse of Topheth. For they have forsaken Me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah (meaning the House of David) ever knew and they have filled this place, Topheth, with the blood of the innocent (19:3-4).

The curse of Topheth was fulfilled in two stages. We know this because in speaking of Topheth, Matthew 27:9 declares: Then what was spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Lm - Judah Hangs Himself](#)).

The first stage was the destruction of Solomon's Temple, Jerusalem and Judah (see [Gc - The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC](#)) and the subsequent Babylonian Captivity (see [Gt - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)), and **the second stage** was the destruction of Herod's Temple, Yerushalayim and Judah by the Romans (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD](#)) and the subsequent diaspora.

The first destruction of Tziyon by the Babylonians was the result of spiritual adultery (see [At - Unfaithful Isra'el](#)) and a refusal to listen to the message of God's prophets concerning repentance, and **the second destruction by the Romans** was a result of the rejection of Yeshua Messiah, on His rejection of the Oral Law (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law](#)) and the decision of the Great Sanhedrin.

In the first stage: Then more judgment is described; first on Topheth, then on Jerusalem and its inhabitants. They have built the high places of Ba'al to burn their children in the fire (2 Kings 6:28-29; Lam 2:20, 4:10; Ezk 5:10) as offerings to Ba'al - something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter My mind. The judgment of the valley around Jerusalem will be so severe that it will necessitate a new name. So beware, **the days are coming**, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter (19:5-6).

When **Jeremiah** (under the direction of the **Ruach HaKodesh**) uses the phrase **in the days to come; the days are coming; in those days; in those days, at that time; or for the time will surely come**, the context points either to the **near historical future** or the **far eschatological future** and which one should be used. This is the seventh of twenty-five times that **Jeremiah** uses one of **these phrases**. In this case, this points to the **near historical future** of the destruction of **Zion** and **Y'hudah** by King **Nebuchadnezzar**.

I will devastate this City and make it an object of horror and scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds. Their **desperate straits will reduce them to cannibalism**. I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh because their enemies will press the siege so hard against them to destroy them (19:8-9). **Leviticus 6:29** and **Deuteronomy 28:53** were the prediction, and **Lamentations 2:10** and **4:10** were the fulfillment.

In the second stage: God declares: **And in this place I will make void the plans of Y'hudah and Yerushalayim**. The key word is **make void** (Hebrew: *baqqoti*, a pun on the flask, *baqbuq*). **And I will cause their people to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who want to kill them. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and the wild animals of the earth (19:7 ESV)**. From the time the religious leaders in **Jerusalem** attributed **Yeshua's** miracles to **Satan** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ek - It is only Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, That This Fellow Drives Out Demons**), they began planning to kill Him (see **the curse of Topheth** below). They discussed their plans (**Matthew 26:3-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-6**), when **Jesus** said, "The Father and I are One," they picked up stones to stone Him (**John 10:25-30**), and they called a meeting of the Sanhedrin to plan for His death (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ib - The Plot to Kill Jesus**).

Therefore, in the **B'rit Chadashah**, the **Great Sanhedrin** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Lg - The Great Sanhedrin**), comprising the leadership of **Isra'el**, was **planning** to have **Yeshua** executed. Part of that **planning** included the payment of 30 pieces of silver to **Judas**. Those same 30 pieces of silver were used to buy a field, the potter's field in the **Valley of Ben Hinnom**. When they thought they had gotten rid of **Christ** and all the problems **He** was causing them, they bought **the curse of Topheth** that went with it. Forty years later the **Romans** came and destroyed **Yerushalayim** and the Temple until there was no more room to bury the dead.

In the first stage: The smashed jar in front of their eyes drove home the point that both **Jerusalem** and its people were broken. Neither can be mended, at least for now. **Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching, and say to them: I will smash this nation and this City just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room (19:10-11)**, which would

make the entire City unclean (Leviticus 21:1ff). The dead will be so numerous that even the unclean site of Topheth will have to be used for their burial. So overwhelmed were the elders and the priests by the words and act of Jeremiah that no one dared interrupt him . . . no one raised their hand against him.

He continued: The shattering of Yerushalayim will make the entire city like Topheth, like an unclean dump. This is what I will do to this place and to those who live here, declares the LORD. I will make this City like Topheth. The houses in Jerusalem and those of the kings of Judah (the House of David) will be defiled like this place, Topheth - all the houses where they burned incense on the roofs like on the high places to all the starry hosts and poured out drink offerings to other gods (19:12-13).

Then Jeremiah was commanded by YHVH to go out from Topheth back to Temple Mount. Boldly, courageously he returned from the Valley of Ben Hinnom, the place of idolatry, to the Temple, the House of God, and there repeated his message to the throng of people assembled there. Jeremiah stood in the court of the LORD's Temple where God had sent him to prophesy. In the Valley of Slaughter the prophet had spoken only to the leadership of Judah, but now in the Temple Court he spoke to all the people. "This is what the LORD of heaven's angelic armies, the God of Isra'el, says: Listen! I AM going to bring on this City and all the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to My words" (19:14-15).

Confidence in the Potter comes in knowing the Potter, not in observing Him spin the wheel and shape the clay from the vantage point of a supposed neutrality. Rabbi Sha'ul reflects on the Potter (Romans 9:18-24) develops this point profoundly and in a manner consistent with the book of Jeremiah. The clay does not have the right to question the Potter; but much more significant is the claim that the Potter has intentions of preparing jars for His glory and fit for His mercy. In the process of fulfilling these purposes, human jars can be shaped and reshaped and used in ways not understood by the human jars themselves. Their "essence" is not violated, but taken up and used by the God of grace.¹⁸⁵