

Jeremiah

Chapter 19

The Broken Flask

Thus says the LORD, “Go, buy a potter's earthenware flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, 2 and go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. 3 You shall 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 bringing such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. 4 Because the people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, 5 and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind— 6 therefore, behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. 7 And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will cause their people to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the earth. 8 And I will make this city a horror, a thing to be hissed at. Everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its wounds. 9 And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress, with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them.’ 10 “Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, 11 and shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury. 12 Thus will I do to this place, declares the LORD, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. 13 The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah—all the houses on whose roofs offerings have been offered to all the host of heaven, and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods—shall be defiled like the place of Topheth.’” 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: 15 “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words.”

19:1–15 A jar deliberately broken by Jeremiah (vv. 1–10) symbolizes the forthcoming destruction of Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 11–15). In ch. 18, the potter's clay was still moist and pliable, making it possible to reshape and rework it (see 18:1–11). In ch. 19, however, the clay jar is hard and, if unsuitable for the owner's use, can only be destroyed (see v. 11). (CSB)

19:1–13 Jeremiah acted out the threatened punishment of Judah in another dramatized parable. Jeremiah prefaced the symbolic action with a scathing denunciation of his people's heinous crimes. (TLSB)

19:1 *flask*. The Hebrew for this word implies a vessel with a narrow neck, perhaps the water decanter frequently found in excavations and ranging from 5 to 12 inches high. (CSB)

elders. Hebrew *zaqen*; term related to “beard.” Used for various levels of tribal leadership. A body of 70 elders led Israel, representing the tribes (e.g. Ex 24:9; c six elders per tribe). Elders were often

associated with religious leadership and acted as counselors to rulers. Each city typically had elders who acted as judges. (PBC)

of the priests. See 2Ki 19:2, “leading priests” (lit. “elders of the priests”). Elders in Israel were of two kinds, one performing primarily civil functions and the other primarily religious functions. (CSB)

19:2 *Valley of Son Hinnom.* The Valley of Ben-hinnom, south and southwest of the city. (Kretzmann)

Potsherd Gate. The Hebrew underlying the word “Potsherd” is the same as that translated “clay” in v. 1. The Jerusalem Targum identified the Potsherd Gate (so called because it overlooked the main dump for broken pottery) with the Dung Gate of Ne 2:13. (CSB)

Likely another name for the Dung Gate, which led to the city dump in the Hinnom Valley. (TLSB)

19:3 *kings.* The current king and all subsequent ruling members of David’s dynasty. (CSB)

disaster ... ears ... tingle. Echoed from 2Ki 21:12 (see 1Sa 3:11). The phrase refers to the shock of hearing an announcement of threatened punishment. (CSB)

Ringling as after a peal of thunder with the unequaled horror of the news. (Kretzmann)

19:4 *they.* All who tried to combine the worship of idols with the worship of the one true God. (CSB)

this ... place. Jerusalem. (CSB)

filled this place with the blood of the innocent. The blood of godly people (see 2:34; 7:6; 22:3, 17; 26:15), specifically as shed by wicked King Manasseh. (CSB)

Children who did not deserve to be executed (TLSB)

19:5 *Baal* – The chief idol of the Canaanites. (Kretzmann)

not command or decree, nor did they come to mind – The heaping of synonymous expressions indicating that the very idea of such offerings was utterly loathsome to Him. (Kretzmann)

19:6 *Topheth* – A name thought by some commentators to have been given to the place because drums (Hebrew, *toph*) were beaten to drown out the cries of the children that were being sacrificed. (Kretzmann)

Valley of Slaughter – This was where the enemies would descend upon the men of Judah to cut them down unmercifully. (Kretzmann)

19:7 *make void.* Lit. “pour out.” As Jeremiah was saying this, he may have been pouring water from the jar to the ground (cf. 2Sa 14:14). (CSB)

fall by the sword before their enemies. The Babylonians are the instruments of the divine threat (see 20:6). (CSB)

dear bodies for food to the birds... beasts of the earth. The birds and beasts of prey making a welcome meal of their unburied corpses. (Kretzmann)

19:8 Echoes the language of 18:16. (CSB)

make this city a horror. The same Hebrew root underlies both words. (CSB)

hissed at. So that people would make noises of surprise and sneering at its downfall, cp.chap. 18,16. (Kretzmann)

19:9 One of the covenant curses (see Lev 26:29; Dt 28:53–57). (CSB)

eat the flesh of their sons and daughters ... eat one neighbor's flesh. † When Jerusalem's food supply ran out during the Babylonian siege in 586 B.C., cannibalism resulted (see La 2:20; 4:10; Eze 5:10). Such shocking activity was not unprecedented in Israel (see 2Ki 6:28–29), and it would occur again: "A woman ... who ... had fled to Jerusalem ... killed her son, roasted him, and ate one half, concealing and saving the rest" (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6.3.4). (CSB)

19:10–11 The Egyptians would write curses on clay vessels and then smash them to symbolize the destruction of their enemy. At God's command, Jeremiah performs a similar symbolic act. (TLSB)

19:11 *break this people... as one breaks a potter's vessel.* Egyptians of the 12th Dynasty (1991–1786 B.C.) inscribed the names of their enemies on pottery bowls and then smashed them, hoping to break the power of their enemies by so doing. (CSB)

never be mended. Though the same material may be used once more in making another vessel. (Kretzmann)

no place else to bury – In an unclean place, the regular burial-places being insufficient to hold them all, **till there be no place to bury.** It is significant that Acedama, the Field of Blood, Matt. 27, 3ff.; Acts 1, 18, 19, was located in this neighborhood. (Kretzmann)

19:12 *like this place of Topheth* – As an unclean place, full of rubbish and carcasses. (Kretzmann)

19:13 *on whose roofs.* The kings of Judah had built pagan altars on the roof of the palace in Jerusalem (see 2Ki 23:12). The Ugaritic Keret epic of the 14th century B.C. describes a similar practice: "Go to the top of a tower, bestride the top of the wall ... Honor Baal with your sacrifice ... Then descend ... from the housetops." (CSB)

host of heaven. Worship of the sun, moon and stars was common in Judah throughout much of the later history of the monarchy (see, e.g., 2Ki 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4–5; Zep 1:5). (CSB)

drink offerings to other gods. The Lord's complaint with regard to these transgressions being repeated time and again. In our days the gross idolatry of ancient days has been replaced by a finer form of false worship, but its guilt is just as bad as in those days. (Kretzmann)

19:14–15 Jeremiah wanted this oracle of doom to reach the largest possible audience, so he prophesied in the temple court, where people gathered for services and festivals. (TLSB)

19:14 *all the people.* A much larger audience than the elders of v. 1. (CSB)

Ch 19 Jeremiah proclaims God's judgment against His people by breaking a piece of pottery near the valley where children had been sacrificed to pagan gods. As Jeremiah breaks the clay vessel, so God will break Jerusalem and reduce the population to destruction. As heinous as their sin is, God stands ready to

forgive and save, if only they will repent and return to Him. • Father, turn us away from sin, and bring us back to You each day by Your grace in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)