

CHAPTER 19

The same melancholy theme is the subject of this chapter that was of those foregoing — the approaching ruin of Judah and Jerusalem for their sins. This Jeremiah had often foretold; here he has particularly full orders to foretel it again.

I. He must set their sins in order before them, as he had often done, especially their idolatry (v. 4, 5).

II. He must describe the particular judgments which were now coming apace upon them for these sins (v. 6-9).

III. He must do this in the valley of Tophet, with great solemnity, and for some particular reasons (v. 2, 3).

IV. He must summon a company of the elders together to be witnesses of this (v. 1).

V. He must confirm this, and endeavour to affect his hearers with it, by a sign, which was the breaking of an earthen bottle, signifying that they should be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel (v. 10-13).

VI. When he had done this in the valley of Tophet he ratified it in the court of the temple (v. 14, 15). Thus were all likely means tried to awaken this stupid senseless people to repentance, that their ruin might be prevented; but all in vain.

◀191▶ JEREMIAH 19:1-9

THE DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM

The corruption of man having made it necessary that *precept* should be upon *precept*, and *line upon line* (so unapt are we to receive, and so very apt to let slip, the things of God), the grace of God has provided that there shall be, accordingly, *precept upon precept*, and *line upon line*, that those who are irreclaimable may be inexcusable. For this reason the prophet is here sent with a message to the same purport with what he had often delivered, but with some circumstances that might make it the more taken notice of, a thing which ministers should study, for a little circumstance

may sometimes be a great advantage, and those that would win souls must be wise.

I. He must take of the elders and chief men, both in church and state, to be his auditors and witnesses to what he said — *the ancients of the people and the ancients of the priests*, the most eminent men both in the magistracy and in the ministry, that they might be *faithful witnesses to record*, as those ^{<38D>}Isaiah 8:2. It is strange that these great men should be at the beck of a poor prophet, and obey his summons to attend him out of the city, they know not whither and they knew not why. But, though the generality of the elders were disaffected to him, yet it is likely that there were some few among them who looked upon him as a prophet of the Lord, and would pay this respect to the heavenly vision. Note, Persons of rank and figure have an opportunity of honouring God, by a diligent attendance on the ministry of the word and other divine institutions; and they ought to think it an honour, and no disparagement to themselves, yea, though the circumstances be mean and despicable. It is certain that the greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of God.

II. He must *go to the valley of the son of Hinnom*, and deliver this message there; for *the word of the Lord* is not bound to any one place; as good a sermon may be preached in the valley of Tophet as in the gate of the temple. Christ preached on a mountain and out of a ship. This valley lay partly on the south side of Jerusalem, but the prophet's way to it was *by the entry on the east gate — the sun gate* (v. 2), so some render it, and suppose it to look not towards the sun-rising, but the noon sun — *the potter's gate*, so some. This sermon must be preached in that place, in *the valley of the son of Hinnom*,

- 1.** Because there they had been guilty of the vilest of their idolatries, the sacrificing of their children to Moloch, a horrid piece of impiety, which the sight of the place might serve to remind them of and upbraid them with.
- 2.** Because there they should feel the sorest of their calamities; there the greatest slaughter should be made among them; and, it being the common sink of the city, let them look upon it and see what a miserable spectacle this magnificent city would be when it should be all like the valley of Tophet. God bids him go thither, *and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee*, when thou comest thither; whereby it appears (as Mr. Gataker

well observed) that God's messages were frequently not revealed to the prophets before the very instant of time wherein they were to deliver them.

III. He must give general notice of a general ruin now shortly coming upon Judah and Jerusalem, v. 3. He must, as those that make proclamation, begin with an *Oyes: Hear you the word of the Lord*, though it be a terrible word, for you may thank yourselves if it be so. Both rulers and ruled must attend to it, at their peril; the *kings of Judah*, the king and his sons, the king and his princes and privy-counsellors, must hear the word of the King of kings, for, high as they are, he is above them. The *inhabitants of Jerusalem* also must hear what God has to say to them. Both princes and people have contributed to the national guilt and must concur in the national repentance, or they will both share in the national ruin. Let them all know that *the Lord of hosts*, who is therefore able to do what he threatens, though he is *the God of Israel*, nay, because he is so, will therefore punish them in the first place for their iniquities (^{<OR1>}Amos 3:2): *He will bring evil upon this place (upon Judah and Jerusalem) so surprising, and so dreadful, that whosoever hears it, his ears shall tingle; whosoever hears the prediction of it, hears the report and representation of it, it shall make such an impression of terror upon him that he shall still think he hears it sounding in his ears and shall not be able to get it out of his mind.* The ruin of Eli's house is thus described (^{<OR1>}1 Samuel 3:11), and of Jerusalem, ^{<OR2>}2 Kings 21:12.

IV. He must plainly tell them what their sins were for which God had this controversy with them, v. 4, 5. They are charged with apostasy from God (*They have forsaken me*) and abuse of the privileges of the visible church, and which they had been dignified — *They have estranged this place.* Jerusalem (the holy city), the temple (the holy house), which was designed for the honour of God and the support of his kingdom among men, they had alienated from those purposes, and (as some render the word) *they had strangely abused.* They had so polluted both with their wickedness that God had disowned both, and abandoned them to ruin. He charges them with an affection for and the adoration of false *gods*, such as *neither they nor their fathers have known*, such as never had recommended themselves to their belief and esteem by any acts of power or goodness done for them or their ancestors, as that God had abundantly done whom they forsook; yet they took them at a venture for their gods; nay, being fond of change and novelty, they liked them the better for their being upstarts, and new

fashions in religion were as grateful to their fancies as in other things. They also stand charged with murder, wilful murder, from malice prepense: *They have filled this place with the blood of innocents*. It was Manasseh's sin (~~2204~~ 2 Kings 24:4), *which the Lord would not pardon*. Nay, as if idolatry and murder, committed separately, were not bad enough and affront enough to God and man, they have put them together, have consolidated them into one complicated crime, that of burning their children in the fire to Baal (v. 5), which was the most insolent defiance to all the laws both of natural and revealed religion that ever mankind was guilty of; and by it they openly declared that they loved their new gods better than ever they loved the true God, though they were such cruel task-masters that they required human sacrifices (inhuman I should call them), which the Lord Jehovah, whose all lives and souls are, never demanded from his worshippers; he never *spoke* of such a thing, nor *came it into his mind*. See ~~2473~~ Jeremiah 7:31.

V. He must endeavour to affect them with the greatness of the desolation that was coming upon them. He must tell them (as he had done before, ~~2472~~ Jeremiah 7:32) that this *valley of the son of Hinnom* shall acquire a new name, *the valley of slaughter* (v. 6), for (v. 7) multitudes shall *fall there by the sword*, when either they sally out upon the besiegers and are repulsed or attempt to make their escape and are seized: *They shall fall before their enemies*, who not only endeavour to make themselves masters of their houses and estates, but have such an implacable enmity to them that they *seek their lives*; they thirst after their blood, and, when they are dead, will not allow a cartel for the burying of the slain, but *their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven and beasts of the earth*. What a dismal place will the valley of Tophet be then! And as for those that remain within the city, and will not capitulate with the besiegers, they shall perish for want of food, when first they have eaten *the flesh of their sons and daughters*, and dearest *friends*, through the *straitness wherewith their enemies shall straiten them*, v. 9. This was threatened in the law as an instance of the extremity to which the judgments of God should reduce them (~~0329~~ Leviticus 26:29, ~~0353~~ Deuteronomy 28:53) and was accomplished, ~~2500~~ Lamentations 4:10. And, *lastly*, the whole *city* shall be *desolate*, the houses laid in ashes, the inhabitants slain or taken prisoners; there shall be no resort to it, nor any thing in it but what looks rueful and horrid; so that *every one that passes by shall be astonished* (v. 8), as he had said before,

~~2186~~ Jeremiah 18:16. That place which holiness had made *the joy of the whole earth* sin had made the reproach and shame of the whole earth.

VI. He must assure them that all their attempts to prevent and avoid this ruin, so long as they continued impenitent and unreformed, would be fruitless and vain (v. 7): *I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem* (of the princes and senators of Judah and Jerusalem) *in this place*, in the royal palace, which lay on the south side of the city, not far from the place where the prophet now stood. Note, There is no fleeing from God's justice but by fleeing to his mercy. Those that will not make good God's counsel, by humbling themselves under his mighty hand, shall find that God will make void their counsel and blast their projects, which they think ever so well concerted for their own preservation. There is *no counsel* or strength *against the Lord*.

~~2190~~ JEREMIAH 19:10-15

THE DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM

The message of wrath delivered in the foregoing verses is here enforced, that it might gain credit, two ways: —

I. By a visible sign. The prophet was to take along with him an *earthen bottle* (v. 1), and, when he had delivered his message, he was to *break the bottle* to pieces (v. 10), and the same that were auditors of the sermon must be spectators of the sign. He had compared this people, in the chapter before, to the potter's clay, which is easily marred in the making. But some might say, "It is past that with us; we have been made and hardened long since." "And what though you be," says he, "the potter's vessel is as soon broken in the hand of any man as the vessel while it is soft clay is marred in the potter's hand, and its case is, in this respect, much worse, that the vessel while it is soft clay, though it be marred, may be moulded again, but, after it is hardened, when it is broken it can never be pieced again." Perhaps what they see will affect them more than what they only hear talk of; that is the intention of sacramental signs, and teaching by symbols was anciently used. In the explication of this sign he must inculcate what he had before said, with a further reference to the place where this was done, in the valley of Tophet.

1. As the bottle was easily, irresistibly, and irrecoverably broken by the Chaldean army, v. 11. They depended much upon the firmness of their constitution, and the fixedness of their courage, which they thought hardened them like a vessel of brass; but the prophet shows that all that did but harden them like a vessel of earth, which, though hard, is brittle and sooner broken than that which is not so hard. Though they were made vessels of honour, still they were vessels of earth, and so they shall be made to know if they dishonour God and themselves, and serve not the purposes for which they were made. It is God himself, who made them, that resolves to unmake them: *I will break this people and this city, dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel; the doom of the heathen* (⁴¹⁰⁹Psalm 2:9, ⁴¹²⁷Revelation 2:27), but now Jerusalem's doom, ²³¹⁴Isaiah 30:14. *A potter's vessel, when once broken, cannot be made whole again, cannot be cured, so the word is. The ruin of Jerusalem shall be an utter ruin; no hand can repair it but his that broke it; and if they return to him, though he has torn, he will heal.*

2. This was done in Tophet, to signify two things: —

(1.) That Tophet should be the receptacle of the slain: *They shall bury in Tophet till there be no place to bury any more there; they shall jostle for room to lay their dead, and a very little room will then serve those who, while they lived, laid house to house and field to field. Those that would be placed alone in the midst of the earth while they were above ground, and obliged all about them to keep their distance, must lie with the multitude when they are underground, for there are innumerable before them.*

(2.) That Tophet should be a resemblance of the whole city (v. 12): *I will make this city as Tophet.* As they had filled the valley of Tophet with the slain which they sacrificed to their idols, so God will fill the whole city with the slain that shall fall as sacrifices to the justice of God. We read (⁴²³¹2 Kings 23:10) of Josiah's defiling Tophet, because it had been abused to idolatry, which he did (as should seem, v. 14) by *filling it with the bones of men*; and, whatever it was before, thenceforward it was looked upon as a detestable place. Dead carcasses, and other filth of the city, were carried thither, and a fire was continually kept there for the burning of it. This was the posture of that valley when Jeremiah was sent thither to prophesy; and so execrable a place was it looked upon to be that, in the language of our Saviour's time, hell was called, in allusion to it, *Gehenna, the valley of*

Hinnom. “Now” (says God) “since that blessed reformation, when Tophet was defiled, did not proceed as it ought to have done, nor prove a thorough reformation, but though the idols in Tophet were abolished and made odious those in Jerusalem remained, therefore will I do with the city as Josiah did by Tophet, fill it with the bodies of men, and make it a heap of rubbish.” Even *the houses of Jerusalem, and those of the kings of Judah*, the royal palaces not excepted, *shall be defiled as the place of Tophet* (v. 13), and for the same reason, because of the idolatries that have been committed there; since they will not defile them by a reformation, God will defile them by a destruction, *because upon the roofs of their houses they have burnt incense unto the host of heaven*. The flat roofs of their houses were sometimes used by devout people as convenient places for prayer (~~411~~ Acts 10:9), and by idolaters they were used as high places, on which they sacrificed to strange gods, especially to *the host of heaven*, the sun, moon, and stars, that there they might be so much nearer to them and have a clearer and fuller view of them. We read of those that *worshipped the host of heaven upon the house-tops* (~~305~~ Zephaniah 1:5), and of *altars on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz*, ~~272~~ 2 Kings 23:12. This sin upon the house-tops brought a curse into the house, which consumed it, and made it a dunghill like Tophet.

II. By a solemn recognition and ratification of what he had said *in the court of the Lord's house*, v. 14, 15. The prophet returned from Tophet to the temple, which stood upon the hill over that valley, and there confirmed, and probably repeated, what he had said in the valley of Tophet, for the benefit of those who had not heard it; what he had said he would stand to. Here, as often before, he both assures them of judgments coming upon them and assigns the cause of them, which was their sin. Both these are here put together in a little compass, with a reference to all that had gone before.

1. The accomplishment of the prophecies is here the judgment threatened. The people flattered themselves with a conceit that God would be better than his word, that the threatening was but to frighten them and keep them in awe a little; but the prophet tells them that they deceive themselves if they think so: *For thus saith the Lord of hosts*, who is able to make his words good, *I will bring upon this city, and upon all her towns*, all the smaller cities that belong to Jerusalem the metropolis, *all the evil that I have pronounced against it*. Note, Whatever men may think to the contrary, the executions of Providence will fully answer the predictions of

the word, and God will appear as terrible against sin and sinners as the scripture makes him; nor shall the unbelief of men make either his promises or his threatenings of no effect or of less effect than they were thought to be of.

2. The contempt of the prophecies is here the sin charged upon them, as the procuring cause of this judgment. It is *because they have hardened their necks*, and would not bow and bend them to the yoke of God's commands, would *not hear my words*, that is, would not heed them and yield obedience to them. Note, The obstinacy of sinners in their sinful ways is altogether their own fault; if their necks are hardened, it is their own act and deed, they have hardened them; if they are deaf to the word of God, it is because they have stopped their own ears. We have need therefore to pray that God, by his grace, would deliver us *from hardness of heart and contempt of his word and commandments*.