

## JEREMIAH 19

## THE BROKEN CLAY VESSEL

In the last chapter, we followed the prophet to the potter's house, where he watched him at his work. Now, in this chapter, the Lord commanded him to get a potter's clay vessel. He was to take it to the Valley of Hinnom, outside Jerusalem; and there he was to utter the words that the Lord told him. He was to take the elders and chief men of the city to be his faithful witnesses to what he said. This sermon was to be preached in this particular valley because that spot had been the location of the vilest of the people's idolatries. It was there that they were guilty of the despicable, detestable abomination of sacrificing their own sons and daughters to the idol Moloch. As they listened to Jeremiah's message, the sight of this place would serve to remind them of their horrid crimes; and then their own consciences would accuse themselves.

The Lord's Word that was to be proclaimed on this solemn occasion was a notice of general ruin that was coming upon Judah and Jerusalem very swiftly (verse 3). Jeremiah was bound to plainly tell his countrymen what their sins were, for which God had this controversy with them (verses 4-5). They were charged with apostasy from the Lord ("they have forsaken me"), and with misusing the privileges of the visible Church ("they have estranged this place"). Jerusalem ("the holy city") and the Temple ("the holy house") were designed for the honor of Jehovah and the support of His Kingdom among men, but these people had turned away from those holy purposes. They had polluted both the city and the Temple with their wickedness to such a degree that God disowned both, and abandoned them to ruin. Jeremiah also charged the people with an affection and adoration for false gods. The Lord had abundantly done marvelous works for them, but they forsook Him and joined themselves with idols of their own making. They also stood charged with murder ("they have filled this place with the blood of innocents"). And as if idolatry and murder committed separately were not bad enough, and enough of an affront to both God and man; they had put them together, and consolidated them into one complicated crime – namely, that of burning their sons and daughters in the fire to Baal! (verse 5)

The prophet endeavored to impress upon the people's minds the greatness of the desolation that was coming upon them. He was to tell them (as he had done before in chapter 7:32) that this Valley of Hinnom would acquire a new name – namely, the valley of slaughter (verse 6), for multitudes would fall there by the sword (verse 7). They would fall before their enemies, who were not only aiming to make themselves masters of their houses and estates, but they also had such an implacable enmity to them that they sought their lives. What a dismal place this valley would be then! And as for those who remained within the city,

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jeremiah preaches a message in the Valley of Hinnom – verses 1-13
- ❖ He speaks to the people in the court of the Temple – verses 14-15

and would not capitulate with the besiegers; they would perish for lack of food, and be forced to resort to eating the flesh of their own sons and daughters and dearest friends (verse 9). The whole city of Jerusalem would be desolate; the houses would be laid in ashes, and the inhabitants slain or taken prisoners; and everyone who passed by would be astonished at the sight (verse 8).

All the people's attempts to prevent and avoid this ruin would be fruitless and vain, as long as they continued unrepentant and unreformed (verse 7). There is no way to flee from God's justice, except by fleeing to His mercy. Those who will not obey God's good counsel by humbling themselves under His mighty hand shall find that He will make void their own foolish counsel and blast their projects, which they thought were so well-planned for their own preservation. There is no counsel nor strength against the Lord!

The message of wrath that Jeremiah delivered was enforced in two ways, in order that it might gain credit among the audience. The first way was by a visible sign. The prophet had taken along with him a clay vessel (verse 1); and after he had finished delivering his message, he was to break the bottle in pieces



(verse 10) in the sight of all present. In the last chapter, he had compared the people to the potter's clay, which is easily marred in the making of a vessel. But some of them might have been inclined to think, "It is past that stage with us; we have been made and hardened a long time ago." "What does that matter?" asked the prophet. "The finished vessel can be broken in the hands of anyone just as quickly and easily as it can be marred when it is still in the potter's hands. And in this respect, its case is much worse – for the marred vessel that is still soft clay may be reshaped; but after it is hardened, it can never be pieced together again when it is broken." The people depended much upon the firmness of their constitution, and the stoutness of their courage; they thought that these things hardened them like a vessel of brass. But the prophet showed that all of those things only hardened them like a vessel of clay; although it is hard, it is still brittle and easily broken. And it was God Himself – the Master Potter Who made them – Who now resolved to break them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27). A clay vessel, when it is broken, cannot be made whole again. No hand can repair it, except His that broke it; and if people will only return to Him, He will indeed heal them.

The second way that Jeremiah enforced the power of his message was by going to the court of the Lord's house, and there giving a solemn recognition and ratification of what he had said in the Valley of Hinnom (verses 14-15). Contempt of the Lord's prophecies is the specific sin that was here charged upon these people (verse 15). Let us pray that God, by His grace, would deliver us from hardness of heart and contempt of His Word and commandments!

*Lord, we have willfully forsaken You many times, and polluted the Temple of our hearts with our idolatries. Pour out Your forgiveness and mercies upon us! Amen.*