

Tophet, Place of Fire (Jeremiah 19:1–17)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (5/17/ 2020)

Introduction

1. A second visit to the potter's house

The prophet is instructed to purchase a clay jar to take to the *Potsherd Gate* at the Valley of Hinnom to illustrate the judgment God.

A *potsherd* was piece of broken pottery used as a scraper. The gate, later known as the Dung Gate, was at the southeast corner of the city.

2. The location for the message

a. *Tophet* was a “high place” of sacrifice origin-ally used for the worship of Yahweh.

b. Manasseh did “*things more evil than all that the Amorites did, who were before him*” (2 Kings 21:11). For this reason, the Lord announced disaster (2 Kings 21:12, repeated in Jeremiah 19:3). However, the merciful Lord allowed the wicked king to repent and avert the disaster in his day (2 Chronicles 33:10–20).

c. Although Josiah, Manasseh's son, turned to the Lord with all his heart and brought about great reforms, the Lord did not relent of His resolve to execute judgment on Judah. (2 Kings 23:25–27).

3. The not-so-obvious truth in the message

a. Although Manasseh repented and Josiah reformed, the people of Judah remained obstinate in their refusal to return to the Lord and covenant obedience (Jeremiah 19:15).

b. This gives the message of Jeremiah greater implications borne out in the NT and fulfilled in the final judgment at the return of Christ.

e. The doctrine of eternal punishment—*hell*—is at the heart of this message, as is evident in the teaching of Jesus Christ.

4. The sad denial of the modern church

a. A search of records in one N.Y. city church revealed that in 45 years there was not one message on the doctrine of hell.

b. Those who cannot ignore the doctrine tend to be vague so as not to upset or offend hearers.

c. Jeremiah demonstrates to the modern church that following false prophets does not protect them when they face God's wrath. Modern Christianity is disinclined to preach an angry God who punishes sin in His wrath.

I. The OT Revelation of Hell

1. The various Hebrew and Greek words (translated *hell* in the KJV) are used in three ways:

a. The *grave* in which the body is laid to rest (Psalm 16:10; Job 14:13)

b. The *realm* of departed spirits (Luke 16:19–31)

c. The *lake of fire*, place of eternal punishment, the second death (Revelation 20:14, 15)

2. OT revelation of the afterlife was very limited.

a. No clear teaching on either heaven or hell

b. The hope of OT believers was future resurrection, not immediate glory (Job 19:25–27; Psalm 17:15).

c. Nevertheless, the concept of eternal punishment was revealed (Daniel 12:2).

1) A place of everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2)

2) A place to discard the wicked (Psalm 9:17)

3) A place of fire and burning (Isaiah 33:14; 66:24; Jeremiah 17:4)

This truth is *progressively* expanded in the Scripture.

II. Christ's Teaching on Hell

1. The truth of eternal punishment is unfolded in the teachings of Jesus.
 - a. Jesus taught more about eternal punishment in hell than any other single subject, except money.
 - b. It is important to consider that Jesus taught this truth as the gentle Savior in His first coming, not the final Judge before whom all will appear to be read their eternal sentence.
2. What Jesus taught
 - a. He taught that hell was a literal *place of fire* (Matthew 13:41; Mark 9:47, 48).
 - b. He taught that hell is a place of *suffering* and torment (Matthew 13:49, 50; Luke 16:24).
 - c. He taught that punishment for sin in hell was *eternal* (Matthew 25:46).
 - d. Jesus taught that hell would also be a place of "outer darkness" (Matthew 22:13; Jude 13).

III. The Correlation with Jeremiah

1. *Tophet* is the connection of Jeremiah to the teachings of Jesus.
 - a. The horrible and unspeakable evil of the worship of Molech became the focus of God's wrath against the unrepentant nation. This was introduced into Israel by Solomon (1 Kings 11:7).
 - b. Molech worship passes under a more sophisticated cover in this modern age as women's health, but the startling truth remains that in the present children are sacrificed to demons in ex-change for sexual freedom with no consequences.
2. Jesus introduced a new term for hell—*Gehenna* (Matthew 10:28).
 - a. The Greek word means "Valley of Hinnom," the location of *Tophet*.
 - b. Josiah destroyed the idols, altars, and asherim in the Valley of Hinnom, turning it into the garbage dump of Jerusalem—a place of burning.
 - c. Jesus used the term to tie together the judgment of God and subsequent punishment of evil doers.

What Can We Conclude?

1. Shall we diminish the horror of hell and the awful fact of divine wrath for the sake of pleasing the carnal pleasure-seeking sinner who wants nothing to do with God at all?

Defining hell as "separation from God" does little to terrify sinners. As Sproul states, "A breath of relief is usually heard when someone declares, 'Hell is a symbol for separation from God.' To be separated from God is no great threat to the impenitent person."
2. Does not a proper understanding of God as just and righteous enhance the glory of His mercy and grace in His kindness through salvation?

Remember Jeremiah's exclamation: "*A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary*" (Jeremiah 17:12).
3. Why would a loving God send sinners to hell? What is the proof that He does?
 - 1) It is *reasonable*. Everyone understands that wrongs must be justly put to right and wrongs punished.
 - 2) It is *biblical*. The Bible is full of clear statements to that effect.
 - 3) It is *demonstrable*. By the death of Christ, for the cross is the measure of God's love for sinners. Hell, in turn, is the measure of God's love for His Son. And by the holiness of God, because holiness qualifies God's love; therefore, Jesus had to go to the cross. As flame is to tinder so is holy wrath to sin.