

10. Jeremiah 18-21



## Jeremiah 18:1-6

The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH: “Get up! Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.”

So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of YHWH came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says YHWH. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

## Jeremiah 18:7-10

At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it.

And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it.

## Jeremiah 18:11-12

Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says YHWH: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

But they say, “It is no use! We will follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of our evil will.”

## Jeremiah 18:13-17

Therefore thus says YHWH:

Ask among the nations: Who has heard the like of this?

The **virgin** Israel has done a most horrible thing.

‘Virgin’ (see 14:17) : Israel has not produced life!

Does the snow of Lebanon leave the crags of Sirion?

Do the mountain waters run dry, the cold flowing streams?

But my people have forgotten me, they burn offerings to a delusion;

they have stumbled in their ways, in the ancient roads, (6:16)

and have gone into bypaths, not the highway,

making their land a horror, a thing to be hissed at forever.

All who pass by it are horrified and shake their heads.

Like the wind from the east, I will scatter them before the enemy.

I will show them my back, not my face, in the day of their calamity.

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‘Jeremiah perceives Yahweh as never being able altogether to believe that Israel would forget him: it is inconceivable, yet it is true. The punishment will fit the crime, and Israel is condemned to endless walking away from her land, the land a ruin; the people will be face to face with the enemy and will find Yahweh walking off. There are many passages like this in Jeremiah, and many passages like it elsewhere in the OT, but few with the sense of scope of this one: high, distant Lebanon; the cosmic sea; desert paths stretching off without aim or end. The rescue from Egypt had been described in cosmic terms (Exodus 15:4–10); it was Jeremiah’s task to use cosmic terms in depicting the disobedience and consequent demise of the people.’

## Jeremiah 18:21

Then they said, “Come, let us plot against Jeremiah —  
for instruction shall not perish from the priest,  
nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.  
Come, let us bring charges against him,  
and let us not heed any of his words.”

Give heed to me, YHWH, and listen to what my adversaries say!  
Is evil a recompense for good? Yet they have dug a pit for my life.  
Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them,  
to turn away your wrath from them.  
Therefore give their children over to famine;  
hurl them out to the power of the sword,  
let their wives become childless and widowed.  
May their men meet death by pestilence,  
their youths be slain by the sword in battle.

## Jeremiah 18:22-23

May a cry be heard from their houses,  
when you bring the marauder suddenly upon them!  
For they have dug a pit to catch me,  
and laid snares for my feet.

Yet you, YHWH, know all their plotting to kill me.  
Do not forgive their iniquity,  
do not blot out their sin from your sight.  
Let them be tripped up before you;  
deal with them while you are angry.

The situation appears to favour the false prophets. Jeremiah appears to be doubting the validity of his mission and wants God's judgment to vindicate him.



## Jeremiah 19:1-3

Thus said YHWH: Go and buy a potter's earthenware jug  
Take with you some of the elders of the people and some  
of the senior priests, and go out to the valley of Ben-  
Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim  
there the words that I tell you. You shall say: Hear the  
word of YHWH, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of  
Jerusalem. Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: I  
am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the  
ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle.

## Jeremiah 19:4-5

Because the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent, and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal (2 Kings 21:6, 16), which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind.

## Psalms 106:37-38

They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons.  
They poured out innocent blood,  
the blood of their sons and daughters,  
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;  
and the land was polluted with blood.

Jeremiah 19:6-9 (see 7:31-32)

Therefore the days are surely coming, says YHWH, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the valley of Ben-Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter.

Topheth (see 2Kings 23:10) appears to be a cult site in the valley where child sacrifice to the god Molech took place.

And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will make them 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 wild animals of the earth. 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 disasters. And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and all shall eat the flesh of their neighbours in the siege, and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them.

## Jeremiah 19:10-13

Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with you, and shall say to them: Thus says YHWH 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. In Topheth they shall bury until there is no more room to bury. Thus will I do to this place, says YHWH, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Topheth – all the houses upon whose roofs offerings have been made to the whole host of heaven, and libations have been poured out to other gods.

## Jeremiah 19:14-15

When Jeremiah came from Topheth, where YHWH had sent him to prophesy, he stood in the court of the YHWH's house and said to all the people: Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: I am now bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks, refusing to hear my words.

## Jeremiah 20:1-4

Now the priest Pashhur [Egyptian: ‘son of Horus’] son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of YHWH (head of the temple-police), heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. Then Pashhur struck **the prophet** (1:5) Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of YHWH. The next morning when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, YHWH has named you not Pashhur (‘Fruitful-all-around’) but “Terror-all-around.”

For thus says YHWH: I am making you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon; he shall carry them captive to **Babylon**, and shall kill them with the sword.

## Jeremiah 20:5-6

I will give all the wealth of this city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them, and seize them, and carry them to Babylon.

And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house, will go into captivity, and to Babylon you shall go; there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.

## Jeremiah 20:7-9

You have deceived me, YHWH, and I let myself be deceived.

you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed.

I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me.

For whenever I speak, I must cry out,

I must shout, “Violence and destruction!”

The word of YHWH has become for me

a reproach and derision all day long.

If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,”

then within me there is something like a burning fire

shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

Jeremiah experiences a profound love-communion with YHWH, but he finds no pleasure in the words that he must utter out of this communion. Part of him would like to be silent, but the truth that emerges from his encounter keeps bursting from him. No one is listening and he does not experience YHWH's support.



## Jeremiah 20:10-11

For I hear many whispering: “Terror is all around!

Denounce him! Let us denounce him!”

All my close friends are watching for me to stumble.

“Perhaps he will be deceived, and we can prevail against him,  
and take our revenge on him.”

But YHWH is with me like a dread warrior;

therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail.

They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed.

Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten.

## Jeremiah 20:12

YHWH of hosts, you test the righteous,  
you see the heart and the mind.  
Let me see your retribution upon them,  
for to you I have committed my cause.

## Jeremiah 20:13

Sing to YHWH; praise YHWH!  
For he has delivered the life of the poor (אֶבְיוֹן)  
from the hands of evildoers.

Jeremiah 20:14-18 (compare Job 3:3-10)

Cursed be the day on which I was born!

The day when my mother bore me.

How can it be blessed?

Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying,

“A child is born to you, a son,” making him very glad.

Let that man be like the cities (Sodom & Gomorrah, Genesis 19:25)

that YHWH overthrew without pity;

let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon,

because he did not kill me in the womb;

so my mother would have been my grave.

Why did I come forth from the womb

to see toil and sorrow,

and end my days in shame?

## Jeremiah 21:1-2

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH, when King **Zedekiah** sent to him Pashhur (not 20:1) son of Malchiah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah, saying, “Please inquire of YHWH on our behalf, for King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is making war against us; perhaps YHWH will perform a wonderful deed for us, as he has often done, and will make him withdraw from us.”

Some time early in 588 prior to the Egyptian invasion

## Jeremiah 21:3-6

Then Jeremiah said to them: Thus you shall say to Zedekiah: Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: I am going to turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls; and I will bring them together into the centre of this city. I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and mighty arm (Deut 26:8; Ps 136:12), in anger, in fury, and in great wrath. And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both human beings and animals; they shall die of a great pestilence.

## Jeremiah 21:7

Afterward, says YHWH, I will give King Zedekiah of Judah, and his servants, and the people in this city – those who survive the pestilence, sword, and famine – into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, into the hands of their enemies, into the hands of those who seek their lives. He shall strike them down with the edge of the sword; he shall not pity them, or spare them, or have compassion.

## Jeremiah 21:8-10

Setting: the final siege of Jerusalem (15 January 588 to 18 July 587)

And to this people you shall say: Thus says YHWH: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death (Deuteronomy 30:15). Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out and surrender to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have their lives as a prize of war. For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good, says YHWH: it shall be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

## Jeremiah 21:11-12

[Jehoiakim]

To the house of the **king of Judah** say: Hear the word of YHWH,  
O house of David! Thus says YHWH: Execute **justice** in the morning,  
and deliver from the hand of the oppressor  
anyone who has been robbed,  
or else my wrath will go forth like fire,  
and burn, with no one to quench it, because of your evil doings.



## Jeremiah 21:13-14

See, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley,  
O rock of the plain, says YHWH;  
you who say, “Who can come down against us,  
or who can enter our places of refuge?”

I will punish you according to the fruit  
of your behaviour, says YHWH  
I will kindle a fire in its forest,  
and it shall devour all that is around it.